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Leadership Contribution to Organizations During Pandemic Disruption – A Case Study of Private Swedish Organizations

*Ledarskapsbidrag till organisationer under pandemisk störning -
en fallstudie av privata svenska organisationer*

Ismail Fakhro

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Summary

Organizations globally faced a disruption throughout the pandemic outbreak from December 2020 onwards. Following the outbreak, regulations and measurements to stop the Covid-19 have been imposed on some sectors, while they remained as recommendations in others. The Swedish private sector faced a unique situation due to the contrasting decisions to keep the country without a lockdown took by the Swedish government. As a result, organizations faced both challenges and opportunities trying to deal with this disruption. The study focuses on the importance and guidance of various leadership styles throughout this process, and what type of challenges and opportunities did they face, to bring a foundation that can be used locally or globally in assisting leaders to drive through the pandemic outbreak. This foundation consists of identifying both transactional and transformational leadership with their traits, and how did each leader from both sides, the transactional and transformational leadership, react to the challenges. The study found that transformational leadership was more effective in the studied case to target team motivation and inspiration within good resources, while transactional leadership was more effective in organizational survival in the case of limited resources. In conclusion, there is no one-fits-all style, and leaders must mix both styles depending on the case of each time and disruption, to ensure proper leadership and achieve higher team engagement and performance.

Keywords: *challenges, disruption, leadership, opportunities, organizations, pandemic*

Sammanfattning

Organisationer globalt stod inför en störning under hela pandemiutbrottet från och med december 2020 och framåt. Efter utbrottet har bestämmelser och mätningar införts för vissa sektorer, medan det förblev som rekommendationer i andra. Den svenska privata sektorn stod inför en unik situation på grund av de svenska regeringens kontrasterande beslut. Som ett resultat stod organisationer inför utmaningar och möjligheter att försöka hantera denna störning. Studien fokuserar på vikten och vägledningen av olika ledarskapsstilar under hela denna process, och vilken typ av utmaningar och möjligheter de möter, för att få en grund som kan användas lokalt eller globalt för att hjälpa ledare att köra igenom pandemiutbrottet. Denna grund består av både transaktions- och transformationsledarskap med sina egenskaper, och hur reagerade varje ledare från båda sidor på utmaningarna. Resultatet man kom fram till är att transformationsledarskap var mer effektivt i det studerade fallet för att rikta teammotivation och inspiration inom bra resurser, medan transaktionellt ledarskap var mer effektivt för organisationsöverlevnad när det gäller begränsade resurser. Sammanfattningsvis finns det ingen anpassningsbar stil samt att en ledare måste blanda båda stilarna beroende på varje gång och störningar för att säkerställa korrekt ledarskap och uppnå högre teamengagemang och prestanda.

Nyckelord: ledarskap, möjligheter, organisation, pandemi, störningar, utmaningar

Abbreviations

Abbreviation	Spelled out in words	Page where it is introduced
RISE	Research Institute of Sweden	1
WHO	World Health Organization	1
GDPR	General Data Protection Regulation	9
GDP	Gross Domestic Product	11
SMS	Short Message Service	17

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1 Introduction

1.1 Problem background

Organizations face challenges when adapting to external disruptions. Leadership is a main factor in guiding organizations throughout the adaptive process (Farah et al., 2020). Today's technological progress has paved the way for a quick adaptation to disruptions. The COVID-19 pandemic brought drastic disruptions to organizations globally (Arora, P. et., al. 2020). The uncertainty led by this pandemic affected the physical and mental health of employees and leaders across organizations (Arora, P. 2020). Approaching leadership, MacGregor (1978) identifies two types of leadership: transformational and transactional leadership. Simply, transactional leadership rewards for work, while transformational leadership has another holistic approach that involves and engages the followers to achieve higher performance.

Throughout the past century, leaders have faced several pandemics (such as the Spanish Flu in 1918), and the researches were shifting from studying leadership as a linear manner that seeks to identify one true theory of leadership, into exploring leadership from several perspectives, reaching to "adaptive leadership", which is a practical leadership that aids individuals and organizations in the process of adapting in challenging circumstances (Obolensky, 2010). By focusing on adaptive leadership, it is possible to find a possible leadership style and methods to assist leaders to drive through the pandemic outbreak. Pandemics might not certainly change the leader's approach, but they set different barriers and circumstances that forces leaders to find new methods and adapt. As technologies are advancing to new levels enabling distance working, a new way of collaboration emerges. For many employees, there is no longer a constriction to work in a physical place, as communications became more advanced, boundaries between nationalities and countries got blurred as well. As a result, employee interaction got more flexible in the presence of virtual and digital technologies.

Moving to a virtual collaboration in such a short period in early 2020 brings with it challenges that leaders have to face and deal with, for the team to function efficiently (Isaacs Russell, 2020). The extraordinary practice-change throughout the pandemic signifies the need for exceptional leadership within organizations and communities (Surg, 2020).

1.2 Problem Statement

By the end of 2019, the Chinese government reported an unusual case of a new virus with pneumonia symptoms. In January 2020, the World Health Organization (WHO) declared the Covid-19 as a new type of disease that joined the corona family. On March 11, the WHO declared the virus a pandemic. The virus made a threat globally, and governments were struggling worldwide to make a proper approach to helping to contaminate it. There was a range of different imposed laws globally, from Spain and Italy who imposed a complete lockdown, to Denmark with partial lockdown, to Sweden with no lockdown and lighter forced regulations.

The Covid-19 pandemic outbreak has forced organizations to shift rapidly into a new method of practice within groups. Leaders, at a fast pace, faced lots of challenges and opportunities to deal with the situation. As we process, organizations find a way to operate within the possible opportunities, but the role of leadership, in this case, was significant (J Surg, 2020).

Facing an uncertain situation could push the organizations' leaders, out of a human instinct, to take the wrong and unnecessary steps, causing delays, anxiety, and pressure amongst the teammates. The main challenge lies in the ability of the leaders to reach "adaptive leadership". Reaching an adaptive leadership and coaching a team or organization throughout extraordinary circumstances in a way that complies with the current enforced rules and the organizations' thrive to success and continuity is an extreme challenge that this thesis aims to highlight. To be able to proceed throughout this strike, leaders might need to try an iterative process with full honesty and clarity. It is still unclear for some leaders and organizations what are the steps that should be taken, or how to work efficiently from a remote distance without physical interaction, and whether or not this type of engagement should be sustained after the pandemic ends or not. Thus, the problem lies for both organizations and leaders who try to survive the situation and keep the team performance when a pandemic strikes. The current field of study could provide a basic foundation in which type of leadership and traits fit in each situation. As provided, each leadership style has a separate method to deal with the team members and disruption, having this study provides a vision based on the organizational direction on which leadership style and method might be more useful to reach their milestones.

1.3 Aim and delimitations

This study aims to investigate the role of leadership in contributing to the organizations' success and continuity throughout the disruption process, focusing on private organizations in Sweden. The objective is to provide a study on how some organizations dealt with the disruption, and what was the role of leadership in contributing to it, and then providing recommendations. The study aims to address the following research questions:

- How do organizations adapt to the pandemic disruption?
- What was the role of leadership in assisting organizations to overcome the pandemic challenges?
- What type of challenges and opportunities did the leaders face?
- Could any general implications or even a leadership style to deal through similar pandemic be recommended?

This study is focused on the private sector in Sweden. Specifically, in two types of organizations, consultancy/research companies, and service/product companies. The companies were chosen from the consultancy/research companies two architectural firms and a research organization, while the product-based companies were a car production company, a chemical company, and a medicine production company.

1.4 Outline

The thesis outline is divided into seven chapters as illustrated in Figure 1. The outline is intended to give a holistic understanding of the thesis structure and chapters.

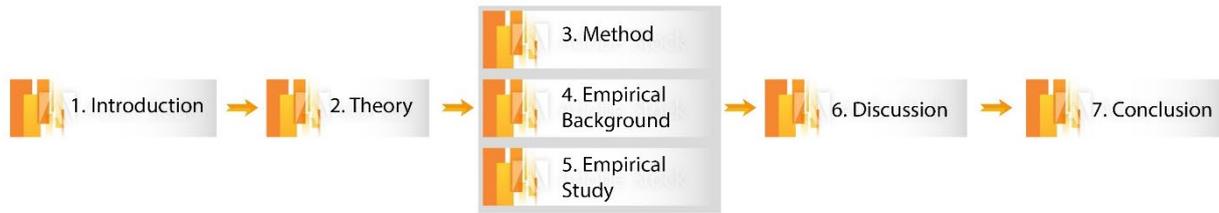


Figure 1. Thesis Outline Illustration

Chapter one introduces the reader to the problem and the aim of the thesis, including research questions that are intended to be answered in the upcoming chapters.

Chapter two is the theoretical section which includes theories from existing literature.

The third chapter is the method which describes how the data in the theoretical and empirical part were collected, in addition to the ethical considerations and delimitations.

Chapter four is the empirical background that introduces the reader to the empirical section.

Chapter five comprises the cases of the interviewed samples, which provides all the analyzed data from the interviews.

Chapter six is the discussion of the empirical data that aim to answer the research questions.

The last chapter, chapter seven, represents the main findings and conclusions, in addition to opening the gates for future research questions.

2 Theory

2.1 Leadership Styles

Fast technological development provides new models of working beyond conventional time and physical boundaries (Cascio & Shurygailo, 2003; Hambley, O'Neill, & Kline, 2007). Therefore, organizations are using virtual teams drastically for talent and economic acquisition (Liao, 2017; Snyder, 2012). Nevertheless, one of the main challenges faced by leaders is how to lead these teams (Liao, 2017). Research has shown that leaders have a key influence on their team's performance and effectiveness (Morgeson, 2005; Hambley, O'Neill, & Kline, 2007; Kelley & Kelloway, 2012). At the same time, they manage the rules to engage the team members in all the processes (Cascio & Shurygailo, 2003). When looking at the virtual environment, the leaders play an important role to handle issues, being technical or among team members, as well as finding potential advantages in this context (Liao, 2017). Although up to the date of writing this paper, autumn 2020, literature on covid and leadership have focus on the health sector and policymakers. However, a few studies on the business sector has been published and the literature is growing fast.

There are various theoretical approaches to leadership. One of the most known is from Bass and Avolio (1993) that separate leadership styles in transformational and transactional. Through their studies, they reveal that transactional leadership is based on exchange processes. Leaders look for common agreement by giving rewards or punishments.

Transformational leadership, otherwise, has a different approach (Neufeld, Wan, & Fang, 2010), highlighting tools to motivate and inspire the team members to help them perform better than expected (Bass & Avolio, 1993). Transformational leaders are skillful input the team members in the center, paying attention to their interests and inspiring loyalty, creating a good atmosphere for the team to accomplish what is needed (Hambley, O'Neill, & Kline, 2007).

The main characteristics of those leaderships differ, as stated by Bass & Avolio, (1993). Transactional leadership is built on action and reaction. It is focused on "cognitive reward" and "management by exception". While transformational leadership emphasizes more the human factor. There are four tools used by those leaders: "individualized consideration", "intellectual stimulation", "inspirational motivation" and "idealize influence".

Both leadership styles have a huge impact on the outcome, as demonstrated by prior research (Bass & Avolio, 1993; Hambley, O'Neill, & Kline, 2007; Kelley & Kelloway, 2012). However, transformational leadership is recognized nowadays as more successful in team performance (Kelley & Kelloway, 2012).

In remote work, transformational leaders can influence the team's trust, emotions, and interests (Kelley and Kelloway, 2012). They state that within virtual teams, the leader's behavior can influence the trust levels positively through coaching and frequent communication. The leaders can also have an impact on the team's general mood by considering each member's demand and recognizing their abilities.

Digitalization shifted many aspects of the interactions, environment, and tools, creating new necessities for leadership models (Kelley & Kelloway, 2012). However, due to former literature, this thesis will depart from the point that the transformational leadership approach is suitable for virtual leadership. Based on transformational leadership we emphasize

empowerment and inspiration as an important aspect of relationships between a leader and team members. In the following section, we will indicate the challenges of leaders in the virtual context.

2.2 Leadership Challenges

Leaders, when switching to and implementing virtual teams, confront various challenges regarding human and technical aspects. This section aims to illustrate the main challenges faced.

2.2.1 *Effective Communication*

Neufeld, Wan, and Fang (2010) signaled that leaders need good communication abilities to transmit their plans and visions. Those skills help them to extract better results from their teams than expected. Their study shows that physical distance does not impact heavily on leadership performance and communication effectiveness. They assume that deep relational familiarity between team members-leaders, learning the organization's culture, and expectation during the time, eliminates the distance effects on communication and performance. Therefore, remote leaders should not look at the distance itself as a barrier. Neufeld, Wan, and Fang (2010) suggest that transformational and transactional leadership are intrinsically tied to effective communication.

Leadership influences team performance through different mediators (Liao, 2017). Kelley and Kelloway (2012) believe that leaders should use various kinds of communication instruments when dealing with virtual teams. Frequent interactions between team members and leaders should be regular, even if no problems arise. The study reveals that it takes work and time to develop a positive perception and get good results from transformational leadership.

2.2.2 *Skills and Mindset*

Snyder (2012) believes that if distance working is managed properly, for instance, managing a team's communication and productivity appropriately, it can lead to positive opportunities and outcomes. At the same time, it is important to stress that the leader's mindset and resistance to change can be a huge challenge. Snyder (2012) demonstrates that the most traditional, conservative leaders must develop their skills to adapt to this new environment and work style. Recognizing that virtual work can enhance organizationally and society's performance is the first step. In her study, she discusses that there are many barriers to virtual work development but the leader's bias should be handled. Misconceptions like "I can not manage what can not be seen" should be eliminated.

Through her research, Snyder (2012), suggests six areas for virtual leaders to focus on: Reflection, Society, Diversity, Ingenuity, People, Business.

In the reflection zone, leaders need to have time to reconnect with their motivations, beliefs, and previous activities. The idea is to develop a clearer picture of what virtual work means for them to act without bias.

In the society zone, leaders should be able to understand the greater view and impact of their decisions in the organization, but also the society and environment.

In the diversity zone, they should create trust among the other team members, encouraging their characteristics that can contribute to the common goal.

In the ingenuity zone, leaders should take advantage of the virtual working environment's flexibility and freedom to stimulate creativity and innovation initiatives among virtual teams. In the people zone, the leader should have the capacity to inspire the team members, motivating them to follow the organization's main goals. For this to happen, they should create a commitment atmosphere within the virtual team.

In the business zone, the leader can make use of the technology to facilitate the team member's work and training, structure reports, and meetings. The strategy is to use the virtual environment as an opportunity to boost productivity and create engagement.

This big shift from traditional to virtual leadership, therefore, demands new skills and mindset from the leaders. It is also a great occasion for them to understand the opportunities and threats in the current and future environments to be able to lead those virtual teams.

2.2.3 Remoteness

Remoteness is a function of the applications on which several employees are working at the same time and the total number of employees on the network. Most organizations acting globally are already equipped with enough bandwidth for general routine transactions, emails, and a few thousands of their employees working remotely. During the pandemic, in a very short time, those organizations had to deal with a great grew in the number of employees working remotely. The bandwidth shortage was revealed as a challenge, that needs to be tackled.

2.2.4 Infrastructural support

The workforce, to maintain a constant workflow, often requires technical assistance. From the initial setup, training, and troubleshooting to more complex tasks as support for specific software, equipment, or tools. Whilst the employees are working remotely, leaders need to be attentive to cope with those needs and provide support. This support may fall under the leader's work scope or a dedicated department like IT.

It is also critical to discuss the issue of cybersecurity with technological advances and expanding digitalization. Inappropriate levels of information protection can bring up complex problems in the business world and society (Hall, Heath, & Coles-Kemp, 2015). The access to technology should be centered on "people's skills, the scope of use and autonomy", so the value of technology is understood and directed to reach the work's goals (Albrechtsen & Hovdena, 2009). When looking at organizations, people have different responsibilities, knowledge, and authority regarding information security. Maintaining security may not be the employees' direct task, but they should have some responsibilities when manipulating information to protect the organization's mission and profit. Nevertheless, understanding and experience differ from person to person (Albrechtsen & Hovdena, 2009). To reduce security threats, employees should be required to have ongoing training and a clear channel to contact the security team. As a result, the general approach and priorities related to security maintenance will be more unified among all the organization's employees (Albrechtsen & Hovdena, 2009).

2.3 Opportunities

Leaders and employees in organizations are not only striking with challenges, rather, but different flexible opportunities also emerged such as working remotely, saving time and money from commuting, more free time for work-life balance, and opportunities for self-development.

2.3.1 Remoteness

Working remotely does not only save time for commuting to and from work, it also gives the employees and managers/leaders more time to spend on projects and self-development (J Surg, 2020). Moreover, it saves them the commuting cost to/from work or meeting further colleagues. Nowadays, leading organizations spend on developing employees and empowering teams. Transformational leadership is the most suitable type of leadership for this type of team development (Farah et al., 2020).

2.3.2 Location Independence

Working remotely provides location independence, which means employees can seek a wider range of opportunities that previously had a geographical restriction (J Surg, 2020). Besides, both leaders and employees who often seek accommodation close to the workplace can choose a place that fits them better rather than being bound to the job offeror. This means also that high-rent mortgage and areas can be avoided.

2.3.3 Sustainable Impact

In the case of pandemics, working remotely has supported sustainable initiatives, from sustainable cities, reducing emissions, lessen climate change, to a more diverse work society (Surg, 2020). In the case of Covid-19, lots of the cities were noticed to have fresher air quality and fewer pollutants in the air/water, as in Italy and China for instance. A great part of that was due to the reduced production and factories shut down, but the reduced number of cars and commuting services was also of a great impact. The urge of organizations to shift into this type of work has also provided a forced disruption to use other possible options, such as working remotely, that were not in sight, due to sticking to the mainstream traditional way that avoids risks and new disruptions.

2.3.4 Economic Impact

The economic impact of transportation affects individuals, organizations, cities, and countries. Reducing transportation means directly reducing the cost of it on the employees and members, as well on the organization and the project. Time is money, and thus saving time for the journeys from/into work or meetings, means sparing the time for the projects. On the other hand, neglecting transportation and moving to a completely virtual work environment might also harm the project, innovation, and social collaboration.

2.4 Change Model

Incumbent firms are embracing digitalization in product and innovation processes, throughout this process they face various concerns: Innovation capability, innovation focus, innovation collaboration, and innovation governance (Svahn et al., 2017). These firms focus more often on sustaining innovation that overshoots customer needs, so they can respond to disruptions, but according to case studies, managers mostly fail to address threats and lead them (King & Baatartogtokh, 2015).

As firms fail to exploit disruptive threats and lead the change due to lack of change management, the author chose to sequentially discuss the incumbent firms' concerns and identify the leadership uneasiness in terms of change management. To approach change management as a critical concern that the incumbent firms are facing, it is important to provide the leading change management models and how to apply them based on numerous case studies. It is necessary to reveal what managers come through, such as resistance, the main

causes for it, and how to deal with it as well. Eventually, models play a role in identifying these concerns and shaping them, to find the appropriate methods for organizations and firms to tackle. For instance, the 3-box model targets the past, present, and future of organizations.

2.4.1 Three-Box Model

The three-box model appeared in 2011 to urge CEOs to manage the three-box approach. This approach relies on three boxes as shown in Figure 2: Manage the present, Selectively forget the past, and create the future (Govindarajan & Trimble, 2011). The three-box model provides a timeline from three boxes to compare the current situation within, pre-pandemic, during pandemic, and post-pandemic. Authors argue on how to balance resources amongst the three boxes to comprehend what to create and destroy. Some companies aim to focus on their success (present box), neglecting the other boxes which create a trap for capabilities and success (Govindarajan & Trimble, 2011). If a company is succeeding how can this be a trap? If we look for instance at Microsoft, which had great success in being the empowered for pcs in the 80s, Microsoft found their success in what they did in the past and focused on this box to preserve their success. Meanwhile, in the 1990s, the internet and mobile phone era arose, with Microsoft still stuck in their box, which led to a trap from grabbing other innovations. This phenomenon considers generally organizational targets and aims to involve the CEOs to interfere in creating a good vision in terms of all the three boxes (Govindarajan, 2016).

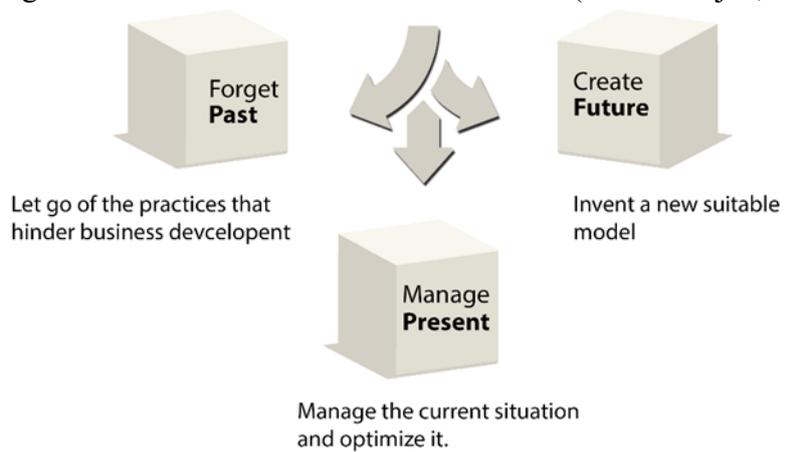


Figure 2. Three Box Model Illustration, adapted from Govindarajan (2016).

Managing each of the three boxes links to the leader behavior, with a strategy for the organization and challenges faced, which requires all leaders and CEOs to emerge in each box. Looking at the present box, organizations must run the business at peak efficiency and extend their products/services. Challenges faced while optimizing efficiency are costs, how can a leader maximize efficiency and reduce cost? Govindarajan (2016) suggests leaders set challenging milestones for peak performance while addressing the inefficiencies and creating a better culture. In the future box, the organization is still ahead of the future, and each step took in the present box will shape the future. Introducing long- and short-term goals and practices are key for a successful model. Leaders in this box must plan for opportunism, and help organizations meet long and short-term needs, without overloading one another, they must also beware of the past, which might fight back. Thirdly, the past box is where lots of organizations get stuck, taking for grant their previous success, forgetting about their present and future. Looking at the past should be used as an opportunity to learn from and look at the blunders to learn from (Govindarajan, 2016).

3 Methods

This research relied on interviews within an abductive and qualitative methodological approach. Bryman (2012) states that interviewing is the most employed method in qualitative research, because of its flexibility and capability to extract rich data. Interviews are the main source of data collection for this thesis, as literature studies are still new and hard to find. Qualitative research design helps carry out this project based on interviews.

This research aims to use thematic analysis to get a better understanding of the topic. Braun and Clarke (2006) define it as “one of the most common forms of analysis within qualitative research.” It emphasizes identifying, analyzing, and interpreting patterns of meaning (or "themes") within qualitative data. This helped identify characteristics and distinguish the differences and effects of each leadership. The interview questions were developed in an iterative process throughout the whole period to be continuously refined according to the role of the respondent.

The interviews were semi-structured with the intent of investigating four main sections: challenges and opportunities, leadership style, change management, and employee empowerment. The interview questions were developed in an iterative process throughout the whole period to be continuously refined according to the role of the respondent. Each interview was recorded and transcribed (after asking for the interviewee’s permission) with the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) form signed. Additionally, the relevant literature on leadership styles, remote teams, and change management formed the main theoretical body. It helped to identify the characteristics of each leadership style, and how it interacted with the pandemic (based on various factors).

The criteria for selection is to manage equality in different sector, such as gender targeting equal interviewees from males to females, and lying between extremely transactional to extremely transformational and in between. The aim was to avoid any bias in the interviews data with high transparency. All the interviews were conducted on zoom, recorded after the permission of each interviewee, transcribed, and then transformed into this research within similar words and figures. The data was analysed by the author to be able to categorize each respondent under a specific leadership style, without asking the interviewee to sort himself under certain side.

A range of databases, journals and literature sources were searched, and papers were included if they explicitly addressed quality assurance within a qualitative paradigm. A meta-narrative approach was used to review and synthesise the literature. Among the papers included in the review, two dominant narratives were interpreted from the literature, reflecting contrasting approaches to quality assurance. The first focuses on demonstrating quality within research outputs; the second focuses on principles for quality practice throughout the research process. The second narrative appears to offer an approach to quality assurance that befits the values of qualitative research, emphasising the need to consider quality throughout the research process.

3.1 Delimitations

The study was focused on the Swedish market, with participants from the private sector, which makes it limited to specific content. Moreover, the participants referring to a certain leadership style could outbalance the other leadership style participants. The author analyzed the data from the interviews per the previous literature. The subject is still new and thus the empirical part plays a heavy role in the conclusion and discussion. The outcome of this thesis might be used as a foundation for future researches to study wider sample size and include different countries and approaches in the studies.

4 Background to the empirical study

The study focuses on two types of organizations in the private Swedish sector that are product based and consultancy/research-based. Three companies from the consultancy/research were selected, and three others from the product-based sector. To keep the identity of the interviewees and the companies protected, all the companies' and respondents' identities are hidden. However, to introduce the reader to what type of companies were selected, from the consultancy/research-based there were a consultancy company, architectural company, and a research organization. On the other hand, under the product-based companies, three other companies were selected: a car production company, another company in the chemical industry, and lastly a company falling under the medical sector.

4.1 Pandemic Impact

As in many other countries, companies in Sweden are affected by the pandemic, but different reactions to COVID-19 were then worldwide. For instance, Norway closed educational institutes, sports, and cultural activities, while Sweden kept most of the facilities open. Some economists have criticized the Swedish policy for being too lenient, but this strategy more likely helped the economy at a high cost of lives (Calmfors, 2020). In that terms, the public health agency has strongly advised working from home, and keeping a social distance, avoiding unnecessary travel as well. This means organizations and firms have had the opportunity to keep working even at a less pace.

4.2 The Swedish Economy

According to Calmfors (2020), the Swedish GDP fell by 1%, and cost an extra 5000 deaths when compared to the other Nordic countries (Denmark, Norway, and Finland) by June 2020. Closing the educational institutes, facilities, and companies could have prevented a lot of people from working. In a published article by the BBC in August 2020, the European Union saw a GDP contraction of 11.9%, as in Figure 3, Sweden's economy is doing better than other European nations. Moreover, the Swedish economy did not reach a contraction, as the first quarter GDP saw a growth of 0.1%.

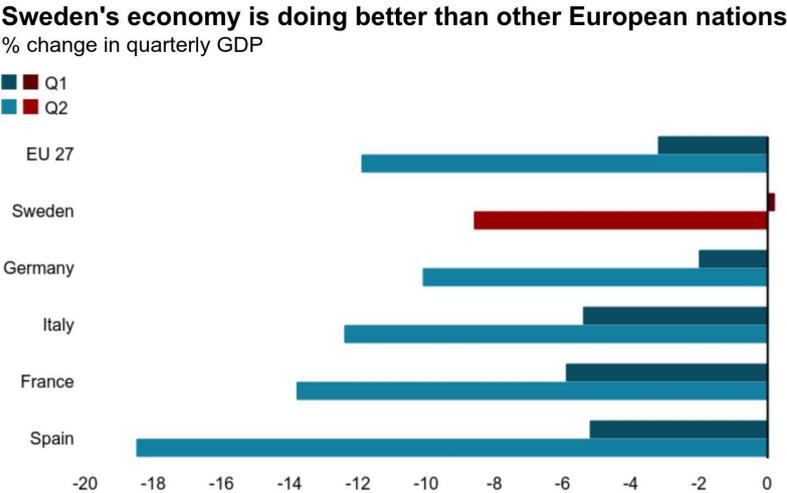


Figure 3. Sweden's Economy Compared to Other European Countries.

Respectively, organizations and firms in Sweden were less affected economically compared to organizations located in other European countries. The Swedish sector was also affected depending on which type of products or services it offers. For instance, one of the companies interviewed limited the productions from Monday to Wednesday on the plant for a total of 72 hours per week. Architectural firms tried to collaborate virtually with fewer meetings in the office, and chemical plants continued production (Andersen et al., 2020). In a published study by Andersen et al. (2020), the authors conclude that in a pandemic, a shutdown increases the spending of individuals, which as a result reflects a modest decrease in spending on categories involved in social involvement, such as personal care.

The following section contains 6 organizations/firms from the Swedish private sector, which were also affected, as previously mentioned, in various ways. Some of which moved completely virtually, others remained on site or mixed both. Each case depends as well on which type of service or product it provides, and if it was directly affected by the governmental suggestions and social involvement or not.

4.3 Study Sample

The studied companies/organizations are listed below, and the interviewees are kept anonymous and identified as letters for referral purposes in the next chapter. Two results from the service based were extremely similar and have been merged to avoid repetition, which are the architectural firms, A and B. The same merging has been done in the product based for the chemical and medical companies, D and E. As stated in the methodology, half of the interviewees were males, and the other half were females, to ensure a non-biased result. The respondents were also analysed to have similar leadership positions from both service-based and product-based.

Table 1. Studied Sample Classification and Number of Team Members

Interviewee	Company	Number of Team Members	Company Type
A	Architectural Firm	25	Service-Based
B	Architectural Firm	15	Service-Based
C	Research Organization	8	Service-Based
D	Chemical Company	20	Product-Based
E	Medical Company	12	Product-Based
F	Car Production Company	20	Product-Based

5 The empirical study

This chapter includes what could be taken from the interviews with the studied companies.

The study focuses on two types of organizations in the private Swedish sector that are product based and consultancy/research-based. Three companies from the consultancy/research were selected, and three others from the product-based sector.

5.1 Architectural Firms and Research-based Organizations

This section divides the interviewees based on the chosen sectors. Consequently, the companies are sorted in terms of product or service-based. The consultancy companies were two architectural firms. One of the interviewees is a leader who is responsible for a team of 25 members, and the other leader is responsible for a team of 15 members. As the results were extremely close, the author merges both data to avoid repetition and make it easier to grouping and summing the results for the reader.

5.1.1 *Architectural firms*

The two architectural firms cases, located in Southern Sweden, have been affected heavily by Covid-19, in terms of project delays, leadership, and collaboration disruption. The recommendations from the CEO were to conduct as much as possible work remotely and work only when necessary. When it comes to huge projects that are formed from different sub-teams, it is harder to collaborate and perform the work remotely. Digital platforms helped throughout this process, as the company has invested in these platforms before the pandemic, and they were of great use.

Challenges

Challenges faced by both firms were in terms of informal information and participation on the project where it is necessary to book a meeting for every meeting to inform the project members, even for small questions. Moreover, leaders had to write an email or slack, which is a channel used where you could divide all the teams into different channels and save or track the chat and progress. Leaders from both firms complained about days being full of meetings scheduled every minute which leaves them stressed. This is a challenge in all enormous projects, where consultants are used to developing concepts with different teams and form a concept collaboratively. So there was a challenge on lack of informal talks, a need to steer all information channels. There is also a challenge in personalities, some people are better at communication with digital tools, and other people not. Elder people mostly had more difficulties dealing with digital communication tools. They were not used and they thought it was complicated.

Opportunities

The opportunities were in terms of lifestyle, where employees or leaders did not need to travel so much, so they managed to stop traveling to the client for a long period. Additionally, less traveling, less climate impact, and less impact on working days where a person saves and gives that time to the project. So it's, it's also an advantage for the private life where there is flexibility. One of the interviews mentions "You can say okay, I can take a break here in the middle of the day and do something and then I can start working again, it gives you another flexibility for the project in itself". When it comes to the quality of the project, it was not a much better quality to work remotely. But the advantage you get on quality or lifestyle and impact on the climate is very huge advantages. For working life balance, in general, it also had a great impact on costs, climate, and flights.

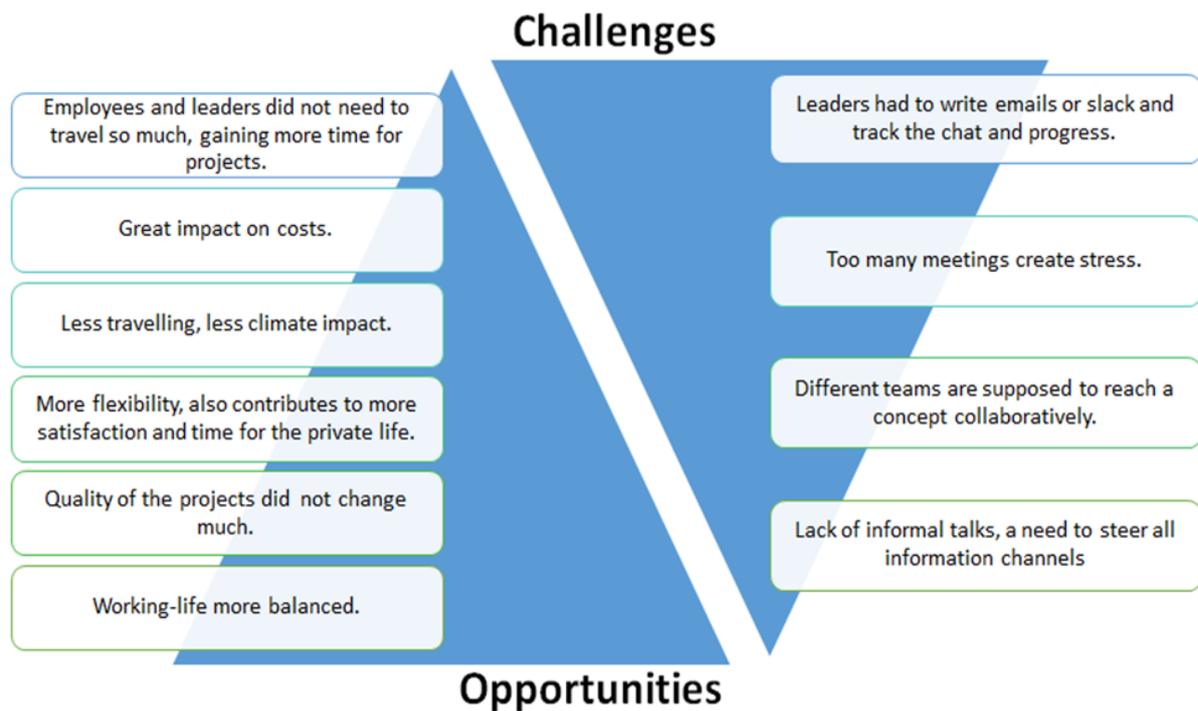


Figure 4. Challenges and Opportunities faced by Architectural Firms Leaders.

Leadership Style

The interviewees both find themselves on the transactional leadership side during the pandemic time. Although it is found hard to deal with, as they refer themselves to be more into the transformational leadership before the pandemic. This is due to the close delivery dates, and the firms letting go of the younger employees, which are the ones considered to need more empowerment. As interviewee A mentioned

“It is still a mixture of both leadership styles, because as a leader, you have to be very clear, and engage every team member, but when you are left with experienced co-workers only, everyone knows his goal and timeline”.

Interviewee B mentions a similar point of view in how they deal in terms of leadership

“You are not there where things are happening, you are alone and exactly your role within this big frame is not defined, you might not be able to define it yourself either. So to have a very clear scheme of the schedule of deliverables and time responsibilities is very important”.

The issue here lies when there is a concept formation and there is a delivery for the concept in two weeks. In this process, there is a lot of creativity where the architect styles differ. Some architects need to meet each other and sketch for innovation, while others prefer being enclosed alone and put their ideas down on the table. In the case of one architectural firm, there were still a few young architects who preferred to meet and set up a concept together. The leader in this case managed to hear from both sides, meet them online, and arrange both online and physical meetings twice per week with proper social distancing. It is not motivating for lots of people from architectural firms to work this way. Leaders are feeling impacted where they have to give talks between meetings, arrange everything, “read between the lines” as they mention, where they have to check if they see someone is a little tired one day or a little sad or having some

problems. In a trial to restore the informal chats, one of the leaders decided to do a digital coffee break with the team, but they still find it hard for people to express themselves behind a screen. It is more difficult to have a clear idea of the health and well-being of the employees. At the same time, people were found less mad and less stressed, due to less travel time. The situation is calmer somehow. So in the end, leaders feel the same pressure, but calmer for the employees.

Communication Channels

The common communication channels used, apart from traditional email and telephone, were Slack and Microsoft teams. Slack is a chat where you can create hundreds of channels with a team and exchange short texts, pictures, drawings, sketches with each other. It is also possible to call on Slack, and a group of people and draw on the ball on the screen together around the detail or a drawing. One of the leaders was using slack where they divided each team into a channel, such as a facade design, landscape, and structural team. There are also room lists so that not everybody is disturbed with all the questions. Microsoft teams are quite similar as well, where you can create teams, boards, and set meetings as well. It is just slack that is mentioned to be smoother and requires less formal bookings.

5.1.2 Research-Based Organization

The research-based organization is located in Sweden, and the interviewed leader, the head of research unit, is responsible for a team of 10 people in the field of technology. The case of teams here depends on where each team is involved. For instance, if the team is based in a laboratory it is much different than the team working in the office. However, the interviewed leader is only in the research field in the office. In this case, the team meets a couple of times in the office and the rest of the days on the Microsoft Teams. The team and the leader have the flexibility to choose what fits the team better.

Challenges

The challenges faced by both the leader and the team was that they were working remotely and not being able to meet for team building activities. Although the team had the flexibility to work in an office or at home, they still could not meet for activities or team building. This had an impact also on the ability to empower the team, coming in the next heading. From a communication perspective, communication can get a lot more complicated when the leader cannot meet the whole team. All informal communication happens through the phone, teams, or emails. Anything that could be discussed face to face now needs an email. So both challenges in terms of communication and team-building were described by the interviewees. As the interviewee mentions

“The communication maybe gets drier. It's a bit drier now because everything is not so social, but it's more like you pop up and then email this answer and it's a lot through digital communication and then digital communication is in itself not the best way of communicating, maybe where you miss the social part”.

All the forms of communication used to take longer because you cannot meet and discuss things directly and solve an issue. From a communication perspective, things get slower. Generally, the working tempo gets slower because things take a longer time to settle.

Opportunities Faced

In terms of opportunities, having the chance to work for three days from work, and two days from the office was appreciated among the team members. For instance, the co-workers who

have families found it an opportunity to manage both work-life balances. Easier for instance to prepare food, mingle with family in the breaks, or even finish some other duties as well at home. Saving time and money to and from work had a great impact as well. Leaders can now invest more time in the project and their families. The commuting time used to take around two hours previously. Now even when going to the office there is way less traffic. Working remotely also allowed the leader for a greater focus, as there is no disturbance or chit-chatting from colleagues, as mentioned

“When you're at home, your authority, you're more focused, because you don't have anyone disturbing, you don't have anyone to talk to. When I work from home, I sit down almost the entire day and work and have meetings and get things done”.

But this can differ from one person to another, and if there are older kids at home or more kids at once, then this could be a great disadvantage.

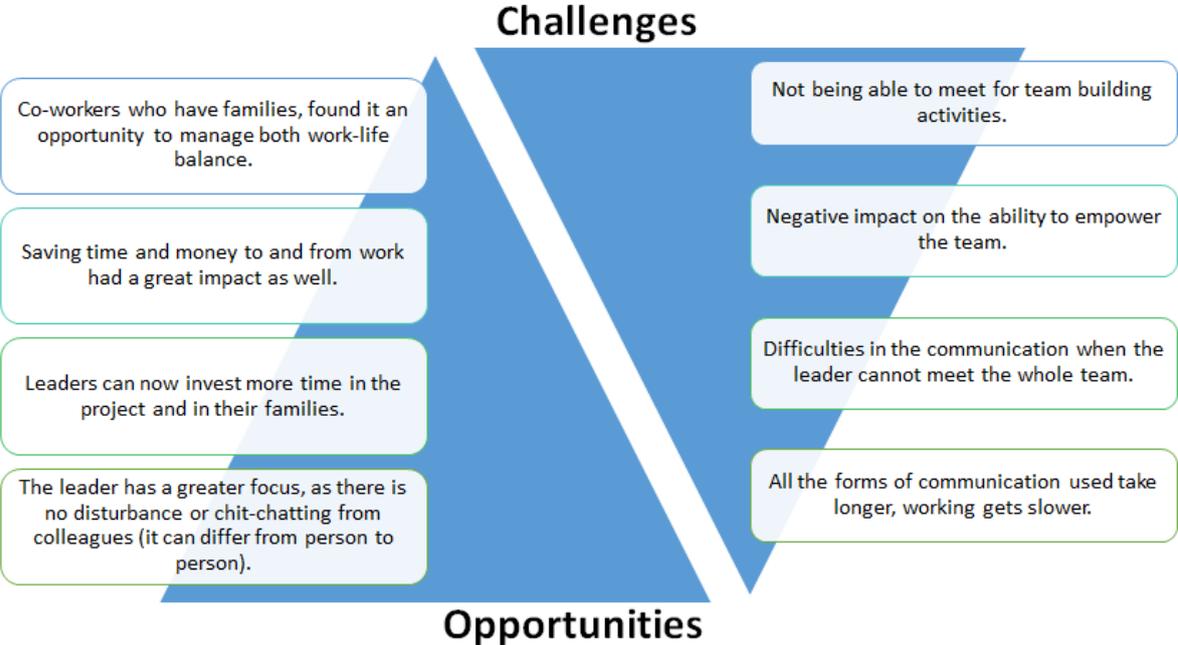


Figure 5. Challenges and Opportunities faced by the Research Organization leader.

Leadership Style

The interviewee in this organization could not self-identify in the transactional or transformational leadership, rather they claim to be somewhere in the middle

“I think I probably see myself somewhere in the middle. I mean, I think it's very important with empowerment and involvement, it's a key, because when you don't involve people in the work, and you don't empower them to decide on you will not reach much, but we are also impacted by the Covid situation and we cannot meet often or do team buildings”.

So within the corona circumstances, it is found extremely hard to target team building and empowerment for instance, and it is not as effective as when you do it face to face in the office. The leader here tries to engage the team in decisions and team building, but it is extremely difficult to facilitate change through this tough period, the organization is struggling like any

other company or organization for survival, with lots of pressure on all the team members, leaders, or managers.

As companies are focusing more on the financial situation, the leadership style could be slightly leaning towards transactional leadership, to reach the required targets. Moreover, the budgets are getting limited towards only certain activities and employees that are necessary for survival. This is where the leadership style leans towards the transactional. Pre-pandemic there was a good time and a budget to spend on younger employees and team-building activities. Even the communication methods for engagement were much clearer, the informal communication was of great importance for both project and mental health. The leader would still encourage the team to work on their project deliveries, but also, there are many rules enforced regularly. In the future, as the leader claims, companies will have to recover their financial situation to continue, but in the long-term, the leadership style should be balanced again, leaning more towards transformational leadership and empowering the employees again.

Communication Channels

Communication channels used in this case study were the phone, SMS, Whatsapp, emails, and Microsoft teams. The Microsoft team is used for formal communication, such as meetings or discussions. Otherwise, telephone calls and SMS are claimed to replace informal communication, where a person just picks up the phone and calls or messages the colleague for a certain urgent matter. It is easier to express the concern from emails or the Microsoft team. As this might, to a certain limit, replace informal communication, it still has some negative outputs as well. Where the team members might overuse a communication side over the other (informal over formal), there would be no official record of what happens and might raise conflicts.

5.2 Product-based Companies

The product-based companies were from the chemical, medical, and vehicles industry. Similar to the previous section 5.1, the chemical and medical companies had very identical results, so the author grouped both results to avoid repetition. The car production company had close results but a different approach that needs a different section.

5.2.1 Case of Chemical and Medical Companies

The company from the chemical industry, referred to as company D, is responsible for the production and distribution of chemical products. The leader is responsible for a team of 20 persons. As mentioned, the results of company D, were quite similar to the results for company E, which is a company responsible for medical supplies. The leader from company E had a team of 12 members to lead. Both companies had had a digital strategy before the pandemic started, which helped both be less affected by the pandemic. The typology of the digital strategy differs from a platform to a management style, but the outcome was similar to a very high extent. The strategy was to build a digital platform to enable managing supplies, distribution, management, and production.

Challenges Faced

The challenges faced through the pandemic were very negligible according to the interviewees. As the remote and online strategy started ahead of the pandemic, the basic infrastructure and education were available. Challenges were in terms of productivity loss, where team members' health got affected by the pandemic and global stress. The interesting part in this is although

the younger generation was more into the digital platforms and work, they were more affected by the pandemic, as the interviewee from company D says:

“Interestingly enough, it was more of the younger generation than the older guys that have suffered most from that, because they were there, they are thriving on the energy of being in a room with other people in a way that perhaps you do not do as when you're a bit more mature in your role”.

Both companies are located in Sweden and outside Sweden, so they both have international colleagues and teams. So the other challenges were expressed in terms of communication, where the teams used to meet physically from a while to another. Right after the pandemic and the recommendations by the Swedish government, or the restrictions by other countries, the teams could only meet virtually.

“The energy felt different in the room”

according to the interviewee from company E, and the remembers, besides the leader, was exhausted from coordinating and facilitating the team communication. The process of creativity and brainstorming has also seen a major strike, as the team dynamics suffer from meeting only virtually.

Opportunities

The opportunities, similar to the service-based companies, were in terms of transportation time. In these cases, leaders were responsible for a local and international team, so the time and money saved counts much higher than commuting locally from or to the office. Time being saved could be invested again in the project and the personal life of the team. For instance, one of the interviewees had time to prepare a healthier food workout at the gym, which creates better physical and mental health for them, enabling better team empowerment and support. A quote from an interviewee in company D, the case is explained as:

“I use it both for projects like for work to get process, get more work done because we're, we are understaffed, right. So this helps me to just turn around more work, higher workload. Secondly, it's on my side, if I would have had that pressure and have to travel to work, I wouldn't have time to go to the gym or, you know, spend time with my daughter as much as I do”.

The impact was not only economical, it had also a sustainability impact which saved hundreds of flights and rides to different offices.

The other opportunity that helped both companies manage throughout the pandemic, is that both companies had a higher demand in the pandemic, and they were both involved in the chemical/medical sector. The plants and production did not affect, even for the international production plants, the team members cannot work from home, they were still working in plants with social distancing. It was only the leader and the office workers who shifted to remote working completely. Even though the employees commuting to work needed less time.

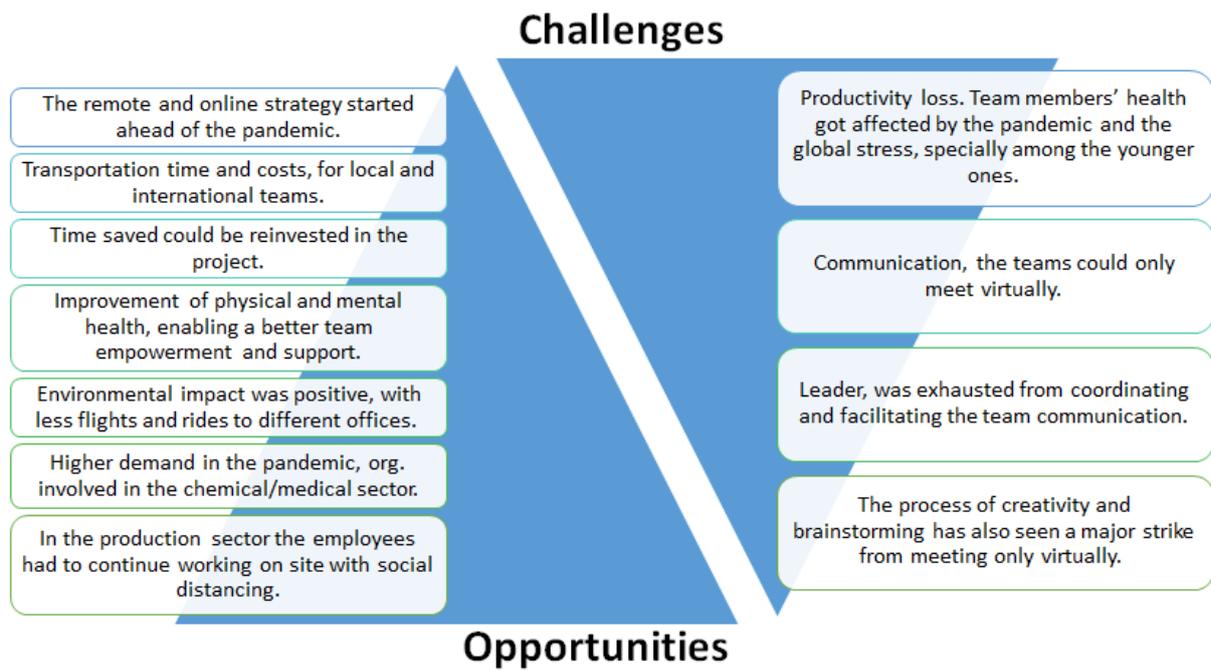


Figure 6. Challenges and Opportunities faced by Chemical and Medical Organizations' Leaders.

Leadership Style

Although the situation did not impact both companies D and E much, there is still an effect on the team members who shifted completely remotely and to the other on plant workers who have less social interaction and guided by social distancing and a limited number of employees on spot. The common results between both interviewees are having to focus more on production and management, focusing more on the agenda and objectives more than the employees themselves. This makes the leaders more concerned about the current progress, and the ability to control the current situation, as the employees, no longer exist in the same physical place. The shift seen here from both sides is a shift from a claimed centric place towards a transactional style that gives them the managerial power to have more control and set stricter lines and dates.

The leader from company D describes it as

“My personnel responsibility has therefore shifted to be more the first (transactional), like leading effective efficiency leading towards the strategic goals, delivering our company, our growth agenda, these kind of things are less about personnel”

while the second leader from company E describes it similarly in other words

“I’m very very concerned about the team progress, I need to have more control and I need to feel that I give everyone a clear task”.

The empowerment and support are always there, but it is more difficult to express for instance in digital communication only. It is difficult to tap shoulders in online meetings, so the shift seen is forced by the current rules and measures. The case will get back normally, and leaders will do their best to support their team again. But both the leaders and team members will have many more opportunities in the future for working from home and commuting less, with a balance that does not impact the productivity and social interaction between everyone. Being responsible for team members, leaders also have much more responsibility to set clear guidelines and pathways for everyone else. As the leader from company D says:

“ I lead by involving everyone, I think I am very much to favor opportunities that cause positive things on both sides of the consensus mode, right. I always work with international teams. And I use this as a strength because I make sure that everybody in the team, although they are responsible for Episerver back end, or if they are responsible for content entry, or if they are responsible for that everybody at least has a basic understanding of what we're doing as a team, why we're doing it and where we're heading”.

It is just in the present situation people are having an issue to see the bigger picture, and need to be led by involving and steering.

Communication Channel

Microsoft Teams are dominant in company D, while company E uses its platform for communication and management. This is for formal meetings which require booking and merging different or all the team together, the documented meetings. It is still possible to communicate with members on the plant, but the other team members are contacted mostly via phone for urgent or fast situations. Email is also important to clarify a single issue between two teammates without referring or meeting with everyone else. The importance of email is keeping a documented copy of the conversation but also time-consuming.

5.2.2 Case of Car Production Company

The car production company, based in Sweden, had interesting occurring changes that made it different from the previous case studies. The company had a new approach to empower teams and change the hierarchical order. The main goal was to build teams with the power of leadership. The approach started slightly before the pandemic started, and was to a certain limit disturbed by the COVID-19.

Challenges Faced

The company started the transition slightly before the pandemic started. Some of the challenges started before and were escalated by the pandemic, and some were only triggered by the pandemic. After, the company decided to limit the production days to Monday, Tuesday, and Wednesday, for 72 hours of the day and night shifts. The other teams continued to work at a regular pace, but had to minimize the physical meetings to follow the guidelines. One of the main challenges which started pre-pandemic was security and infrastructure, where the company needed to create a stable infrastructure and provide a secure communication platform to all the team members. The platform was being divided into an iterative process and on a gradual pace to cover all the employees. Once the pandemic started, the server faced a crash to hold all the company at once, which required further work, not only to support the huge load but to create a digital identity for everyone. Social support was a great factor that the interviewed leader used to target. As most of the meetings and work had to be done remotely, some team members did not have sufficient knowledge for that, others did not feel completely secure to shift immediately to it. Also, a lot of people were not used to the digital structure of channels and documents, and informal communication played a major role in finishing their objectives.

The fast shift pace was not planned for, it was more forced over everyone. As some team members were glad to reduce their commuting hours, the leader felt higher stress to facilitate all the communication channels between different team members, book the meetings, follow up on each individual to make sure they do not miss the face change pace.

Opportunities Faced

The company decided to embrace an agile model, providing all means of team building, empowerment, and flexibility. The process started slightly before corona and was going good according to the interviewee:

“In corona, we have to find medicine, we can’t work the old way (waterfall), this will take too many people and people will die. We had to close down, because of the virus spread, the white color we are all put to working 60% and remotely, and opened the office the previous week, people can check your temperature and remind people of social distancing”.

Like all the previous interviewees, the leader found the less commuting time a great advantage to invest in self-knowledge.

To cope with the challenges faced, the leaders decided to support the team members in the transformation and built a transparent sharing system to involve all the team. Which will be explained further in the next heading. The environmental impact was quite positive due to lower emissions and less commuting as well.

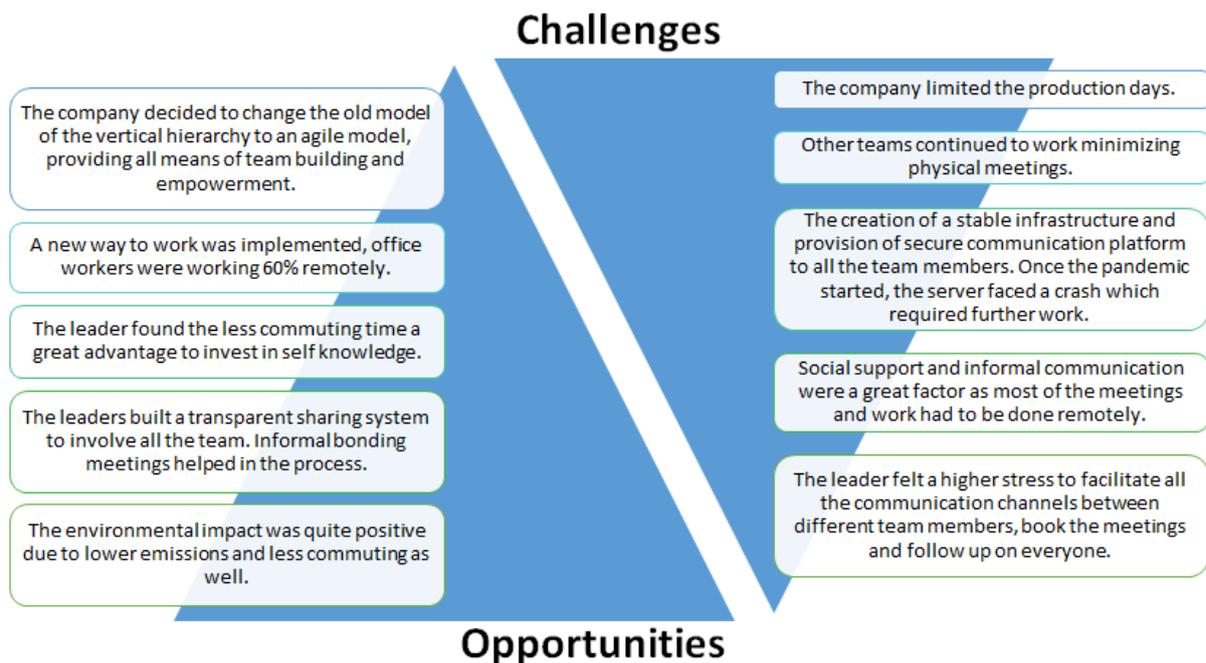


Figure 7. Challenges and Opportunities faced by Car Production Company's Leader.

Leadership Style

Social bonding and motivation were one of the leader's main treats to involve the team and provide maximum support. In addition to the emotional support, the company and the leader provided all the user comforting devices and infrastructure. Just when everyone was forced to shift remotely, additional supplies were provided to cope with the situation.

Looking at the three-box model, the previous hierarchy was vertical, it still had a transformation approach, but that was close to the transactional leadership style. After the model changed into agile, the style had a strong shift to the transformational type, not only for the team members but to the organization as a whole. An agile organization is claimed by interviewee F to have higher innovation rates and would cope with the new companies vision as per the interviewee.

To cover the social bonding and support, the leader has created “bonding dinners” to keep the existing relation between team members

“We serve our people, we are servant people, what do you need to be successful. That comes from we are all ladies and gentlemen, you are nice to people. The main tool is connecting, change will not happen if you’re not connecting. If you look at leadership now, it’s about the ecological system, some part of the leadership. The interesting thing is why leaders who are afraid, are afraid of people connecting because they might take off the bad leader”

says the interviewee. Team building did not stop even though the strike, the leader ensured following the social distancing and kept the current bondings. The team building has reinforced continuous feedback and communication and great work culture. Additionally, all the teams were provided with the necessary information and training to cope with the digital culture.

Communication Channels

Similar to the previous cases, informal communication was replaced by calls, SMS, with much more emails. But the difference here is that the social meetings and bondings used to cover a great part of the informal communication, so the team members still had the opportunity to express themselves face to face, knowing that this type of communication can not simply be replaced by digital communication. Besides, the new communication system was scrum boards, which had a special manager to ensure the effectiveness of it, and provide with all the necessary information and training when necessary.

6 Analysis

This chapter aims to address the research questions stated in chapter one, based on the theoretical framework and the empirical data.

6.1 Leadership within 3-Box Model

Based on the interviews conducted, the organizations investigated were either dealing with transactional leadership, transformational leadership, or a merge of both. The three-box model was then applied, creating a time delimitation to frame how the leadership type changed in each organization during the pandemics and what were the impacts of those changes. It is important to emphasize that no company integrally follows one type of leadership, the leaders differ and so do their approach to the problems. For this research, the focus is the organizational culture followed before, during and what are the expectations for after the pandemics. Which leadership types had a great impact on the organization during the analyzed timeframe.

Leadership styles, within the 3-box model, have varied from a type to another according to the circumstances faced by leaders and organizations. According to Bass and Avolio (1993), transactional leaders' relations are built on an exchange, and they gain agreements by reward and punishments. Conversely, transformational leadership emphasizes motivation to inspire team members. Looking at the first phase in Figure 8, the past, four out of six samples have found themselves to be more on a transformational leadership style, focusing on building relations beyond expectations, finding common interests, and exchanging ideas to create commitment. While one of the companies couldn't identify leaning to another side, and lastly the car production was focusing more on the transactional leadership to achieve the organizational development beyond personal development.

The second phase of the model, the present, is where the pandemic strikes the organizations. Shortly after the pandemic started, three out of six leaders found it a must to change into a transactional leadership to ensure the organizations' survival. But why would this type of leadership give a higher reliance and assurance for both leaders and organizations? As Bass (1993) identifies this leadership style relying on an exchange, this was found by the interviewees to be an effective way to cut investments in team buildings and team members who required training, and in all of the four cases, the employees who were set to lose their positions were the younger generations who required team building and training, while the ones who remained in their positions were considered as "veterans" that know what they were doing exactly, with minimal support required. Even though the leaders lay between transactional and transformational leadership, team building was still offered but mainly on a platform. That is found to be another challenge which will be discussed in the next heading. The rest companies, medical and chemical companies, shifted slightly towards transactional leadership, provide slightly fewer inspirations and social interaction and due to physical restrictions and working remotely. The outstanding result was in the car production company who invested in creating a dedicated platform to cover the social interaction and supplied all the team members with the crucial equipment and technologies to influence teams for better productivity and inspiration.

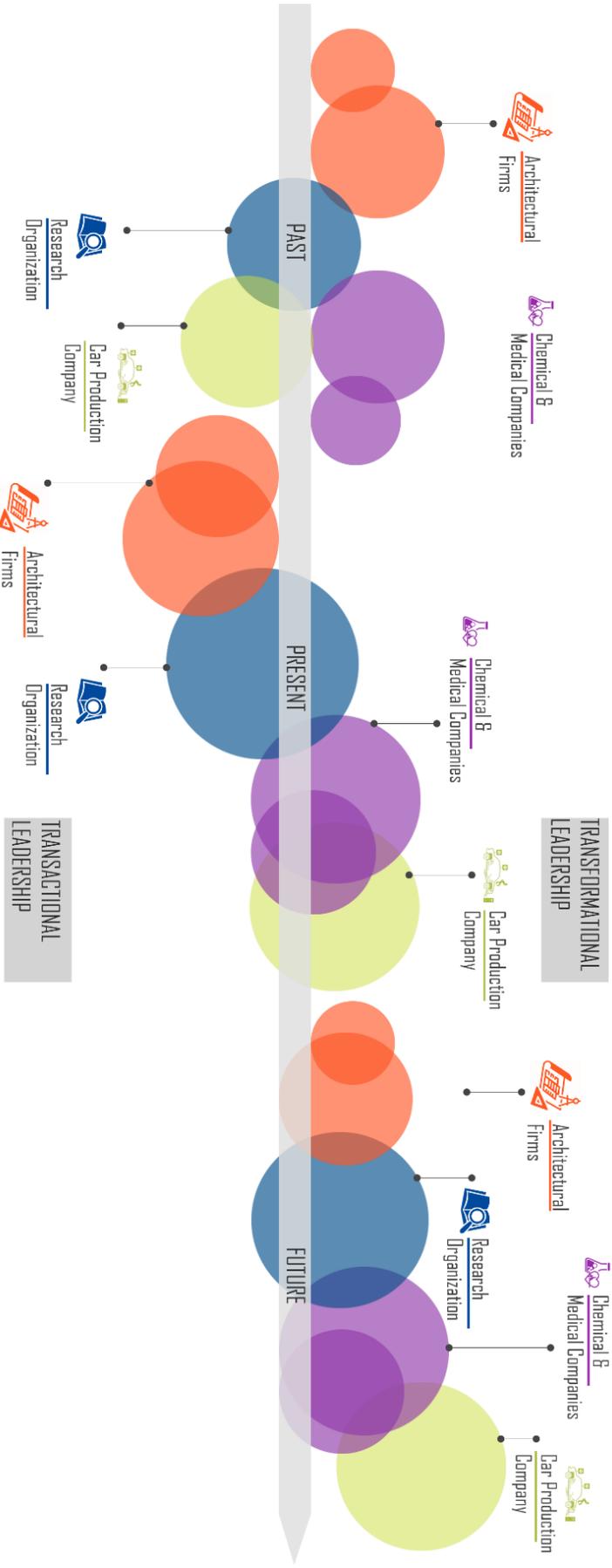


Figure 8. Illustration of Samples' Leadership Transition within the 3-Box Timeline.

In the third box, the future, all the interviewed leaders expect to be shifting towards a transformational style. After the pandemic ends, in the long run, the companies or organizations will need to restore from the pandemic damage, and set a plan to grow again and hire more employees, estimating that new projects will be gained. The working culture in Sweden is claimed by the interviewees to be a supportive culture that invests in team development, and in the upcoming months, the hiring process will be restored, and again younger generations will need much more training and inspiration. Leaders, throughout this pandemic, recognized the importance of flexibility and that it is possible to provide the team members with opportunities and inspiration within a remote and flexible environment.

6.2 Challenges & Opportunities

Challenges identified by the interviewees, in relevance to the theoretical background, could be categorized into two categories: Social challenges and technical challenges. The opportunities were mainly economical, environmental, and chronological.

6.2.1 Social Challenges

Social challenges identified are communication and cultural challenges as shown in Figure 9. Cultural challenges include skills and mindset which were tougher to target through remote work. Some team members needed the training to adapt to the remote work or the part-time office work. Resistance to change is a cultural challenge as well, where some team members resist the change and try to push the old order back. But Snyder (2012) believes that leaders' mindset and resistance can be one of the main challenges. So it is not only linked to members, this challenge should also be identified by leaders themselves, and work on it to lift the team experience and influence.

Through the interviewed leaders, neither transactional nor transformational leadership had an advantage above the other for communication. Neufeld et. Al. (2010) indicate that transformational and transactional leadership are intrinsically tied to effective communication. Even though all of the six leaders faced a communication conundrum, which leaders tended to put more effort to facilitate all the communication channels, including formal and non-formal communication. For instance, the architectural firms scheduled a meeting for two architects, once a week, to communicate face to face for improved innovation and creativity. Meeting mostly virtually took the opportunity of "shoulder tap" as a leader describes it. A "shoulder tap" is where the leader tries to engage with the team members through non-formal communication, and checkup on the well-being of the member. The chit-chat creates a bond between team members, and it is extremely difficult to do this behind a screen. Even if it happens, it was found to be shallow over an online meeting.

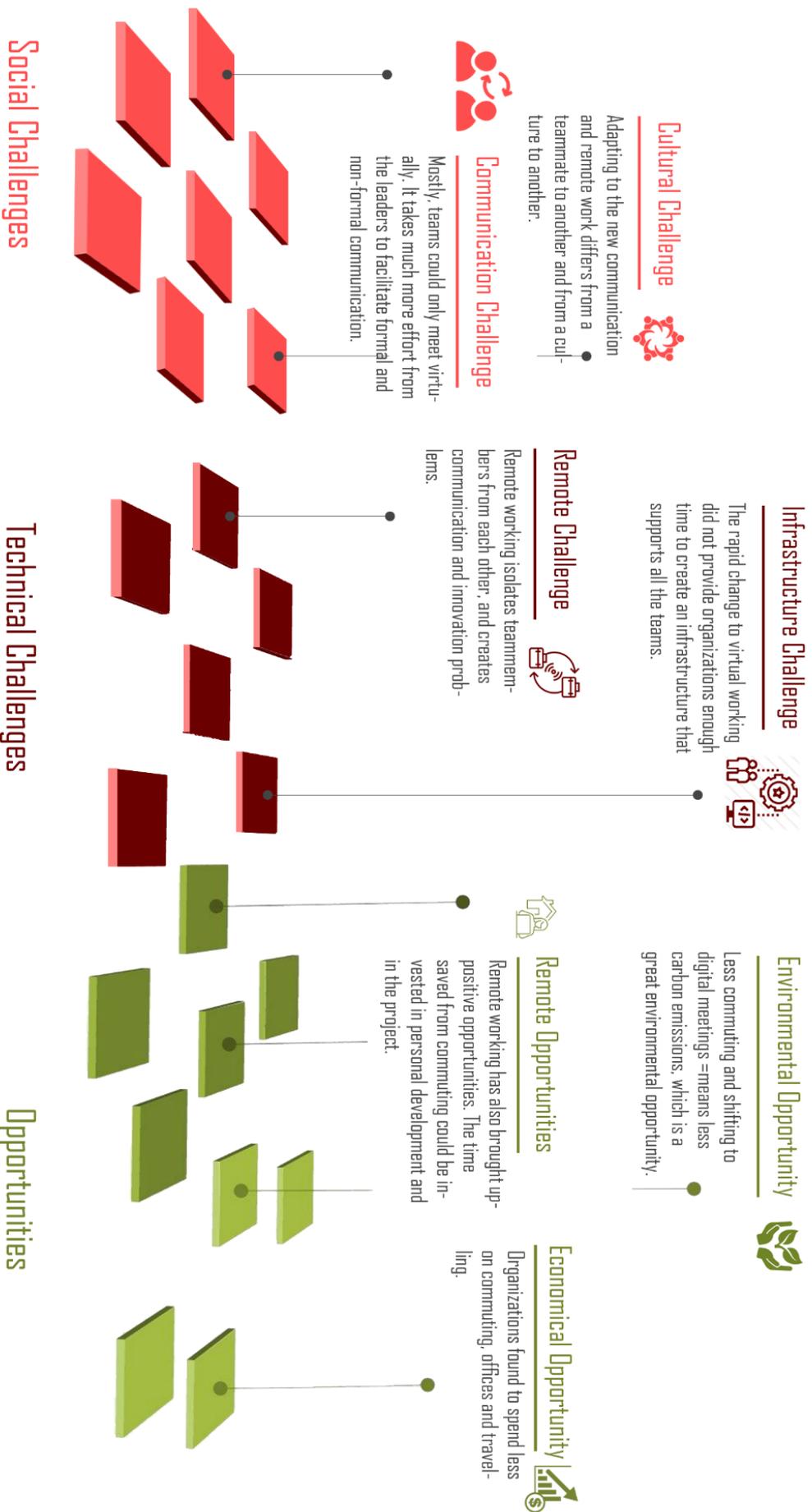


Figure 9. Identified Challenges and Opportunities Illustration.

6.2.2 Technical Challenges

Technical challenges were remoteness and infrastructure support. Remote work not only created communication struggles but also isolated team members from each other. Team building activities were extremely tough to conduct, and the trustor bond between new-forming teams is hard to establish. Leaders use team-building activities to create trust and bond between different teammates, it creates an inspirational bond to lift the team goal and objectives. Teams formed before the pandemic start were less affected, as they have an established relationship, but forming new teams in domains like architecture, where creativity and innovation are highly required, working remotely was a dreadful challenge. Lastly, when some organizations faced a rapid forced change to remote working, the existing infrastructure, such as platforms and user software, did not support moving the whole organization to a remote platform, which created trouble to develop the existing system. Some organizations such as the chemical company had shifted to this type of work a long-time before the pandemic strike, and thus they faced no challenge in that terms. Albrechtsen & Hovdena (2009) studied this challenge more and identified also a security challenge that could face all the teams. They suggest that to decrease security threats, employees require ongoing training and interaction with the security team. Consequently, it will reduce different approaches and priorities based on security maintenance

6.2.3 Opportunities

The pandemic did not only have challenges, it also had some opportunities which had a great impact on both organizations and teams. The common opportunity identified by each leader is an economical opportunity, where less commuting and traveling means less money spent by the organization in this area. Time is money, and the time saved from the journeys from and to work could be re-invested in projects again.

Remoteness had both challenges and opportunities. It provides location independence, as Surg (2020) identifies it. Location independence was also identified by some of the leaders, where companies could save money from renting offices and traveling, and meetings could be held at any time without having limits for bookings and reservations. Environmental opportunities were also noticed by each interviewee and mentioned by Surg (2020). Environmental impact relates to the commuting from and to work. Reducing the number of trips by trains, cars, or flights results in a green impact which cuts carbon dioxide emissions. This results in better air quality as this was noticed in many countries such as China, Italy, and Spain.

7 Discussion

The interviewed leaders had different leadership styles and various approaches to the pandemic. Some of the leaders shifted from a style to another and willing to shift again in the future, others remained more tending towards a leadership style (Bass, B. et al., 1993). Dealing with each challenge differs from a leader to another, even within the same leadership style. Figure 10 illustrates the challenges met generally by each of the interviewees.

Communication challenges were the most common among everyone, and it was one of the greatest challenges (Neufeld et. Al. 2010). Communication was facilitated more by transformational leadership than in transactional leadership in this case. Transformational leaders invested in training the team members to adapt to the new channels, they even added meetings for "chit-chat" to encourage the team and lift the inspiration. As stated by an interviewee, it was during this period that it is necessary to take care of the mental health of the team members and invest more hours in merging. Transactional leaders have also helped their teams overcome communication channels, but it was in terms of arranging meetings between specific team members who were having difficulties, in addition to arranging the whole meetings for the team. The investment in cultural and skills training had also given a huge advantage of transformational over transactional leadership.

Table 2. Ability of Each Leadership Style to Cope with the Challenges

Dealing with Challenges	TRANSFORMATIONAL LEADERSHIP	TRANSACTIONAL LEADERSHIP
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Communication Challenges The ability to overcome communication obstacles through pandemic. 		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Culture & Skills Challenges Coping with the cultural challenges and team skills challenges. 		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Economical Challenges Overcoming economical challenges and coping with organizational goals. 		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Infrastructural Challenges Adapting and providing the necessary infrastructure in crisis. 		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Meeting Timelines Ability to meet deliveries timelines in crisis. 		

Conversely, transactional leadership focused more on keeping only the employees who have enough experience to perform efficiently, named as "veterans", to cut off the economical costs. Although this step had less advantage in terms of culture and skills, it helped the organization cut the costs and ensure as stated by interviewee B the survival by reducing costs and all non-essential costs.

Both leadership styles, including all the interviewed leaders, worked on providing the necessary infrastructure and channels for their teams, and there wasn't any advantage/disadvantage for any leader above the other. It is crucial to mention that each action of any of the previous leaders was limited within the organizational vision and resources. For instance, interviewee A and B had an organization with limited resources and was hugely affected economically, by which cutting all means of non-essential costs was vital for their survival. Other interviewees, such as interviewee F, in the car production company, had a long-term company vision and better resources to invest in training and facilitating the employees' mental and working environment.

Meeting timelines differed from one case to another. Some organizations/companies had projects stopped, others had delayed submission dates, with some dates stricter than others. To sum up the cases, companies with an emergent deadline and limited resources, tended to let go of the trainees and team members who need training and development, keeping the experienced members only with double the pressure to meet the submission dates. The second case is where the companies were not affected by Covid-19 and the production on the plant continued normally, so the process was not affected. Thirdly, the company with more resources and flexible deadlines, tended to provide more empowerment for employees, reducing the working days on the plant to three days but pressured to 24 hours, but also providing much more personal time for personal development and self-education.

Referring to one of the unanswered research questions: Could any general implications or even a leadership style to deal through similar pandemic be recommended? There is no one-fits-all style. Each case requires a special study and investigation of the environment, resources, and disruption. In the studied samples, transformational leadership proved to be efficient in empowering employees and providing them with the necessary work advice and mental health. The training and extensive support was hectic for the leaders but provided a helpful outcome for the team members. This required a lot of time and resources investment. Transactional leadership has secured meeting the project budget and timeline, regardless of the ethical side of firing newly hired members. Leaders used their time for coaching a successful project, investing all their time and resources in the project, keeping only the highly experienced members that have the sufficient knowledge and experience to deliver their tasks without referring extensively to the project leader or rely on other team members.

8 Conclusions & Recommendations

Teams and organizational performance are linked to leadership. There is no one-fits-all leadership style that works for all firms. Nonetheless, understanding the factors and traits of each style aids executives to adopt the proper characteristics based on each situation for better team performance. Transformational leaders provide inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, idealized influence, and individualized consideration. This leadership style requires a clear vision to articulate effectively. Transactional leadership is based on rewards and sanctions, providing praise on success and negative feedback or threats in failures. These styles are not mutually exclusive and can be mixed to reach optimum performance.

The leadership style is particular for each team and should be influenced by the team's purpose and composition. As a leader, it is necessary to decide how much freedom should the team get. The dilemma of giving too much freedom will not help the team achieve the target, and too little freedom will restrict the team's satisfaction and development and leave them demotivated.

8.1 Concluding Remarks

To choose a suitable leadership approach, the leader must investigate his role, his team, and his task. An effective leader has key characteristics: Honesty and integrity, vision, inspiration, ability to challenge, and communication skills. Honesty and integrity get the team to believe in the leader and buy into their journey. Vision is required to know where the leader is currently, and chart a future path whilst enrolling the team within this path. Inspiration lifts the team spirit to follow the bigger picture and get motivated to achieve a goal as a team. The ability to challenge applies both to the team members and leaders. Resistance to change is common between team members and leaders, while leaders tend to resist the change more, this is a key that leaders should work on and encourage the team to think outside the box. Communication skills are extremely necessary to ensure a mutual understanding between team members throughout the journey.

To answer each question precisely. How did the studied sample adapt to the pandemic disruption? The studied sample tried to adapt and provide the work remotely if possible. Some of them had economical strikes, and had to optimize the resources for projects flow and deadlines to ensure organizations survival. Others tried to invest in the team development and train their employees to adapt to the situation and cover all the formal and non-formal communication as well.

What was the role of leadership in assisting organizations to overcome the pandemic challenges? Leaders were overwhelmed trying to ensure proper communication channels, provide the team members with proper trainings or setting project milestones to approach. Ensuring the project timeline, budget, and milestone was essential for organizational survival. They set a direction, build a vision, and created a path for them and their teams.

What type of challenges and opportunities did the leaders face? As classified before, communication and culture challenges under the social challenges, and technical challenges in terms of remote and infrastructure support. Opportunities were economical, environmental, and remote.

Could any general implications or even a leadership style to deal through similar pandemic be recommended? Recommendations should not be generalized based on six companies. But based on the studied sample, transformational leadership proved to be effective in motivating and assist the team even with the tools and trainings to overcome the challenges but within a good funding.

Transactional leadership in tough economical situation was able to maintain the project and company survival.

8.2 Recommendations

Challenges and opportunities appear in different stages throughout the team formation and project progress. The COVID-19 has demonstrated the toughest disruption and challenge to the global economy and organizations at once. Facing disruptions is part of organizations nowadays. To ensure effective leadership throughout similar disruptions, leaders must learn from the present situation and identify the following points:

- **Suitable leadership style and traits:** each situation requires a proper analysis to select a relevant leadership style. Leaders must merge different leadership styles and traits when required, as there is no one-fits-all style.
- **Effective communication:** focusing on effective formal and non-formal communication is vital for mutual understanding. Even though a pandemic, leaders must ensure proper parallel channels and manage them properly.
- **Lift team inspiration:** team inspiration might face up and downs, especially in pandemic times. Inspiration might be affected by the mental health of team members and should be addressed by leaders when necessary.
- **Avoid resistance:** Resistance is more likely to be found within middle-managers. Leaders must identify the reason for the change and adapt to each situation.
- **Identify challenges & opportunities:** Challenges and opportunities might vary from a disruption to another, and from a location to another. Each case should be analyzed separately to identify challenges and try to turn them into opportunities and carry the team to overcome each challenge.
- **Use a change model:** A change model, such as the 3-box model, helps leaders identify the past and the present successes and failures to plan for the future and build upon it.

8.3 Future Research

This research focused on the Swedish private sector companies, three product-based, and three service-based. Future research might include different types of organizations, and engage the public sector. The public sector might have different approach as it is directly linked to the governmental decisions. Even other types or organizations which experienced a different approach in the private sector, such as hospitality sector, would be of a great importance to the data outcome.

It is also of great importance to study the approach of different organizations globally, such as the United Kingdom or Italy who experienced a full lockdown imposing different challenges. This might include companies who have global offices, and had different approach in each country, and how did each approach help the company pass through the situation.

Lastly, change models are valuable to apply and analyse different situations. Change models such as SCARF that targets the psychological effect, or the 9-step model of change might create a broader result and generate different perspectives to the study.

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Appendices

Appendix 1. Interview Questions

Warm-up Questions

1. Can you start by introducing yourself?
2. What is your experience at this company?

Challenges and Opportunities

3. How did the pandemic affect the situation in this company?
4. Are you working more remotely?
5. What challenges are you facing? What is resolved and how?
5. Do you have any team building activities while working remotely?
6. How are you and your team coping with the remote work?
7. Did you follow any specific model to lead the teams during these times?
8. Are there any benefits for this shift?

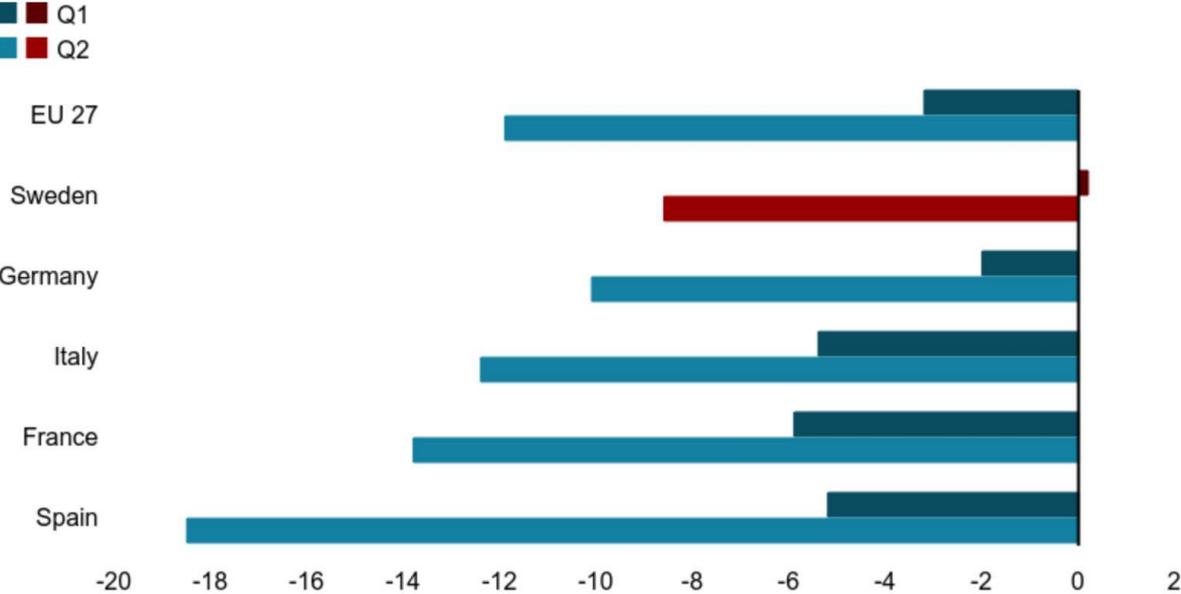
Employees Empowerment

9. How has the work process changed? How has the communication within the team changed?
12. What are the steps taken to keep the employees motivated and to what level do they feel empowered?
13. How do you demonstrate working products frequently to your customers in this remote working scenario?
14. Finally, do you wish to continue virtual working (partly or full time) even after this situation. Why or why not?

Appendix 2. Sweden's economy compared to other European countries by BBC

Sweden's economy is doing better than other European nations

% change in quarterly GDP



Examensarbeten / Master Thesis
Inst. för skogsekonomi / Department of Forest Economics

1. Lindström, H. 2019. Local Food Markets - consumer perspectives and values
2. Wessmark, N. 2019. Bortsättning av skotningsavstånd på ett svenskt skogsbolag - en granskning av hur väl metodstandarderna för bortsättningsarbetet följts
3. Wictorin, P. 2019. Skogsvårdsstöd - växande eller igenväxande skogar?
4. Sjölund, J. 2019. Leveransservice från sågverk till bygghandel
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6. Skärberg, E. 2019. Outsourcing spare part inventory management in the paper industry - A case study on Edet paper mill
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8. Andersson, S. 2019. Kalkylmodell för produkter inom korslimmat trä - Fallstudie inom ett träindustriellt företag. *Calculation model for products within cross-laminated timber - A case study within a wood industrial company*
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15. Gyllengahm, K. 2020. Omsättningslager för förädlade träprodukter - en avvägning mellan lagerföring - och orderkostnad. *Levels of cycle inventory for processed wood products - a trade-off between inventory - and order cost*
16. Olovsson, K. 2020. Ledtider i sågverksindustrin - en analys av flöden och processer. *Lead times in the sawmill industry - an analysis of flows and processes*
17. Holfve, V. 2020. Hållbart byggande - Kommuners arbete för flerbostadshus i trä. *Building in a sustainable way - Municipalities' work for wooden multistory constructions*
18. Essebro, L. 2020. Ensuring legitimacy through CSR communications in the biobased sector. *Att säkerställa legitimitet genom CSR kommunikation i den biobaserade sektorn*

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21. Emerson, O. 2020. Impacts of environmental regulations on firm performance – the development of a new perspective. *Påverkan av miljökrav på företags prestanda – utvecklingen av ett nytt perspektiv*
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