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Michal Džujka

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ao. Univ.-Prof. Dr. Ingrid Getreuer-Kargl

Abstract

This thesis is focused on advantages and disadvantages of working from home during the Covid-19 pandemic in Japan and the differences between female and male office workers. After defining telework, its advantages, disadvantages and teleworking history in Japan, the gender differences between female and male office workers in Japan as well as the culture of salarymen is briefly explained to give broader context to the topic. In order to provide the background introduction, desk research of the available literature is presented. Afterwards, an interview analysis of 6 office workers in Japan is provided with 3 interviews with female office workers and 3 interviews with male office workers. When defining the target interviewees of this research, young childless workers were selected. Contrary to the literature review, the experiences of women and men in this context were very similar and mostly positive where they wish to continue working from home after the Covid-19 pandemic due to the noticeable benefits that this working system has brought to their lives.

Key words: teleworking, covid-19, work from home, home office

Abstrakt

Diese Masterarbeit beschäftigt sich zum einem mit den Vor- und Nachteilen des Home-Offices während der Covid-19-Pandemie in Japan und zum anderen mit den Arbeitserfahrungen zwischen weiblichen und männlichen Büroangestellten während der Coronakrise. Nach diversen Definitionen, die für diese Masterarbeit relevant sind, werden die Vor- und Nachteile des Home-Offices beleuchtet. Im Anschluss daran wird die Geschichte der Telearbeit in Japan erläutert und die geschlechtsspezifischen Unterschiede zwischen weiblichen und männlichen ArbeiterInnen in Japan sowie deren Arbeitskultur analysiert.

Für diese Masterarbeit wird zuerst eine systematische Literaturanalyse herangezogen. Anschließend werden Interviews mit insgesamt 6 ArbeitnehmerInnen in Japan (3 Interviews mit weiblichen und 3 Interviews mit männlichen Büroangestellten) durchgeführt. Die Zielpersonen dieser Studie sind junge, kinderlose ArbeitnehmerInnen. Das Ergebnis der Analyse ist, dass die Arbeitserfahrungen und Meinungen zwischen japanischen Frauen und Männern während der Covid-19-Pandemie sehr ähnlich und überwiegend positiv ausfallen. Es hat sich außerdem herauskristallisiert, dass alle sechs Interviewpartner die Vorteile des Home-Offices genossen haben, sodass sie sich weiterhin die Option wünschen von Zuhause aus zu arbeiten.

Schlagwörter: Telework, Covid-19, von Zuhause arbeiten, Homeoffice

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1 Introduction

The global pandemic due to the spread of the Covid-19 virus has affected lives all around the world in many different ways. Many Japanese people who were satisfied with their working conditions before the pandemic are now seeing the benefits of working from home which often translates to not spending their time commuting and having more time for their families (Ryall, 2020).

Switching towards a more home office-oriented workflow seems to be the future in many Japanese companies since *"now companies have realized that it is possible to do most things online, that meetings can still happen outside the company and I expect to see companies here go more in that direction"* (Ryall, 2020). Compared to the neighboring countries in the East Asia region, Japan's restrictions due to the Covid-19 pandemic have not been as strict, due to the constitutional restrictions present in Japan (Helliwell et. al., 2021:70). This means that the large portion of mobility and social distancing measures were more on a voluntary basis compared to different countries in the area. On the other hand, the central as well as local governments made recommendations for the general public to limit gatherings, close schools but also to implement a working from home systems for non-essential office workers which will be the topic of this thesis (Tashiro/Shaw, 2020:3).

With the Covid-19 pandemic affecting our every-day lives since March 2020, it is important to investigate the different aspects of our lives that had to be adjusted in order to fit into the new normal. Working from home has been a strategy implemented worldwide and in the case of Japan, where a high portion of office workers was used to working long hours from the office, it was interesting to look into the effects of the teleworking policy and see what differences working from home brings to the everyday lives of Japanese office workers. Due to the still present gender stereotypes in Japanese society, it was further explored whether teleworking could enable society on the way to more gender equality.

Before the Covid-19 pandemic, telework was not a common practice in the Japanese office workplace with only 6% of Japanese companies having implemented teleworking structure in January 2020 before the pandemic hit Japan (Okubo, 2020:1). Since working from home was introduced on a more mass scale and became a normal part of many Japanese office workers during the pandemic, the aim of this thesis is to explore its effect especially on young childless

office workers in Japan. The objective is to identify if this new way of working would be preferred after the pandemic and what are the differences between female and male Japanese office workers and their perceptions of the advantages and disadvantages of the new teleworking system.

Based on the above problem definition and the goal of this research, the research question for this thesis is as follows:

What are the advantages and disadvantages of working from home during the COVID-19 pandemic according to the Japanese office workers and what are the differences of opinion between men and women?

In order to summarize already available information, secondary research in the form of a desk research was conducted. The desk research was focused on the topics of definition of telework, advantages and disadvantages of telework before the Covid-19 pandemic, the history of telework in Japan, the differences between female and male office workers in Japan as well as the culture of salarymen. To be able to get the latest information available regarding the implementation of telework during the Covid-19 pandemic in 2020 as well as 2021, reliable news articles were used. As primary research, interviews with childless, young office workers in Japan were conducted. In total, there were 6 interviews with 3 women and 3 men conducted in order to get a better understanding of their current experience with working from home during the global pandemic. Detailed explanation regarding the analysis of the interviews will be further elaborated on in the further chapter.

2 Desk Research

In the following, the results of the desk research will be presented. With the help of the literature analysis, a part of the research question should be answered. In addition, relevant terms for this thesis will be defined.

2.1 Definitions of teleworking

Teleworking is a broad term that includes all types of work that occur outside of the traditional office space. Gupta et al. defined telework as "*work carried out in a location where, remote from central office or production facilities, the worker has no personal*

contacts with coworkers, but is able to communicate with them using the communication technologies" (Gupta et. al., 1995:306). There are several types of teleworking, and these will be further explained below.

2.1.1 Telecommuting

Telecommuting is a term used to describe working from home during the standard working hours. This is also often referred to as "*home office*" (Higa/Shin, 2003:233). Telecommuting has been the most popular form of telework that was implemented during the Covid-19 pandemic to help to prevent spreading of the Covid-19 virus. The effects of telecommuting during the world pandemic in 2020 and 2021 are also further investigated throughout the interviews.

2.1.2 Satellite office

If a company utilizes satellite offices, it sets up various office locations (typically in a large city) where the employees can work from. This shortens the commuting times since a worker is free to choose the satellite office that is the closest to their location (Higa/Shin, 2003:233). Satellite offices are especially popular in large cities such as Tokyo where workers usually spend a long time going to and from their workplace.

2.1.3 Mobile working

A mobile worker is an employee that works at a place that is not the company's office or their home. These locations would typically include at a customer's office, coffee place or any other location that is suitable to perform their work tasks (Higa/Shin, 2003:233).

2.1.4 A non-territorial office

This term describes an office space where the available desks are not assigned to a particular employee. A typical territorial office would be an office space that is mainly made for mobile workers, meaning if a mobile worker works from the office location, they simply choose one from the available desks (Higa/Shin, 2003:234).

2.1.5 Pseudo telework

Pseudo telework describes the often-occurring situation in Japan where companies have implemented some sort of teleworking. However, they are not experiencing the efficiency of it. A mobile worker that has an assigned desk at the company's primary office would be an example of a pseudo teleworker. A mobile worker that unnecessarily commutes to the main office on most of the working days is another example of a pseudo teleworker (Higa/Shin, 2003:234).

2.2 Advantages and disadvantages of teleworking

In the following section, various advantages and disadvantages of teleworking, mostly telecommuting will be explored in order to provide a deeper understanding of the pros and cons of this working policy.

2.2.1 Disadvantages of teleworking

Several studies show that teleworkers often have difficulty separating their work life from their private lives which is especially the case of work from home (Sato, 2019:108). When telecommuting, the already thin line between work and family disappears and work often intrudes in one's life even after working hours due to the fact that the teleworkers essentially never leave their workspace. This results in long working hours and overtime as well as high levels of stress that can negatively influence one's health (Messenger, 2017:307).

“Giving a workaholic a [laptop] is like giving an alcoholic a bottle of gin.” (Ellison 1999:348). This is a quote that very well describes the potential danger and negative effects that working from home could bring when a company is not being cautious of setting up a teleworking system that does not harm the employees.

Traditionally, the Japanese workers considered “work” to happen while being physically present in the office (Ryall, 2020). A good worker would be someone who works overtime. Therefore, despite the clear benefits of telework, many are worried that a traditional Japanese office worker may feel the need to put in the extra overtime hours throughout the night. This could happen out of a “guilty feeling” in the case for example of losing their concentration through the day due to having their children running around in order to complete all their tasks, however still feeling obliged to finish the given tasks (Ryall, 2020).

In case there is a mistrust between the management and the company's employees, a large disadvantage of having the employees work from home is that there is lack of control from the management side. Many managers are then worried that their employees are slacking off, some even think that the employees may be drinking alcohol during their working hours (Dooley/Inoue, 2020). This is then of course also mirrored to the employees who would then not take the opportunity of working from home even though it were offered to them due to the fact that they know that their direct manager is not trusting those employees that work from home and prefers them to be in the office. Therefore, they would rather work from the office than to risk potentially negative effects on their career if working from home (Dooley/Inoue, 2020).

Some companies may not be comfortable sharing sensitive information. Other policies such as having face to face meetings so as not to share sensitive company's information through an online channel are also being challenged during the Covid-19 pandemic. This goes hand in hand with the management's lack of trust in the company's employees and manager's tendency to feel that they simply cannot manage the workers who are not physically there (Dooley/Inoue, 2020). The social aspects of working in an office is something that many have missed during the pandemic: *"I did miss the encounters with my work colleagues, just walking down a corridor and meeting them, sharing a coffee and a quick chat."* (Ryall, 2020). The social aspect of the workplace and company culture is a very important thing for the Japanese companies as well as the employees, therefore not having this part of every-day interaction can be difficult for many workers.

This is clearly visible especially when starting a new job during the Covid-19 pandemic and not being able to meet the new colleagues in person. Many claim that it is especially hard for the newcomers to get the feel of the company's culture, values and getting to know the new colleagues on a deeper level. It is also more difficult to evaluate a new employee and deliver the training sessions when a company is not used to a working from home model which could potentially put the new employees into a disadvantage.

In Japan, to work from home often means that the worker does not have the same rights compared to a traditional office worker. Being on a waiting list to be admitted to a nursery school in Japan is not unusual (Kazekami, 2020:14). Municipalities decide who is eligible to go to the nursery school based on the amount of parent's working hours. According to the 2016 survey, many mothers state that teleworkers' children are getting minus points when applying for nursery school due to the fact that teleworking does not count in the same way as regular

work from the office does (Kazekami, 2020:14). This leaves busy mothers in the rear end of the priority systems and therefore largely discourages them from teleworking.

A lack of exercise is another unwanted result of a teleworking population. Since workers would not necessarily have the need to leave their homes at all during the working week, obesity related effects on health should be taken into consideration (Kawada, 2020). Exercise is a vital part of an individual's life therefore long-term effects of working only from home and not doing any kind of exercise could be serious.

2.2.2 Advantages of teleworking

There are many advantages when it comes to teleworking which is also one of the reasons why it has become a popular measure to implement during the Covid-19 pandemic. Taking telecommuting for example, the fact that one can do their job from their home without needing to meet with their colleagues is the precise reason why it was implemented to reduce the risks of spreading Covid-19 virus.

Japan is a country that also often faces severe weather conditions, earthquakes as well as monsoons that complicate transportation around the country and inside the cities. There was a spike in companies introducing teleworking systems in Japan after the Great Tohoku earthquake of March 11 2011, where many companies realized the potential of having a working system in place that could allow the firm to work efficiently even during a natural disaster and during times where the workers are not allowed to use the public transport to get to work (Sakamoto/Spinks, 2013:1).

By implementing teleworking systems and by letting employees to work from home, even once the global pandemic is over, companies will be ready to operate as per usual also under unexpected conditions (Adriani, 2019:3).

Generally, people in large cities spend a long time commuting to work. Taking the commute time out of the equation completely means that a worker has more time to spend with their families but also hobbies and relaxation. Commuting, however, does not only take a lot of time but is also often especially in large cities like Tokyo very stressful as well as largely uncomfortable due to the overcrowded trains in the rush hour (Kazekami, 2020:3).

It is then very clear to see this benefit of skipping commute when comparing a peaceful environment at home to an hour spent in an overcrowded and stressful environment. It is also

believed that skipping this part of the day leaves the workers more positively motivated and productive at the beginning of their day (Kazekami, 2020:2).

Working from home also means that the worker is able to spend more time with their family. This is especially beneficial for people with young children who are not able to place their kids in the kindergarten or also people who need to take care of a family member or an elderly parent that requires constant care (Kazekami, 2020:10).

Teleworking and especially telecommuting also decreases the company's operational costs. By letting at least a fraction of employees work from home, companies do not require such large office spaces and office equipment in general since they do not have the need to accommodate that many people inside their offices on an everyday basis (Adriani, 2019:3). The company does not only save on the office costs, but also on energy bills and possibly also transportation costs for the employees.

The probability that women with children will either remain or return to the workplace is also higher if the company allows them to work from home (Adriani, 2019:5). This is due to the fact that having the flexibility would, in theory, enable Japanese women to keep their jobs even after they give birth or get married. The modern Japanese women are no longer tied to the traditional gender roles therefore teleworking enables them to work and further develop their careers (Adriani, 2019:5).

A great benefit on the side of the employees is the increased working time autonomy meaning that when working from home, employees have more freedom to choose when to work and how to allocate their tasks effectively throughout the day (Messenger, 2017:305). This allows the employees to be more independent and take ownership of their tasks.

Teleworking has also been known to increase the employee's productivity (Messenger, 2017:306), which is often due to the fact that when working from home, one can work without being distracted and therefore focus on the given task efficiently. Another reason for this is the fact that people are often calmer and at peace when working from home which can be a positive change compared to often stressful office spaces.

One could, however, also argue the exact opposite, that there are too many possible distractions at home therefore working from home is the least ideal place. However, according to the research from 2018, many participants chose their homes as the best place to work due to the lack of distractions and a very few chose the opposite (Bugeaud, 2018:72). This suggests that “home office” is a great alternative to the traditional office.

Even though many could be worried that reducing or in some cases even eliminating face to face communication could make it harder for teleworkers to communicate in an effective way, it has been proven that “*non-verbal cues (facial expressions and body languages) from face-to-face were not that critical for teleworkers to have rich communication*” (Lee/Shin/ Higa, 2007:695). This demonstrates that in a business setting, the non-verbal communication is not as vital as the verbal and written one, therefore, if done correctly, teleworking does enable workers and managers to communicate effectively.

2.3 The pre-pandemic situation of teleworking in Japan

The following section will explore to which degree did the Japanese society use teleworking before the Covid-19 pandemic and what were the reasons for implementing such work policy before the pandemic restrictions were implemented.

2.3.1 Telework in pre-pandemic Japan and the history of teleworking in Japan

Teleworking has been presented and encouraged in Japan since the 1980s in order to solve many of the country's workplace issues (Higa et. al., 1996:352).

In the early 1990s, teleworking and more specifically satellite offices were promoted in order for Japanese companies to appear more attractive and offer their employees a possibility to save up the time that would normally be spent commuting by giving them an option to work from various locations around Tokyo (Higa et. al., 1996:356). Another reason for this fact were the rising prices of land in Tokyo which led to many skilled potential employees to move outside of the city to save up on rent. Therefore, to attract the employees living in the outskirts of Tokyo, companies were becoming more creative and were setting up multiple office locations (Higa et. al., 1996:356).

Fujitsu, a company that implemented telework in the early 1990s reported various benefits of this new style of work which also included “*increased managerial emphasis on workers’ output, improved performance and increased communication between engineers in the telework offices.*” (Higa et. al., 1996:352).

Even though there are many similar success stories of introducing telework in Japan, before the Covid-19 pandemic it was rather an exception than the rule to be working for a company that allows their employees to telework. This is due to the specific management style used in Japan that is more presence oriented rather than result oriented (Higa et. al., 1996:357). It is clearly visible when looking at the statistics from pre-pandemic Japan, where in 2016, “*less than 5%*

of employees perform(ed) telework in half of the firms that have introduced telework” (Kazekami, 2020:1). In fact, in pre-pandemic Japan, only 6.3% of the companies that offered telework had teleworking participation of 50% or higher (Sato, 2019:84). This means that many Japanese workers did not take advantage of the option to telework even though they had the option. This was mostly due to the presence-oriented management style where, as explained in the above sections, the management was not comfortable with employees teleworking and they would rather have an “overview” which then discouraged employees from teleworking. Teleworking before the Covid-19 pandemic has been promoted to mainly improve the work life balance of the Japanese office workers. In 2016, 13.2% of the Japanese companies allowed their employees to engage in some form of telework and 82.8% of the companies that responded to the survey had no plans to introduce a form of teleworking for their employees (Sato, 2019:84). The 13.2% of companies have, however, also included a so-called “informal telework” where employees would take their unfinished work tasks home and informally finish them in their homes, after the official working hours. This essentially prolonged the already long working hours of the Japanese office workers and even gave the employees the option to work late at night from their home or during a public holiday. Many Japanese workers engage in this “late-night teleworking” which takes place at their homes between 22:00 to 05:00. On average, according to the 2016 survey, Japanese office workers perform “late-night teleworking” 5 times a month (Sato, 2019:108).

The government has promoted telework in the form of “whole-day own-home teleworking” for at least one day per week especially for the employees with children and/or health care responsibilities (Sato, 2019:77). It was also believed already in 2013, that teleworking could give more job security to women with children as well as promote paternity leave with working men.

There have been multiple projects and organizations dedicated to promoting the benefits and implementation of teleworking systems. *Telewaku Zenkoku Tenkai Purojekuto* is a Nationwide Development Project for Teleworking by the Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communication that has existed since 2012 and was organizing seminars to advocate the benefits of telecommuting (Sato, 2019:77).

Telewaku Sodan Senta or the Telework Consultation Centre has been founded by The Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare in Tokyo that has been providing spaces to small and medium enterprises to introduce the “*whole-day own-home teleworking*” system or a satellite office system for Tokyo based office workers (Sato, 2019:77).

The Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry has also organized several meetings to discuss work from home (Sato, 2019:77).

Looking into data on how the Japanese teleworkers utilized telework before the Covid-19 pandemic, the number one place is the satellite office with 54.4% of at the time teleworkers utilizing a satellite office (Sato, 2019:92).

A second most popular form of teleworking was telecommuting or so called “home office” with 49.3% of the Japanese teleworkers utilizing this option. In third place in this survey was working from a client's office which was utilized by 34.3% of teleworkers who were mostly working in sales. This came in handy since they were already visiting their clients, so it was logical for them to also catch up on a few emails while they are there before they move on to their next client visit. Looking at this high percentage of teleworkers working from a client's offices, it seems that a large portion of teleworkers in general would work in sales - at least 34.3%, according to this survey.

Another interesting fact from the same study is that in pre-pandemic Japan, even if one would consider themselves as a teleworker, they would be mostly teleworking either 1-3 days a month or 1-3 days a week. Therefore, a large portion of teleworkers at the time would not utilize this option too frequently.

5.5% of the respondents admitted teleworking 6-7 days a week even though most Japanese companies have adopted a 5 day-week work schedule. This shows that some people would utilize telework to work on weekends or holidays.

The fact that many official teleworkers before the Covid-19 pandemic were not using telework more than a few times a month actively demonstrates that even though particular firms have implemented teleworking systems before the Covid-19 pandemic, it was often misunderstood by the company's employees and management and therefore not used to its fullest potential. In some cases, it failed to provide the benefits that have been promoted by the Japanese government which resulted in pseudo telework. One of the reasons why teleworking systems were not widely spread in Japan before the Covid-19 pandemic was the lack of telework adaptation guidelines and general misunderstandings by the middle management (Higa/Shin, 2003:233).

Another characteristic that companies who failed to implement teleworking systems shared was the fact that they only tried to implement part time telework on a small scale as well as pseudo telework. This means that they did not fully trust the process or only had a vague plan therefore

were being too cautious which caused them to fail with the implementation (Higa/ Shin, 2003:237).

On the other hand, successful adopters often shared the fact that they wanted to implement teleworking in order to solve an internal organizational issue rather than seek new business. Due to the fact that they were focusing on the internal issues, often, there was strong support from the company's upper management.

It is therefore believed that for telework implementation to be successful, a strong support and back up from the upper management needs to be present in order to change the company's culture and attitudes towards teleworking.

Looking into a survey carried out in 1998, 26 people out of 1134 survey participants engaged in telecommuting which represents 2.3% of the sample, 3.1% of the respondents worked at a satellite office and 1.5% consider themselves as mobile workers (Higa/Wijayanayake, 1998:5). These participants describe the benefits of telework similarly compared to the more recent studies from a pre-pandemic Japan. The most significant effect of teleworking was improvement of productivity followed by relief of stress and commuting (Higa/ Wijayanayake, 1998:7). From the perspective of management, the three main reasons to implement telework were to reduce cost, improve productivity and work-related stress relief (Higa, Wijayanayake, 1998:7).

The reasons given from the management on why they haven't implemented telework were mostly that the company does not have any jobs that can be performed when teleworking, followed by the fact that teleworkers are very difficult to manage.

The study also states that “*Workers have a significant interest in telework while only a very small percentage of managers have the same interest*” (Higa, Wijayanayake, 1998:7) which is demonstrated in the fact that 63.2% of the respondents were interested in teleworking, however only 8% of the management was interested in introducing teleworking systems in the future.

Even without the Covid-19 pandemic, Japan was still planning to implement teleworking from home in order to avoid large crowds especially on the public transport due to the planned Olympic Games that were supposed to be held in 2020 (Dooley/Inoue, 2020). This clearly demonstrates that Japan was aware of the possible advantages that implementation of home based telework could bring even before the world pandemic.

2.3.2 How does telework fit into the Japanese style of work?

Japan has been focusing on shortening time spent at work in order to improve the working conditions (Ono, 2018:35). The government has passed legislation and policy measures (Ono, 2018:35), however, the average time spent at work has not changed since the 1990s which makes Japan less productive than the OECD average (Ono, 2018:36).

When it comes to working hours in Japan, looking at the official statistics only does not provide the viewer with a view of the reality many office workers face. In reality, unpaid “service” overtime work often adds up to hundreds of hours per month and is rather frequent in many Japanese firms, a fact that these statistics do not take into consideration (Nemoto, 2013:514). Overworking results in serious health problems which has, unfortunately, become the norm for many Japanese office workers. This is very well demonstrated in Nemoto's research where one of the interviewees said: “*An investment banker who works like me usually gets hospitalized at least once by the age of forty*” (Nemoto, 2013:519).

People are multidimensional beings, therefore to be happy and fulfilled, we want to grow and progress in a wide range of different areas and not only live as workers but also as members of a family, caregivers, creatives and much more (Ono, 2018:36).

Long working hours have a clear negative influence on one's health and well-being.

An ideal office worker in pre-Covid 19 pandemic would devote their life to the company. Doing a lot of overtime is a method of developing a heroic-like reputation due to the fact that sacrificing private life and time in the workplace shows commitment, endurance and toughness (Nemoto, 2013:514).

Losing precious time that could have been spent with one's family is however not the only negative aspect of working long hours. Working overtime is directly associated with developing symptoms of depression (Ogawa et al., 2018:7). Depression can unfortunately, lead to suicide and Japan has one of the highest suicide rates in the world (Tanaka/Okamoto, 2021:229). The number of suicides was gradually declining, however, it increased during the Covid-19 pandemic (Tanaka/Okamoto, 2021:229). Therefore, investing more into the well-being of the employees by controlling the amount of overtime that they put in would make sense.

One can see the influence of long working hours also when looking into the amount of time Japanese husbands spend with their children. It is of course only one of the aspects that influence this phenomenon, however, Japanese husbands on average spend only 33 minutes a day on childcare which is significantly less than the average in other developed countries (Sato, 2019:78).

Even though the trend in the Western world nowadays is to digitize as many processes as possible and move matters online, Japanese businesses are often not following this trend and were still even in 2020, very paper based (Dooley/Inoue, 2020).

This is a large constraint when implementing a work from home policy, due to the fact that employees still need to go to the office, at least from time to time to make sure that they are able to perform the physical tasks that need to be done in order for the business to be able to run as usual.

An example of this is the *hanko* signature' which is a signature stamp used in Japan in order to sign documents. The *hanko* system has been influencing many workers during the Covid-19 pandemic in a negative way. Many had to go to the office to only stamp the official documents that were not digitized yet to be able to finish their tasks. Yoshikata Hibi, a Nagoya University professor tweeted: “*Why do we have to put each other at risk just for something trivial like a hanko?*” (Dooley/Inoue, 2020). At the time of writing this thesis, this tweet has been retweeted over 10 000 times and received over 27 000 likes. This shows that many agree with the fact that this traditional way of signing documents is not enough of a reason for someone to go and spend time commuting to work and risk potentially catching the Covid-19 virus just to stamp a document.

2.3.3 Reasons for implementing teleworking systems in pre-pandemic Japan

From the perspective of companies, the biggest benefit of teleworking before the Covid-19 pandemic in Japan was to improve productivity of the company's employees with 60.2% of the surveyed companies stating this in the survey (Sato, 2019:95).

According to the same study, the second largest motivator with a very similar score - 59.8% was to improve efficiency for standard work. These two results are consistent across industries and company sizes as well, where clearly, the biggest motivator for the “early adopters” of telework was to increase company's profits by introducing this system. Soft factors such as realization of employee's work-life balance score relatively low with only 9.3% which showcases that this was only a minor factor when deciding to implement telework or not. Looking at the same survey from the perspective of workers, improvement of efficiency and productivity ranks first with 55.7% respondents and 16.9% noticed improved customer service which was mostly due to being able to spend their workday at the customer's office. Both of these correspond with the company's values.

Moving into benefits that influence the worker's life, 16.7% respondents enjoyed reduced commute time, 9.9% claimed to have more time to spend with their family, 7.4% noticed more time for housework and 4.9% of workers observed an increase of the time they have for childcare.

2.3.4 Japanese male and female perspectives on teleworking

At the first glance, it may seem that Japanese workers do not perceive the benefits such as more time for family and household as important. However, as further explained in the next chapter, female work participation is lower than male workplace participation, which explains why most of these questionnaires were filled out by Japanese men. Japanese men are generally not as concerned by childcare and household compared to women. This is clearly visible when comparing the answers given by women and men. (Sato, 2019:98).

Looking into the number one advantage, improvement of business productivity and efficiency, this factor has been selected by 58% of the male respondents but only by 48.4% of the female respondents. On the other hand, female respondents were generally ranking the advantages such as more time with their family and household higher in comparison to the male respondents. These results confirm that the stereotypical gender roles in Japan are still present and demonstrate that workers from the same company perceive the benefits of telework differently due to their gender and gender-bonded responsibilities (Sato, 2019:98).

The specific gender occupational differences also show that inside this study group, the percentage of male sales workers is twice as high as female sales workers and the percentage of female clerical workers is twice as much compared to the male clerical workers. Therefore, naturally, in this study, men participants valued improvement to the customer service more than the female participants did due to the nature of their job (Sato, 2019:98).

Another valuable finding from this particular study is that “*in general, more teleworkers wish to reduce the time spent teleworking away from company offices rather than increase that type of work*” (Sato, 2019:99). This relates to the case of working from home, which is an informal type of working often unpaid and unrecognized by the company.

Another study from the year 2017 suggests that there are noticeable differences between the perceived benefits and disadvantages of teleworking between men and women (Messenger,

2017:307). According to the study, when teleworking, women are more inclined to work from home rather than use a satellite office or mobile working opportunity and in most cases, the reasons for this are family related, where working from home enables women to balance their family life and work life more effectively. Women also seem to obtain a better work-life balance result when working from home compared to men. This would suggest that the female participants have a better ability to separate work from their personal life when working from home (Messenger, 2017:307).

2.3.5 Teleworking pioneers among Japanese companies: Nissan Motor Company

There are companies that introduced measures to combat overworking from home as for example Nissan Motor Company Limited who has strict rules when it comes to telecommuting (Sato, 2019:100). Each Nissan Motor employee who wishes to work from home has to register at least one day in advance and is not allowed to work more than eight hours when working from home (Sato, 2019:100). By introducing such measures, companies normalize the eight-hour workday even when working from home which reduces stress of teleworkers in the long term.

Companies such as Nissan Motor Company Limited with similar teleworking policies were rare to see, and before the Covid-19 pandemic, parts of telework usually remained informal and undocumented.

2.3.6 Covid-19 implementation of telework in Japan

In April of 2020, many Japanese workers had to change their working habits due to the Covid-19 related governmental recommendation. According to a survey by the Research Institute for Advancement of Living Standards concerning effects of the Covid-19 pandemic, 24.4% of respondents had to cancel their business trips, 21.6% started to have their meetings online, 19.5% staggered commuting, and 14.9% had to take a paid leave (Research Institute for Advancement of Living Standards, 2020:9). Looking at the same data, it is clear that the larger the company is, the more likely it is to implement telework.

According to the research, more than 51.2% of the companies with 1,000 or more employees have implemented telework during the Covid-19 pandemic to battle the virus. This percentage goes down on average together with a decreasing number of employees with only 12.9% for

companies between 10 and 29 employees having implemented telework (Research Institute for Advancement of Living Standards, 2020:2).

According to the 2020 data from the Reuters Corporate Survey, 62% of Japanese companies claimed that their office utilization fell by 10-20% in early August compared to 2019, 25% said it had decreased by 30-50% and 9% said it had decreased by more than half (Kajimoto, 2020). Even though teleworking has been widely talked about for many years in Japan, it was not widely implemented until the Covid-19 pandemic started in 2020. In January 2020, the national average of teleworking companies was 6% which grew significantly to 25% in April and later decreased to 17% in June 2020 (Okubo, 2020:1).

This represents a large growth in a very short period of time and even though the number has decreased in June 2020, the portion of companies implementing telework has significantly increased compared to January 2020. This proves that teleworking as a new style of work has become a part of the Japanese workstyle to at least some extent.

It also means that many Japanese employers started to rethink their processes during the Covid-19 pandemic and offered their employees more flexibility compared to the times before the pandemic.

Some companies embraced the new normal to such an extent that they decided to implement telework as their long-term strategy. Fujitsu LTD, for example, announced in July 2020 that they plan to decrease their office space by more than 50% in the upcoming three years by letting their employees telework (Kajimoto, 2020).

According to a survey from May 2020 that was conducted one month after the government announced the state of emergency due to the Coronavirus, 7.2% of the 1100 telecommuters that took part of the survey stated that their work efficiency has increased. 26.6% of the respondents claimed that it somewhat increased. In other words, one third of the respondents who engaged in telecommuting already felt that they had become more effective at their work after only a few weeks (Nippon, 2020). In the same survey, however, 41.4% of the respondents noticed a slight, and 24.8% a significant decrease in their work efficiency. This adds up to more than 60 % of the respondents who felt that they did not perform their job as efficiently as before. The survey thus demonstrates that the majority of the workers felt that they were not able to perform their job efficiently when working from home.

The study also asked whether the respondents would like to continue to work from home even after the restrictions are lifted and the country wide state of emergency is over. The results show

that 24.3% of the employees would definitely wish to continue working from home and 38.4% of the employees were somewhat interested in doing so. In contrast, 26.9% showed a relative dislike towards telecommuting and 10.4% would definitely not want to continue teleworking after the pandemic is over. To sum up, while over 60% of the respondents of this study felt that teleworking was not enabling them to perform their job efficiently, the same percentage of respondents also stated that they would like to continue teleworking after the pandemic is over. This demonstrates that many workers are aware of the benefits of teleworking but may need more time to properly adjust to the working system in order to retain their work efficiency.

Another explanation for the drop in work efficiency could be external factors. During the world pandemic, many different factors arose that might potentially influence productivity, such as worrying about one's friends and family, increased anxiety levels due to unpredictable and unexpected circumstances, but also having one's children around and helping them to adjust to home-schooling.

Implementation of telework has not been smooth for all of the Japanese companies and workers. According to the survey done by Cerp Press in 2020, the biggest issue for many employees has been the lack of digitized documents, file sharing and IT security (Okubo, 2020:13).

In the New York Times interview, a 26-year-old Mr. Aoyama said: *"It's not so much our company's culture as it is Japanese culture that's causing the problems"* (Dooley/Inoue, 2020) which comes back to the fact that many workers would not take advantage of teleworking even though they may have the option to do so. This is mostly due to the fact that it is not the norm in the Japanese work life and that the management may not feel comfortable about the fact that they are not seeing their employees physically in the office (Dooley/Inoue, 2020).

There was a study performed on 5,105 respondents who worked in Japan in June 2020 to assess the effect of working from home on the worker's productivity. At that time, 32% of the respondents worked from home, mostly due to the recommendations regarding the Covid-19 pandemic (Morikawa, 2020:13). On average, the productivity was in the range of 60% to 70% compared to being in the office and it was generally lower for employees who started to work from home only after the Covid19 pandemic (Morikawa, 2020:3). This suggests that workers were less productive when working from home compared to being in the office, especially if this was a relatively new concept to them.

The biggest contributors on the decrease of productivity according to this study were the loss of the quick face-to-face interactions at the workplace that were no longer possible due to

everyone working from home, poor internet connection compared to the office as well as additional rules and regulations that required employees to go physically to the office to perform tasks that were not digitized as for example signing of documents.

It is important to mention that the productivity was in this case measured by self-evaluation which leaves the results rather subjective as different people can perceive productivity differently.

2.4 The differences between female and male office workers

This section will explore the differences between female and male office workers in Japan. It will look into gender (in)equality in the workplace, the traditional roles of men and women in the workplace as well as the culture of salarymen.

2.4.1 Gender equality in the Japanese workplace

According to the data from OECD, Japanese women are performing $\frac{3}{4}$ of the overall unpaid overtime work while caregiving (OECD, 2017).

Even though Japan is a developed country, it ranks very low on the number of women in the leadership positions - management and board of directors (OECD, 2017). Japanese women also often give up their careers after the birth of their first child. According to research from 2012, more than 60% of women leave their job once they start to have children (Goldstein-Gidoni, 2020:365).

The often-seen general differentiation and the division of labor and social roles between men and women in Japan is that “*men should work outside the home for wages and women should protect the household*” (Goldstein-Gidoni, 2020:364). This view on life and gender division initiated in the postwar Japan where ideally a family would consist of a full-time stay at home mother who would take care of the household as well as the children, and a salaryman husband who would devote himself to work to make sure that he can support his family financially (Goldstein-Gidoni, 2020:365). This mutual understanding allows men to stay at work and overwork for long hours and sacrifice family time for long meetings, *nomikai* after work drinks, and hopes for promotion.

There are very clear differences between the genders when it comes to office workers in Japan. Looking at the data from 2014, 53% of women in the age group of 20 to 65 are considered non-regular employees, compared to only 14.1% of men in the same age group (Yamaguchi, 2019:27). A difference between regular and non-regular employment is that a regular employee is strongly protected from dismissals and lay-offs while at the same time being employed for an indefinite term, whereas a non-regular employee has a fixed term contract and does not have the same benefits as a regular employee does.

Women in the workplace represent only 6.4% of the department directors or similar positions (Yamaguchi, 2019:27) with the two main given reasonings for this being “*at the moment, there are no women who have the necessary knowledge, experience, or judgment capability*” and “*women retire before attaining managerial positions due to their short years of service.*” (Yamaguchi, 2019:27).

Looking at the percentage of female graduates by level of tertiary education one can see that in Japan there is almost a perfect gender equality with 49.7% of the graduates being women (UNESCO, 2020). This suggests that in Japan, earning a college degree plays a much lower role in climbing the corporate ladder than the gender at birth.

When entering the job market in Japan, the system of two career tracks also adds to the gender segregation at the workplace. Many women pursue the book-keeping track *ippan shoku* instead of the managerial career track called *sogo shoku* (Yamaguchi, 2019:28).

The reason for this is the expectations on the time commitment between the *sogo shoku* and the *ippan shoku* level. Employees on the *sogo shoku* level are expected to put in regular overtime hours which is not compatible with the traditional Japanese family values where women after marriage are expected to almost fully take care of the household as well as of children with the financial support of their husbands. Supposedly, the wife would only work if the husband's income were not sufficient in order to provide for at least an average family life, but only to such an extent that work does not conflict with the wife's home responsibilities (Ono, 2018:43). Men are the ones who generally work more overtime which is seen as being more committed to their job and the companies they work for, and therefore are more likely to get promotion (Kato/Ogawa/Owan, 2016:42).

To promote higher gender equality at the workplace, it is recommended that Japanese companies start measuring how productive a worker is rather than how much time a worker

spends in the office (Yamaguchi, 2016:31). That would suggest switching from the seniority-based pay system to a merit-based one.

This is where telework and especially telecommuting comes in place, due to the fact that if a large portion of employees work from home as has been often the case during the Covid-19 pandemic, the management has a difficult time tracking the number of hours spent working but can clearly see the results and value created by each of the employee.

There are different expectations directed at working men and women. For a man to be considered an “ideal worker” he should not let his family life intrude on his career and job and he should stay loyal to the company where he works, that is to essentially give priority to his work life (Nemoto, 2013:512).

On the other hand, an ideal female worker is expected to fulfill dual roles, being a caretaker for her family, taking care of the household but at the same time being an ideal worker similarly to her male colleagues (Nemoto, 2013:512).

This creates double standards and different expectations towards men and women. A married woman with children is considered not being able to perform to such an extent as a married man does, due to the fact that she is not able to put in the overtime hours because of her commitments at home, while at the same time, for male workers, it does not matter if they are married with children or not, the expectations towards them start and end with their job responsibilities.

Women managers who are also mothers and/or wives are often seen as not good enough managers due to the fact that they are not able to put in the overtime hours compared to their male colleagues. To quote an interview with a bank worker in Japan: “*Those titles the women managers obtain often have nothing to do with actual management*” (Nemoto, 2013:519). According to this worker, actual management includes managing relationships and meeting with the company's clients in the evening as well as being there for the employees that may require help after the official working hours. In his words, it is “*simply impossible*” for a woman to be a mother and have a career in the corporate world at the same time, due to the fact that taking care of the household and family is considered to be the number one priority for Japanese women therefore there is no way for them to have time for “*actual management*” (Nemoto, 2013:519).

From the interviews from the same study, it is clear that most of the managers would prioritize their job over their personal life therefore this is something that is considered to be normal and expected from a higher ranked employee.

Parental leave is also still considered to be only meant for the female workers. Fewer than 3% of the Japanese male workers that become fathers go on paternity leave (OECD, 2017). The government is trying to make paternity leave more popular by introducing father-only leave for up to one year, however, a vast majority of the male workforce still is not taking advantage of this system.

Due to the fact that the men are not present at home to take care of the newborns, many Japanese wives stop working to devote their time to their family.

That is the reason why the female participation rate plotted by age group does not take the reverse U shape as in the case of other developed countries, but rather an M shape (Sato, 2019:78). What this means is that often once the children grow up, many of these women go back to the workplace, however, often only as part time workers. This is well illustrated in the average working hours. Officially, Japanese workers work on average 39.3 hours per week (Sato, 2019:91) which seems to be a healthy number, considering a 40-hour work week. However, looking into the differences between genders, male employees work 43.7 hours per week on average compared to the female workers that work on average 33.1 hours per week (Sato, 2019:91). As previously stated, this is due to the M shaped female participation in the workplace curve that explains that female workers often stop working once they have a family and if they return back to the workplace, it is often for a part time job only (Sato, 2019:78).

It is believed that telecommuting would strengthen women's position at the workplace and give them more flexibility. By standardizing working-from-home principles, it would also become more normal for men to work from home while they take care of their children. This could potentially shift their mindsets towards taking paternity leave as well, which would enable women to focus on their careers.

2.4.2 The culture of salarymen in Japan

Japanese white-collar workers are often referred to as *salarymen* which first appeared in Japan's cities in the 1910s and 1920s (Timinsky, 2020:6).

The main symbolic division between salarymen and factory workers at the time was how they received their wage. While factory workers were mostly working manually and received a daily wage, salarymen engaged in office and management type work, taking advantage of their higher education, and received a monthly wage (Timinsky, 2020:6).

Throughout the middle of the 20th century, overwork became normal for the salarymen due to the pressure and demands coming from their managers, co-workers but also families. This resulted in a blurred line between work and leisure time. Various activities such as golfing and drinking have also been heavily marketed to the salarymen and soon became the foundation of the company's outings (Timinsky, 2020:52). It quickly turned into a norm that salarymen would engage in these activities in their free time in order to fit in.

It became essential for a good employee to have good relationships with their colleagues, as company managers often demanded that their employees develop bonds to create more efficiency in the workspace. This would often mean that even though a salaryman would have family waiting for him at work, instead of spending time with his family after work, he would have gone out drinking with his colleagues, not necessarily because he wanted to, but also because it was expected of him to do so. This resulted in salarymen essentially having nonexistent leisure time which has often left them feeling like they are not able to disconnect from their work life in their free time and truly relax when taking control of their free time activities.

One of the reasons why this system is so widely spread in Japan is the fact that it originated already after the Second World War (Goldstein-Gidoni, 2019:364). It is generally believed that if salarymen work hard, do overtime hours, take part in the after-business hours drinking parties and devote their time to the company, they will climb the corporate ladder and become managers (Goldstein-Gidoni, 2019:370). Once they are managers however, they still keep the same values, therefore they expect their subordinates to also live their lives up to the salarymen values to become successful and climb the corporate ladder in the same way as they did (Goldstein-Gidoni, 2019:370).

This working culture is a large constraint when implementing teleworking systems, especially telecommuting when one cannot be “seen” while working which is challenging when it comes to determining who is a good worker according to the salarymen success criteria. Based on this, it is expected that Japanese companies, especially the traditional ones, struggle to make teleworking systems work for them in an efficient way.

3 Results from the interview study

To gain an understanding of the current state of telework as experienced by young childless Japanese office workers, six interviews were conducted. To find out the subjective perspectives and views on teleworking of individuals, the method of interviews was selected. Similar to the desk research, the results of the interviews show relevant findings on the experience of the Japanese office workers with telework during the Covid-19 pandemic.

3.1. Interview methodology

The interviewees were found through a messaging function on LinkedIn where roughly 200 people were contacted in total. Prior to conducting an interview, it was always made clear what the interview topic will be, and it was also ensured that the profile of the interviewees matches the target group. The interviews were performed fully in English and made via a video call, mostly using Google Meets. The transcription of the interviews can be found in the Appendix of the thesis.

Once the interviews were transcribed, the interviews were analyzed using Mayring's inductive content analysis (Kruse, 2014:407). As the first step, all interviews were divided into sections where each question and answer represented one section.

Afterwards, each section was given a category. Once all the sections were categorized, the different categories were revised and finalized. After that, each category was summarized based on paraphrasing the answers given in the respective categories.

Once the summary was complete, each of the categories was further compiled in two iterations of reduction in order to produce the result.

In the first iteration, all the paragraphs that did not include essential information were deleted and the focus was to keep the paraphrases that are critical to the content.

In the second iteration, two categories were merged, and the focus was put on grouping similar paraphrase statements together into one to achieve a further reduction of the text.

As the last step, all the interviews were read again to make sure that the final summary still represents the main points from the performed interviews. In order to have a clear structure throughout this process, an Excel sheet was used together with Excel's filter function to ensure that no section of the interviews was forgotten.

3.2. Interview Findings

To keep the interviews anonymous, the different interviewees will be referred to as “Person A”, “Person B”, “Person C”...”Person F”. All of the interviewed people were office workers based in Japan through the Covid-19 pandemic starting in the March of 2020.

The different interview topics are next split in various categories and the content of each of the categories will be elaborated on in further detail in this chapter. Finally, all the interviews will be briefly summarized.

3.2.1 Interview 1

Interview 1 was made with an office worker who is currently working from home due to the Covid-19 pandemic and has been doing so 3 times a week, going to the office twice a week. She does not have any prior experience with working from home as her company did not allow for this before the pandemic.

Person A enjoys the balance of working from home and going to the office that the teleworking system provides for her. She says: *“Now it's perfect, half of the week you stay at home and the rest you just go to the office because I also like going to the office.”*

This person in particular normally has many meetings and face to face communication with clients, therefore she believes that a 100% work from home system would not be suitable for her current job: *“I think it's a little bit harder at my job compared to other jobs because my job requires meeting a lot of people outside of the company. You can still do meetings but it's a different experience.”* However, she enjoys the possibility of working from home especially to prepare presentations or prepare for meetings. When it comes to the advantages and disadvantages of working from home, Person A enjoys the fact that she can start working from the moment she wakes up and that she does not need to get ready and/or spend time commuting to work, which is in her case 30 minutes.

When it comes to the disadvantages of working from home, Person A finds it difficult to ask quick questions and finds it slightly inconvenient to set up a Zoom call each time that she needs to ask something - for this aspect of the work, it is easier to simply ask colleagues in the office. Interestingly, the boss of Person A joined the company during the Covid-19 pandemic, therefore they only interacted in this hybrid way and Person A feels that the relationship with her colleagues has actually improved since the implementation of telecommuting since they were “forced” to communicate more online.

When working from home, she misses the high-speed internet that they normally have access to in the office, a large monitor screen and a printer.

In Person A's view, men and women in their office have a very similar experience, she however acknowledges that parents with especially young kids have a hard time working from home during a pandemic. Person A however mentioned that once she has children, she would like to have the opportunity to work from home as well. After the pandemic is over, she would like to keep the hybrid 50:50 system as she currently has to be able to go to the office and have face to face meetings which work better for her - she is however not sure if this will be a possibility for her.

When it comes to Person A's motivation and productivity during home-based telework, she confesses that her motivation was not on the same level in the beginning of the pandemic, however it has improved and is currently at the same level compared to being in the office. Her productivity is sometimes affected for the tasks where she needs input from her colleagues but needs to schedule video calls in order to finalize the projects. She says that *"Sometimes it's easier to do that when I'm in the office, for example when you can easily talk to people and your boss. Some things are better when done in the house."* Comparing the working hours, Person A works roughly the same amount when they work from home compared to being in the office.

3.2.2 Interview 2

Interview 2 was conducted with a foreigner who has been living and working in Japan for years. Person B has been working from home ever since the Covid-19 pandemic started where he has not been to the office since March 2020. He has some experience with teleworking; however, he has never worked from home to such an extent as now: *"My company had a policy about working from home like once in a while maybe a few times a month but not this much."*

Person B very much enjoys working from home and wishes to keep working from home even after the pandemic ends. The biggest benefits that he perceives is not spending time commuting in Tokyo and the freedom that he gets when working from home which enables him to organize his tasks in a more effective way.

He misses the social aspect of the office as well as the exercise that he would normally get when getting to and from the office. Person B also explained that he finds it especially hard to connect with newcomers meaning the people who joined the company and only worked remotely therefore this is one of the aspects where meeting the colleagues face to face would help.

Person B's colleagues have various experiences when it comes to working from home - some like it a lot, others find it very tough. Person B says that it is especially hard on people with kids - *“They are not so vocal about it, but you can tell that they don't like it.”* He also mentioned that *“It can be tougher when you work from home if you're a mother”* and acknowledges that the switch to working from home completely has been harder for parents in general. It's important for Person B to keep working from home after the pandemic as well, *“if for example Corona ended tomorrow and they would want us to go back to the office, I would probably switch companies.”*

Person B finds the mass implementation of telework as a very positive thing for Japan even though he is not sure if the companies that implemented the teleworking system due to the pandemic will keep this as an option for their employees once the restrictions are lifted. Person B would like to have the option to telework especially when starting a family where he would appreciate having the flexibility that one needs when having children. Person B also mentions the fact that seeing the company's employees on a video call with their kids running in the background makes them seem more human therefore Person B believes that the working culture will shift towards more acceptance and consideration towards people that have other responsibilities outside their work such as taking care of their children or older or sick members of their families.

When working from home, Person B feels more productive compared to working from the office. Person B is also measuring his productivity, he was not able to share the productivity metrics he uses during the interview, however, according to Person B, his productivity went up significantly which is due to the quiet and peaceful environment at home. Person B also feels that many end up working longer hours when working from home which is both a good and a bad thing in Person B's opinion. According to Person B, when working from home, it is challenging to find work:life balance: *“with telework, the boundary between home and work is connected so people tend not to shut their computer down and just continue working. Telework has been negative in that way because it makes people work later and it's harder for them to tune out their work versus their personal life”*.

3.2.3 Interview 3

Interview 3 was made with a Tokyo based office worker who has been working from home since the beginning of the pandemic. Person C has never worked from home before, it was his first time therefore he found it challenging to adjust: *“it was tough to manage my surroundings as well as manage my time but gradually I started to know how to prepare stuff and manage myself, put some schedules and timelines, milestones to complete my work on time.”*

Person C is very motivated when seeing other people working hard which is the case when working from the office - this is the aspect that he misses when working from home, not being able to see other people work. He gradually changed his lifestyle and reached the current point where his motivation is back to the levels comparable to being in the office.

His company gave Person C guidelines on how to adjust to working from home, however, he learned what works best for him by himself when trying out different options. One thing that has been working out well for him is to go to a cafe and work from there where he can be surrounded by people. Similarly to Person A and Person B, the biggest advantage when working from home for him is not spending time commuting which saves a lot of time. Person C considers the communication misalignment as a disadvantage when working from home. When he does not meet his colleagues in person, there is often miscommunication between them which reduces the effectiveness of his work. When in the office, it is simple to turn around and ask a question, it is not so simple when working from home. The big challenge at the company where Person C works is language barrier. The company where he works is Chinese, therefore many people come from China and do not speak fluent Japanese. This language barrier is even larger when communicating online, the message is often not clear therefore Person C needs to check with his colleagues multiple times to understand what they really mean and need from him.

Person C likes the fact that his manager often has one on one meetings with him to make sure that things are running smoothly - this is especially important to him when working from home. When working from home, Person C mostly misses the interaction with his colleagues such as team building events, Christmas parties or similar: *“eating and drinking together and having fun - we can only do that now through video calls. It's totally different, it's way better to meet in person”*.

Person C feels that the men and women in their office have similar experiences with working from home. Person C thinks that people with children, especially very young ones, currently have a much harder time due to the fact that the kindergartens, too, are closed: *“those that*

have kids have a different experience because when you are in the office you can bring your kids to the kindergarten but when we have Covid-19 and emergency claims from the government, the kindergarten is closed as well which means all the parents need to take care of their parents at home while they work at the same time which is totally different from me because I'm single". Therefore the parents are not able to concentrate at home to such an extent as Person C can.

Compared to being in the office, Person C is missing a good and stable internet connection that is not available to him at the moment, it is especially difficult when he needs to make a lot of video calls.

After the restrictions are lifted, Person C would like to continue to work from home. He has now spent the time to find a way to make the home office effective, plus working from home also gives him the opportunity to pursue projects and hobbies outside of their regular full-time job. In the ideal scenario, Person C would like to go to the office once a week and work from home for the remaining days. He finds that his current productivity is on the same level if not better compared to working from the office before March 2020.

3.2.4 Interview 4

Interview 4 was conducted with a man who used to work from home due to the Covid-19 pandemic full time at the beginning of the pandemic, however, his company has loosened up the restrictions in January 2021 asking their employees to go back to the office. Person D, a fresh graduate, managed to talk to his supervisor and is now able to work from home twice a week. Therefore, working from home was a new experience for him just as working from the office was. Due to the nature of his job, being a computer science engineer, working from home makes a lot of sense to Person D. His regular workday is set up in a way where he has a morning meeting with his supervisor to discuss the tasks that need to be completed by the end of the day. Therefore, Person D believes that as long as the tasks are completed on time, it does not matter where the tasks are performed.

In the view of Person D, advantages of working from home outweigh the disadvantages. The only disadvantage perceived by Person D is the fact that in case he gets stuck on an issue, he needs to organize a video call and share his code through the call as well which is not as effective as discussing the possible issue face to face. The first advantage of working from home that Person D mentioned is the fact that he is able to work at his own pace and organize his tasks

better in the home environment. He also said that *“I prefer working from home because it gives me a peace of mind.”* which strongly suggests that he feels more comfortable working from home compared to being at the office. Another advantage perceived by Person D is the saved commute time, being based in Tokyo, he saves 2 to 3 hours a day by working from his home.

Person D works at a very traditional Japanese company, meaning that everyone is very focused on their tasks and there is little to no conversation regarding non-work-related topics. When working from home, they keep the conversation very brief and mostly via email. Person D feels that everyone at his company has a very similar experience to him - as long as the tasks are finished on time, everyone is happy. Person D would prefer that the company allocate a budget for the employees to buy the necessary equipment for their home office set-ups such as chairs or tables.

Person D also has experience working for two different companies during the pandemic. When asked about the differences between the two companies, Person D mentioned that his previous manager was too strict in a very negative way and would often be rude to the employees due to the high-pressure nature of the job. This was one of the biggest reasons for Person D to switch companies.

Looking into the future plans, Person D would definitely like to continue to work from home also after the pandemic, in his opinion *“you don't necessarily need to be in the office to get the work done, unless there is a very important meeting with a client.”* Person D would definitely like to have the option to work from home especially when starting a family to be able to balance his family life and work life better: *“the day I begin to have a family of my own, I would much rather prefer to spend time with them as well. So that's the stage of life in which I definitely think that companies should allow their employees to work from home as an option.”*

Person D feels that when he needs to go to the office, he is more motivated to get ready, prepare his lunch to get his day started, when working from home all he needs to do is wake up and turn on the computer.

When it comes to productivity though, he feels no difference. Person D feels that it is the worker's responsibility to schedule their days in the office together with the person from whom they need the help in order to perform their best.

3.2.5 Interview 5

Interview 5 as conducted with another recent graduate based in Tokyo. Person E started to work from home in April 2020 which was her first job after graduating from the university. Person E has experience with working in a regular office during the internships that she did in the past. However, working from home has become very normal for her very fast. Person E also switched her job during the pandemic; therefore, she has experience with working from home from two different workplaces. For her previous job, the whole onboarding process was done online via video calls, she even received the company hardware via post. In June 2020, she was going to the office a few times a week, sometimes visiting clients as well. For her new job, she went to the office on the first day to pick up the company's hardware as well as to say hello to at least a few colleagues. As of April 2021, she is not required to go to the office or to visit her customers. Person E thinks that working from home has more advantages than disadvantages. The first advantage that she mentioned was the time saved that she would normally spend commuting. Person E lives in Tokyo, however, her office is in Yokohama which saves her around 1,5 hours a day and gives her more energy for the day as well as more time for her hobbies and private life.

Talking about disadvantages, she would like to have team building activities together with her colleagues as well as have small chats throughout the working day.

Regarding the relationship with her coworkers, in the previous job, Person E had a tough time building relationships, especially with her boss. The problem was that they were not talking often enough. For the current job, Person E's manager is trying really hard and organizing online informal meetings for the team as for example, eating lunch together to encourage more communication, which Person E finds very good. She said that *“there are also times where you want to take time for yourself, for your private life as well. I think it's really good to have these short meetings during the working hours.”* Therefore, Person E is happy about having the company socializing done in a fast and efficient way during working hours.

In her current job, Person E believes that the men and the women in her office have a very similar experience with working from home. Interestingly, in her previous job, it seemed that men did not enjoy working from home where women on the other hand did enjoy this new working system: *“In my previous job, the women especially preferred working from home, they really liked it but most of the men or male workers came to the office.”*

Person E believes this is due to the gender stereotypes present in Japan: *“It used to be like women need to stay at home and do household chores and men need to go out for working,*

some guys still have these kinds of stereotypes, these people especially tend to go to the office often.” That being said, Person E also recognizes that this phenomenon is shifting with the younger generation: *“The younger generation like us, under 25,30, they prefer that both men and women should work.”* In general, Person E believes that people with small children in particular have a different experience with working from home than Person E does.

When it comes to the things that Person E would like to change in regard to working from home, she replied that she would like to get a new chair, otherwise she is very satisfied. When asked about Person E's plans after the pandemic, Person E would like to have the option to work from home, especially when starting a family. Person E feels that her motivation and productivity is on the same level when working from home, she feels however more energized due to the fact that she does not need to spend her time commuting each day. Being a sales person however, makes working from home more difficult: *“My client might actually force us to go back to the office because it was part of the contract. So we need to work in a secured area in the office”*.

When asked if she would like to add anything to the interview, Person E said that many Japanese companies require their employees to return to the office once the pandemic is over, however, Japanese employees seem to be enjoying the work from home setup: *“There is probably a gap between the company's policy and what the employees actually want. I think it's also because of the difference of the generations. At the top of the company there is always the older generation but the employees are younger so there are some gaps.”* Person E believes that this will cause problems for the future of Japanese office workers. When asked if in Person E's opinion, Japanese workers will demand to keep the working from home policy after the pandemic is over, Person E said the following: *“Thinking about Japanese culture and people's way of thinking, people just follow those rules, that's a Japanese thing. I think the employees will just go back to the office even if they don't want to and then they may just change their job where they can work from home.”*

3.2.6 Interview 6

The last interview was with the head of HR at a Japanese company. Person F has actually run an internal survey at her company to get opinions from the company's employees and was kind enough to share them for our interview. When asked “Do you have any issues working from home?” Many people said yes, the reasons were lack of space at home, not having proper

furniture, utility fee burden and some were saying that they couldn't decide when to finish working. When asked "What's your efficiency like when working from home?" Half of the employees said it's equal. A little bit more than a quarter answered that it's better than working in the office, and a little bit less than a quarter said it was worse than in the office. That was due to the fact that they relied on the paper documents and *hanko* signatures. Those people felt that working from home was more complicated since they did not have access to the needed documents. When asked if the employees want to continue working from home, 95% said yes. Half of the employees would prefer going to the office once or twice a week, a quarter said 3 days or more, a quarter said only if needed. The two departments that were having most difficulties with the implementation of home based telework were the finance and sales department. Person F specified that "*the problems in detail were paper documents, stamp signatures and sales guys, our sales guys are really old style classic type of sales go, go, go type of people, they like to do face to face meetings, that's their communication style. They prefer having meetings physically, together.*" Finance department had difficulties due to the fact that many documents were not digitized which meant that their processes had to be adjusted. This was not so well received, as Person F elaborates: "*People are so reluctant implementing the new system, saying that they don't know how it's going to be connected, if it's allowed by the headquarters*". After running the internal survey, Person F's company has supplied all their employees with large monitors as well as Virtual Personal Network (VPN). Person F also mentioned a struggle when it comes to measuring employees working time when working from home. Up until March 2021, there was no general guideline from the government to calculate remote working hours effectively.

In the company where Person F works, people do not tend to overwork, however, Person F is aware of this issue in Japan.

Person F felt that for her personally, working from home has enabled her to have more frequent and close meetings with each department heads. Person F had the impression that the meetings were more productive and focused when done over a video call: "*When I book a Teams meeting, they are more concentrated on the topic that I was raising - like development of your subordinates, what's your plan, onboarding process and those kinds of things. I feel that the quality of these meetings improves when I do them from home*". Person F also said that more employees were reaching out to her with the issues that they had due to the anonymity when working online: "*Normally they are hesitant to come to my desk to talk to me in the office but if you're working from home, they are more inclined to just call me and ask me to have a call with me. We can talk in more secret.*" This made them more inclined towards scheduling more

meetings with HR and sharing more of their issues. When it comes to the disadvantages of working from home for Person F, there were not any major ones. However, Person F usually goes to visit two of the company's factories which is now not possible due to the restrictions. Therefore, this is one thing that Person F would like to change. Person F would also prefer to go through the onboarding process with the new employees in person rather than doing it online to be able to showcase more of the company's culture which is very challenging to do over a video call: *“When you set up an online meeting, it sounds very formal and I try to take the advantage of the time, getting coffee, going out for lunch. So those informal types of set-ups would be more appropriate in many ways.”*

Regarding the differences between men and women at her office, at the workplace of Person F, the working mothers have a good collaboration system with their spouses which is the reason there are no major issues in their company.

Looking into the future, Person F would like to continue to work from home and she also sees it as a realistic option for the whole company going forward. Person F believes that it is important to have flexibility when having children or taking care of a family member and that as long as the employee is sincere about their work, the company should be happy with it. Person F also believes that giving the workers an option to work from home empowers them more and gives them a sense of ownership to handle their tasks in a way that makes sense to them.

3.3 Interview topics

To summarize all interviews by topics, Mayring's inductive content analysis method was used to divide the various topics in category as follows:

Topic 1	Current state of telework and experience with telework from the past
Topic 2	General feeling about teleworking
Topic 3	Advantages and disadvantages of teleworking
Topic 4	Relationships with colleagues when working from home
Topic 5	Experience with working from home during the pandemic of those around the interviewee
Topic 6	Plans and wishes after the Covid-19 pandemic

In the following section the topics will be further explored based on the six interviews performed in January - April 2021.

3.3.1 Topic 1 - Current state of telework and experience with telework from the past

The point of asking whether the interviewees are currently working from home in the beginning of the interview was to ensure that all the interviewed people have had at least some experience with working from home. Interviewees were also asked about their experience with teleworking from the past to see whether this was a known concept to them already before the Covid-19 pandemic.

All of the interviewees are working from home at the time of summarizing the interviews - April 2021. Person A is working from home three times a week, Person B, Person C, Person E and Person F are working from home five days a week and Person D is working from home twice a week.

All of the interviewees have been working from home from around the beginning of the pandemic in March/April 2020 except from Person D who worked fully from home up until January 2021 where his company decided to fully return to the office, however, Person D managed to negotiate with his boss to have a possibility of working from home at least 2 days per week.

Most of the interviewees have not had any prior experience with teleworking except for Person B who has been working from home a few times in his past and Person F where her company allowed parents to work from home if their children were sick at home and the parents needed to stay home with them.

Interestingly, Person D as well as Person E are both recent university graduates that were introduced to their working life by working from home straight away therefore in their experience, this concept is not the “new normal” but simply normal and they accepted it from the start of their professional careers.

The findings regarding the experience with previous working from home were not surprising, given Sato's research from 2019, it was clear that it is rare to find a company that would offer work from home prior to the Covid-19 pandemic.

3.3.2 Topic 2 - General feeling about teleworking

For this part of the interview, the interviewees were asked simple open questions about their feelings about working from home to be able to get honest answers that are not influenced by any subtones in the question and/or previous discussions before starting to talk about their experience in detail.

Generally speaking, the experience of the participants of the interview was mostly positive and they found the switch towards working from home during the pandemic as a good thing. Their impressions were often influenced by the nature of their jobs. Two out of the three female participants - Person A and Person E who work in Sales and PR have expressed that in their profession, meetings in person are often important and are simply not the same when compared to a video call. On the other hand, we have the male participants, Person B and Person D who work in IT where they do not necessarily need to meet with their colleagues and/or customers in order to perform their jobs. The nature of one's tasks seem to play a role when deciding on what is the best environment to work in. Person D, who works in IT, also mentioned that he would be fine with going to the office for important face to face customer meetings.

Another repeated pattern among the interviews was the lack of motivation and/or eagerness to work at the beginning of their working from home journey. For example, Person A found that in the beginning of the pandemic, she was struggling with the motivation factor. However, this has gradually improved and currently, Person A enjoys the hybrid system of working both from home and from the office. At this point, Person A finds that some tasks are better to be

performed at home such as preparing for meetings or creating a presentation whereas having the actual meetings is better to have in person rather than over a video call. Person C was also struggling to adjust to working from home once the pandemic started. He was motivated by being in the office environment and by seeing his colleagues all working together. Taking the social aspect of working resulted in a struggle of finding motivation for work and achieving his goals. He also struggled with the distractions that he has at home and handling himself in terms of work motivation and time management. Gradually, he found a way to get used to this new lifestyle and way of working by setting goals, timelines and milestones for himself which has drastically improved his experience, similarly to Person A. Person F also shared that things were rather chaotic in her company in the beginning of the pandemic. According to the experience of Person F and the company that she works in, the situation has started to improve once the government allowed schools and kindergartens to open again. This change switched the dynamic and allowed people to think more positively about working from home.

Work from home has become a crucial and an essential work benefit for many. Person B said that he would most probably switch companies if he had to return to the office. This demonstrates that remote working has become so important in Person B's life that it would be one of the main criteria for remaining or switching jobs. This demonstrates a tremendous change in the job market - when looking into Sato's research from 2019, it is clear that such a requirement would be almost unimaginable in the pre Covid-19 pandemic Japan. Person D had very similar feelings about returning to the office. When his superior asked him to return to the office in January 2021, he declined and negotiated having two days a week where he can work from home. He feels that his productivity is not affected by working from home and therefore he sees no need for him to return to the office full time. This way of thinking seems to be repeating throughout the interviews as well. Person E, who works in Sales (in contrast to Person B and Person D who work in IT) also mentioned that in her opinion, as long as the tasks are finished, it does not make a difference if the job is performed at home or at the office, which is the reason why she likes to work from the comfort of her home. Person F, the HR representative also mentioned that the employees at her company have more sense of ownership when it comes to the organization of their work tasks when working from home. Even though sense of autonomy is usually a positive thing, Person B voiced that he struggles to set boundaries between his work life and his private life which results in him working longer hours than what he did before the pandemic which underlines the quote: “*Giving a workaholic a [laptop] is like giving an alcoholic a bottle of gin.*” (Ellison, 1999:348).

3.3.3 Topic 3 - Advantages and disadvantages of teleworking

Participants of the interviews were asked to provide what are in their experience the biggest advantages and disadvantages when working from home. The idea behind this question was to gain more insight on the advantages and disadvantages provided in the literature review and to see which points the interviewees will bring up as their main advantages and disadvantages of working from home.

The general trend during the conducted interviews and something that has been mentioned in all of the interviews was that the main advantage is the fact that one does not need to spend time commuting to and from work when working from home. This has been a rather significant factor for the interviewed people due to the fact that all of them either work or live in Tokyo, Japan that is well known for its overcrowded trains during the rush hours in the morning as well as in the evening. Person E mentioned that she saves up on the frustration of the morning commute which really enables her to start her day off in a more positive and energized way when working from home. The frustration of the morning commute has also been reported in research by Kazekami as one of the significant pain points of Tokyo's office workers (Kazekami, 2020:3).

Person A particularly enjoys the fact that she can start working straight after waking up meaning that she does not need to get ready - put on makeup, shower, or take the train in order to start working, it is an immediate step for her after waking up. Being able to start working straight away lets her sleep longer as well as saves time and energy by skipping the morning and evening commute.

Person B feels that he has more freedom when working from home and is able to organize himself and his tasks in a more effective way meaning that he can decide when he responds to emails or messages which enables him to be more empowered and focused at work. He can also focus better when working from home and is more productive compared to being in the office. Person D also mentioned a very similar thing, namely that when he works at home, he feels more freedom and a sense of ownership of his tasks. This is due to the fact that he is able to organize his time by himself and work at his own pace. Person F has also reported similar findings at her company where many of her colleagues are for example more concentrated during meetings when working from home. Having more freedom and increased working time autonomy when working from home has also been supported by research made by Mesenger (Mesenger, 2017:305).

Person C as well as Person E feel that they can spend more time on their hobbies or side projects which is very beneficial and more fulfilling.

Person F has the impression that the company's employees are more trusting towards her and schedule more meetings with the HR team to bring up issues that they may be facing. This is due to the anonymity factor that comes with working from home and having video meetings, no one from the company knows that they are talking to the HR about issues that they may have with their boss for example which encourages honest communication. This is something that Person F finds extremely helpful when performing her job.

Looking into the disadvantages of working from home, Person A finds it rather frustrating to set up video calls and/or other forms of online meetings with her colleagues whenever she has a small question. In the office, this is much easier since one can just go to the person's desk and discuss the issue directly which is much more effective according to her. Communication issues have been also reported by Person C where in the company where he works, many people do not speak very good Japanese which makes the communication rather hard. Work from home makes this especially difficult, therefore he spends more time going back and forth trying to understand his colleagues. On top of this, similarly to Person A, he finds it rather time consuming to schedule calls with his colleagues for each small thing that he may need from them. Person D also finds it difficult to discuss work related issues over a shared screen. Face to face meetings would sometimes be more beneficial to him, especially when he needs help with his code or is stuck on a certain issue.

When working from home, Person A misses having a second monitor screen, fast internet connection as well as a copy machine that is not available at her home. Internet connection has been a pain point also for Person C and Person D. Person D also mentioned that the company where he works did not give their employees a budget to get furniture that they may need for their home office set up which is something that Person D would very much appreciate.

Person B misses the social aspect of being in the office - having lunch with his colleagues and building bonds with them. This phenomenon has also been described in Ryall's article, where one of the interviewees mentioned that *"...I did miss the encounters with my work colleagues, just walking down a corridor and meeting them, sharing a coffee and a quick chat."* (Ryall, 2020). Person E would like to have at least some team building activities in order to get to know her colleagues better. Especially for people like Person E, this could be difficult since she started their job already during the pandemic therefore, she never had a chance to connect with their co-workers in the "real world".

Before the pandemic, Person B did not realize how much he walked during the day. This kind of exercise is something that he also currently misses, he needs to find alternative ways to keep himself moving. When going to the office, it is easier for him to “get the steps in”. Kawada also warns about possible health issues caused by the lack of exercise by the teleworking population (Kawada, 2020).

As previously reported, Person B also finds it hard to find sustainable work life balance for himself when working from home due to the fact that there is no environment change for him when he stops working.

Another negative for Person C is the fact that he needs to only rely on himself when it comes to motivation and work environment. He feels more motivated when surrounded by people which is hard to replicate in the home environment.

Person F points out that the onboarding process for new employees can be rather challenging when performed completely online. It is hard to demonstrate the company's culture on a video call and to really integrate the new employees into a company when running completely online. Person F also explained that the Sales and Finance department were struggling to get used to this new way of working. The issue for the Sales department was the team culture that is hard to replicate on a video call. The Finance department had to adjust and digitize their processes to be able to accommodate to the new working style which was, as Person F hinted, not a welcome change. Okubo also mentions in his research that the lack of digitized documents, file sharing and IT security has been the biggest issue for many workers (Okubo, 2020:13). Morikawa's research from 2020 came to a very similar conclusion when it comes to the disadvantages of working from home, namely that the largest inefficiencies of working from home are the lack of fast in person meetings at the workplace, bad internet connection at home, as well as the lack of digitized processes (Morikawa, 2020:3).

3.3.4 Topic 4 - Relationship with colleagues

For this section, questions regarding the current relationship with the interviewees' colleagues were asked in order to get an understanding on how the internal communication of the respective companies has changed after introducing working from home policies.

When discussing this topic in particular, the participants had mixed experiences. In the previous section, it became clear why the interviewees enjoy working from home; however, in many cases, this creates a sense of ambivalence. This is due to the fact that the productivity is

increasing because one can focus on certain tasks better because of the comfort and silence of the home environment, but on the other hand, the relationships between the colleagues can suffer which can have a negative impact on the employee's experience. Working culture can be often neglected when all or most employees work from home which could lead to the employees changing their job - which was also the case of the two recent graduates, Person D and Person E where this was one of the reasons for them to change their jobs.

On the other hand, there are cases such as Person A, who has the feeling that her relationship with her colleagues actually improved when the company started to implement working from home. She was forced to communicate more internally which enabled her to work more effectively compared to being in the office. Looking into the relationship with their direct supervisor, Person A is unable to compare the relationship as her present boss joined the company only recently, already under pandemic conditions.

Person B, as already mentioned, misses the social aspect of being in the office and spending time with his colleagues. When asked further about his relationship with colleagues, Person B shared that he finds it difficult to connect with them, especially with the newcomers. This goes hand in hand with what Person F, the HR representative mentioned, namely that the onboarding process and integration when it comes to company culture is challenging when starting a new job and working only from home. Looking into the relationship with his direct manager, Person B feels that they have gotten even closer compared to pre-pandemic, however, Person B also mentions that it could be also simply due to the fact that they are now working together longer therefore this could be the same when working from the office.

Person C seems to have the most challenging time when it comes to the relationship with his colleagues. As previously mentioned, many colleagues of Person C come from China and even though the main company language in the Tokyo office is Japanese, a large portion of the colleagues do not speak Japanese with professional proficiency. The language barrier becomes even bigger when working from home. Person C mentioned that he spends a larger portion of his day dealing with miscommunication compared to being in the office. On the more positive note, Person C is happy to have frequent one-on-one meetings with his direct supervisor which works very well for him.

Person D said that the company where he works is a very traditional one, meaning that there is not too much conversation happening in the office to start with therefore he does not have very strong bonds with his colleagues. However, his manager is going the extra mile to ensure that Person D feels comfortable and that things are working out for him and therefore has allowed Person D to continue working from home even though Person D's colleagues are returning to

the office. Taking this into consideration, Person D says that his manager is friendly and accommodating when working from home.

Person E was not able to form a bond with her supervisor in the previous job due to little or no communication from her supervisor. However, her current manager is the opposite, and they even organize extra events such as having lunch with the team over a video call to encourage the employees to talk more which Person E finds very positive.

Person F as previously mentioned feels that her relationship with colleagues has very much improved due to the fact that more of them feel more comfortable sharing their issues online therefore, they talk more than what they normally would when working from the office. Person F also feels that the meetings with the company's higher managers have improved and become more productive since working from home.

3.3.5 Topic 5 - Experience with working from home during the pandemic of those around the interviewee

In the following, interviewees were asked to share the experiences of working from home from their colleagues, friends and families. The objective of these questions was to see whether the interviewees are aware of any differences when it comes to gender and working from home.

The expectation before conducting the interviews was that the female office workers would have a harder time working from home compared to their male colleagues due to the traditional gender roles in Japan described in the above literature review section.

Person A works in a female dominated company with only around 30% male employees. From Person A's perspective, the company's employees have very similar experiences in the same departments. When asked further about who may have a different experience with working from home, Person A said that people with children, especially with the small children have much harder time working from home during the pandemic due to the fact that kindergartens as well as schools were closed which makes focusing on work very difficult for parents.

Person B does not consider his working from home experience to be average due to the fact that at the time of the interview, Person B felt that many companies had already returned to the office which was not the case for him. Person B shared that he noticed that his colleagues and friends have various experiences with working from home - some enjoy it a lot, some dislike it. Person B says that this often depends on the fact if one has children and/or other responsibilities

that may interfere with their work life when working from home. Person B also said that the Covid-19 pandemic could be tougher on working mothers, however Person B does not know many of them to be able to give a more detailed answer.

In terms of the communication issues that Person C is experiencing, Person C has the feeling that this is a company-wide issue, therefore in this regard, Person C thinks that everyone from his company faces the same issue. Similarly to Person A and Person B, Person C feels that people with children have had a harder time in comparison to them due to the fact that kindergartens and schools have been closed.

Person D feels that everyone has similar experience to him and perceives the benefits and disadvantages of working from home similarly to him.

Person E shared a very interesting insight from her previous job, namely a fact that her male colleagues disliked working from home whereas the women workers felt more positive about the fact that they could work from home. The reason for this was that the male workers disliked the fact that their wives and children were at home while they had to work which was something that they were not used to, therefore they wanted to return to the office as soon as possible. This represents the old, gender stereotypical way of thinking that “*men should work outside the home for wages and women should protect the household*” (Goldstein-Gidoni, 2020:364). Person E also explained that this has a lot to do with the Japanese gender stereotypes where the men do not feel comfortable being at home during the day because they are supposed to be working in the office and it is only the wives who are supposed to be at home, taking care of the children and the household. Person E feels that this is a generational issue and that young people in their 20s and early 30s do not think in this way anymore and are more pro gender equality. Adriani supports this in the 2019 research saying that the modern women of Japan are not anymore tied to the traditional gender stereotypes and teleworking is one of the tools that enables them to work and further develop their careers (Adriani, 2019:5). Therefore from Person E's perspective, there seems to be a clear colaration between the gender role and traditional thinking of her (ex)colleagues and their age.

Person F did not notice any differences between men and women in her office. Working mothers in her organization have a well working collaboration system with their spouses that lets both the wives and the husbands balance work and taking care of their children.

3.3.6 Topic 6 - Plans and wishes after the Covid-19 pandemic

The last topic discussed during the interviews was the plans and wishes when it comes to work after the restrictions of Covid-19 pandemic are lifted and it will not be any more necessary to work from home. By asking these questions, interviewees shared their preferences when it comes to place of work. Respondents were also asked about when in particular would they like to have access to work from home to see if there is a certain part of life in particular where they feel that working from home could come as a benefit to one's life.

Everyone from the interviewed office workers would like to continue with work from home at least to some extent. After the pandemic ends, Person A would like to have the option to choose how many days per week she would like to go to the office and how many days she would work from home. She would definitely like to continue working from home, however, due to the nature of her job, it would be also important for her to be present physically in the office and have in-person meetings. She thinks it would be useful to have the option to work from home once she starts a family to be able to spend more time with her future children.

Person B would definitely like to work from home after the pandemic as well, however, he is not sure whether he will have this possibility. His best guess is that his company will have a hybrid system, which would be very similar to Person A's ideal scenario, working both from home and the office by simply splitting up the days of the week between the different locations. He does not mind going back to the office for a few days a week, however, it is important to him to still have access to work from home after the pandemic. Person B also expressed that being able to work from home has been one of the very few positive things that happened with the Covid-19 pandemic and that in his opinion, the fact that many Japanese companies were forced to introduce this working system is a positive thing that will hopefully have an influence on the future of Japanese workplaces. Person B believes that the fact that he can hear his colleague's children in the background during a work video call makes them seem more human which is the direction in which Japanese office places should be moving towards and become more accommodating especially if someone has a family and/or other responsibilities outside of their work. Similarly to Person A, Person B would also like to have the option to work from home once he has a family to have more flexibility in balancing his work life and private life. Even though Person C expressed the most frustration about working from home in his current job, he would still like to keep on having a "home office" after the pandemic and only go to the office once per week. This is most likely due to the fact that he managed to find his rhythm

already and is now discovering more benefits to this way of working compared to the beginning of the pandemic.

Person D would in ideal scenario, only go to the office when necessary, such as meeting with an important client or similar. For routine work, he would like to only work from home. As mentioned in other interviews, Person D would like to have the option of working from home when starting a family.

Person E would like to have a hybrid working system of going to the office a few times a week as well as working from home a few times a week. She would also definitely prefer to work from home when starting a family, however, this may very much depend on the job that she will have in the future. Currently, as a salesperson, she believes it would be rather difficult to work from home as they need to have multiple meetings a day. Her current client also states in their contract that the work should be performed from the company's office to make sure that their data stays safe. This is one of the reasons why people working in Sales may need to go to the office even though they would prefer to work from home. This is a very similar situation to Person A who works in PR. Person E also believes that many Japanese workers would like to work from home in the future; however, it may not be an option for them at their current job. When asked if she believes that the Japanese workers will fight for having the option to work from home, Person E said that that will most likely not be the case and people will either accept the fact that they have to return to the office or they will start searching for a new job that will allow them to telework. It will be indeed very interesting to see whether the ability to work remotely will be offered to Japanese office workers after the pandemic and if not, whether the workers will then rather decide to switch jobs.

According to the survey conducted at a Person F's company, 95% of the workers would like to continue working from home after the pandemic. Person F believes that it will become a standard at her company, once an employee receives a confirmation from their manager, they will be able to work from home, there will be definitely more flexibility around the attendance to the office. Person F believes that having flexibility is very important since things happen in life and if employees need the flexibility of working from home, they should be granted this option. Workers can contribute to the company with their experience and skills and at the same time take care of their family as well as themselves. Person F says that work life should not be about devoting their whole time to the company but rather provide a value that fits both parties, the worker as well as the company.

3.4 Differences and similarities between the interviewed women and men

Throughout the interviews there were various topics as well as opinions and attitudes that came up for both interviewed men and women.

One of the biggest and most prominent topics was the time saved commuting when working from home. This is perceived as the biggest advantage by all of the interviewees and the biggest reason why they want to continue working from home in the future as well. Continued working from home even after all the Covid-19 restrictions are lifted was another topic which drew very similar answers from both women and men – they all want to continue teleworking. They have become used to this way of working and would like to keep it for the future as well.

Both male and female interviewees also agree that through working from home, they have more time for doing things outside of work during the working week which results in a better work-life balance. This also enables them to focus on non-work related projects and hobbies that may be difficult to pursue when going to the office due to the long commuting times. However, nothing comes easy and work from home also has its negative sides. Communication among other team members has been difficult for both men and women where they find setting up video calls each time that they have a quick question for their colleague and/or superior rather ineffective and miss the option of just showing up at their colleague's desk to get fast answers. The topic of missing social activities and events among colleagues when working fully remote also came up among both women and men. Last but not least, all of the interviewees showed empathy when talking about the struggle that they know that parents have had during the Covid-19 pandemic. Everyone recognizes that parents with young children had a much harder time to adapt to working from home. However, on the other hand, both men and women would like to have the option to work from home once they become parents which may represent a very positive switch in society that would encourage more men to be more involved in childcare.

Even though the interviewee sample was rather small, there have been a few differences between the responses given by women and men.

There seems to be a difference when it comes to relationships with colleagues. From the interviewed women, it seems that their relationships with colleagues has gotten better through remote working, however, the interviewed men have mentioned that they are having more difficulties with their colleagues and/or miss the social interactions from inside of the company more than the interviewed women. The interviewed men have expressed that they miss the social aspect of working in an office and spending time with their colleagues, but interestingly, Person

E, one of the interviewed women has strongly hinted that she finds it very good that the social activities during this time are done during the working hours. This strongly suggests that Person E is not very fond of the Japanese business *nomikai* culture which is as explained in the culture of salarymen section above traditionally an important part of office life that is often tied to building relationships with colleagues and being able to climb the corporate ladder (Goldstein-Gidoni, 2019:370).

In the similarities section between the interviewed women and men it was established that both of the groups have improved their work life balance through working from home. Nonetheless, the interviewed men seem to struggle more with the working hours compared to the interviewed women. Especially Person B and C find that they often work longer when working from home compared to being in the office. The interviewed men also seemed to have struggled more to get used to the new way of working. It seems that they lacked the structure and organization of their workday especially at the beginning of the pandemic and had to put in more effort in order to find suitable work practices for them to be productive at their work.

4 Conclusion and Interpretation of the results

In order to interpret the results from the performed interview, the responses will be compared to the already available research on advantages and disadvantages of telework based on the data from the year 2016 (Sato, 2019:96) as well as study researching the effects of teleworking on productivity during the Covid-19 pandemic (Morikawa, 2020:14).

According to Sato (2019), the five main advantages of teleworking for men are: 1. Improvement of business productivity, 2. Improvement of customer service, 3. Reduction of physical/mental burden of commuting, 4. Reduction of mental stress 5. Increase of time for communication with family. The five main advantages of teleworking for women are 1. Improvement of business productivity, 2. Reduction of physical/mental burden of commuting, 3. Increase of time for housework, 4. Reduction of mental stress, 5. Increase of time for childcare. Differences between the two genders and the gender roles are in this case very clear. This is due to the fact that when teleworking, women appreciate the fact that they have more time for housework as well as childcare. However, the male participants do not value these factors as high and only include the increase of time for communication with family in the top 5 advantages of telework.

Taking this into consideration, the expectations when going into the research and having the interviews was that advantages such as more time for household chores and/or more time for

childcare will be brought up by the interviewed women and more or less ignored by the interviewed men.

However, according to this research, all of the interviewees valued the saved commuting time the most. The interviewed men also stated that working from home enables them to better organize their time and have more freedom when doing so as well as be more productive compared to being in the office. The interviewed women felt that working from home gives them more free time and more energy, and some even improved the communication with their colleagues. One of the assumptions on why the results in this aspect differ from the results from Sato's research is the fact that the interviewed people were childless, therefore, the aspect of childcare falls out of the equation.

When comparing the disadvantages of telework according to Sato's research (2019), the top five for men were 1. Ambiguity of work and time off, 2. Longer work time, 3. Difficulties with evaluation about work, 4. Difficulties with communication with superior/colleague, 5. Difficulties with access to shared information. The disadvantages for women were 1. Ambiguity of work and time off, 2. Longer work time, 3. Difficulties with evaluation about work, 4. Difficulties with communication with superior/colleague, 5. Dispersion of documents and materials. In other words, in this research, both men and women agreed on the four top disadvantages.

According to this research, the disadvantages reported by men were lack of motivation - especially in the beginning of working from home, difficulties with communication with colleagues, increased working hours and a difficult differentiation between work life and private life, missing social activities with colleagues and having bad internet connection and/or missing proper office equipment such as chair or a printer.

The disadvantages reported by women were lack of motivation - especially in the beginning of working from home, difficulties with communication with colleagues, missing social activities with colleagues, having bad internet connection and/or missing proper office equipment such as office chair or a printer and difficulties when onboarding new employees. It is believed that the differences between the conducted interviews presented here and research by Sato are also due to the different time frames of the research. The present interviews were performed during the global pandemic where going to the office was simply either not possible or strongly discouraged. Therefore, the participants experienced a different side of teleworking and that is also why the responses regarding the disadvantages differ.

Interestingly, in Sato's research (2019), men and women reported very similar responses regarding the disadvantages of telework. However, their answers differed regarding the

advantages of teleworking. In this research, the conversations were very similar with both men and women and the differences came rather from the type of job performed by the interviewees than from their gender. The fact that the interviewees were young, childless office workers also suggests that there is a switch in the thinking of the younger generation where gender does not dictate one's career anymore.

The differences between this research and the research by Sato (2019) is also the fact that Sato also included teleworkers who work as mobile workers and workers in satellite offices who may perceive the advantages and disadvantages differently. Another fact to mention regarding the participants of Sato's research is that many who claimed to work from home did do so in the form of overtime hours - often also during the night as further explained in the above literature review.

Another important research in this topic was made by Morikawa (Morikawa, 2020:14) who looked into the effects of working from home during the Covid-19 pandemic on the productivity of workers.

The conclusion of Morikawa's study (2020) was the fact that employees, mostly those who started to work from home due to the Covid-19 pandemic, were 30% to 40% less productive compared to being in the office. It is important to note that this study was performed in June 2020 where most of the newly teleworkers were still not fully used to the concept of working from home. Morikawa's results make a lot of sense when looking at the results of this study. Many of the interviewees of this study mentioned that they had difficulties focusing on their work and motivating themselves, especially in the beginning of teleworking. They also mentioned that this has gradually improved for them once they got used to the concept of working from home and realized what works for them. It is therefore believed that the office workers needed to have time to adjust to this new way of working - especially if this was their first time working from home. Interestingly, the newly graduated interviewees did not struggle as much as the workers who would go to the office every working day before the Covid-19 pandemic. This actively demonstrates that when working from home becomes a norm and it will be the reality of every office worker entering the workforce, they should not be having issues adjusting to it.

5 Recommendations for further research

Since this thesis was focused on childless young Japanese office workers and the perceived benefits and disadvantages of working from home during the Covid-19 pandemic, it would be interesting to look into the benefits and disadvantages of working from home from the perspective of parents in Japan and to see what the gender specific pros and cons of this working system are. It would be also interesting to get the company perspective and interview more HR representatives to get their opinions and views on how working from home influences company culture and its employees and whether they believe that working from home will become a standard in the Japanese office workspace.

To get more insight on the topic, it would be also beneficial to perform quantitative research on the topic with more participants. It would be also very interesting to send the questionnaire again to the same sample that Morikawa (2020) used in their research to see if the productivity of the workers did indeed improve as they got more used to the concept of working from home.

6 Limitations

One of the limitations of this study is the fact that the interviews were performed via a video call rather than in person. Taking the Covid-19 pandemic into the consideration, this was the safest choice for both the interviewer as well as the interviewee. However, if the interviews would be performed in person, the interviewer would have been able to collect more data and/or information about the interviewees based on their body language as well as the nature of a more comfortable face to face communication.

The fact that the interviewees were found on LinkedIn by messaging Japanese office workers is another limitation due to the fact that the people who decided to have the interview wanted to discuss their experience with working from home which implies that their experience has been more or less positive. It would be very valuable to have an interview with someone who absolutely did not like the concept at all and does not like having video calls in general to get a wider range of people involved in the interview process.

This factor as well as the limited resources and time also narrowed the number of interviewees performed. If it would be possible to hold the interviews in person, it is believed that the author would have access to a wider audience, therefore, a larger sample of office workers to have interviews with.

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8 Appendix

8.1 Interview 1

Michal: Are you currently teleworking?

Person A: I am currently teleworking, ahh, 3 times a week.

Michal: What kind of telework do you do? So you only work from home or do you also use the satellite offices or something similar?

Person A: Just from home.

Michal: OK, how long have you been working from home?

Person A: Ever since Corona started, which is last March I guess.

Michal: Were you doing some kind of work from home before the Corona pandemic or was it the first time for you?

Person A: No, it's the first time, I used to go to the office every day.

Michal: So basically for your telework, the start of the pandemic so you started to work from home.

Person A: Yes.

Michal: That makes sense, and how do you feel about teleworking so far?

Person A: I got used to it in the meantime hahah. It's good I guess. I don't like going to the office every day but sometimes you have to go to the office and meet people as well. I think meetings are better in person so it's a good balance right now to see people twice a week like your colleagues and people from outside of the company but you can focus more at home

when you for example prepare for the meetings or just make Powerpoint or something, so it's a good balance for me.

Michal: If I would like to ask you, what are the advantages and disadvantages of working from home? You said that you can focus better at home right? Is there something else that you would say is of advantage to you compared to going to the office every day?

Person A: Hmmmm... you can save your time because you just work from home. You just wake up and after that you can basically start working without wearing any makeup, without taking a shower or anything and after work you're at home already so you don't have to ride the train, the train is super crowded in Japan and yeah you can spare that time.

Michal: How long is your commute usually?

Person A: Hmmmm, from door to door it's about 30 minutes.

Michal: OK, so you save like 1 hour just by travelling as well.

Person A: Yes, yes, per day.

Michal: And do you feel, are there in your case any disadvantages of working from home compared to being in the office?

Person A: Hmmmm... maybe, whenever you have questions and you want to talk to your boss for example or your colleagues, you have to call them or start a Zoom meeting every time because when you're in office they're sitting right next to you or behind you so you can just talk to them casually and it doesn't happen.

Michal: Do you feel like that this has affected your relationship with your direct supervisor or your colleagues? Is it different? You already said when you're teleworking you can't just casually talk with them but are there any differences that you feel when it comes to your relationship with your supervisor and colleagues?

Person A: Hmm...I think as of my boss or supervisor, I think that I don't know to be honest because she started working at our company only after Corona started so it's been like this the whole time. As for my colleagues, I think our relationship got better actually compared to before.

Michal: Why is that?

Person A: Because I don't know... We started communicating to each other more compared to back then when we used to be in the office because you can't see them physically, we were kind of forced to talking to each other online and that way I started understanding her better - that's just one person who I am working with right now in a team but yes, I think it's gone better.

Michal: Would you also say that it's maybe more personal in a way even though you're so far away from each other and have to use a computer to talk? Or is it just strictly business related?

Person A: Hmmmmmm.... I usually don't talk about personal stuff with her. I just keep it for myself.

Michal: That makes sense. Are there any things that you miss when working from home? Is there something that you wish you had at home that you have at the office? I'm not just talking about physical things like having a nice chair or a nice desk but is there anything that you miss in particular?

Person A: My second monitor screen hahah. And what else, super fast internet connection, copy machine, I think that's it hahah.

Michal: OK, do you feel that your experience with working from home is a typical experience for a Japanese worker and do you think that your colleagues and peers have similar experience to you?

Person A: I think it really depends on the position and the type of job you have, I guess who is doing work from home experience something similar.

Michal: OK, if you would compare yourself and some other people from your company who are married or are men, do you see that your colleagues have different experiences than you? Do you talk about these things and the struggles that you have?

Person A: I don't think so. In my company there are only about 30% male, the rest are women but whenever I talk to my male colleagues in my team, in the same department, I don't think that they have any problems. I think it's the same.

Michal: As you said this depends on the job that you have and I think that makes a lot of sense so who do you think has different experience from you and how do you think that the experience of working from home can be different when we talk about Japan.

Person A: I think people with kids will absolutely have a different experience.

Michal: Do you think that it would be harder for them or do you think it's maybe in some ways easier to stay at home when you have kids?

Person A: I think from what I've heard it's harder for them to work from home when they have kids unless you can send your children to kindergarten or some daycare. Otherwise I think that the kids are always in the house around you somehow and I think that they would bother you so I don't think that you can focus really when taking care of them and working at the same time.

Michal: Let's go back to your experience. Do you wish that anything would change in regards to teleworking or are you happy with the things the way they are right now?

Person A: Hmm... Yeah, I'm satisfied, I think it's okay. But once this pandemic ends, I wish I could choose how many days I want to go to the office and how many days do I want to work from home.

Michal: You now jumped into my next question hahah I wanted to ask you, what are your plans or wishes once the pandemic is over and the restrictions are lifted and there is basically

no official recommendation to do this, do you wish this will be still possible? Do you expect to still work from home? Would you like to work from home?

Person A: Yes I do but only partially. Now it's perfect, half of the week you stay at home and the rest you just go to the office because I also like going to the office. It should be 50 50.

Michal: Do you expect that this will be a possibility for you at your job?

Person A: I think it's a little bit harder at my job compared to other jobs because my job requires meeting a lot of people outside of the company. You can still do meetings but it's a different experience. So I think that once the pandemic ends, you will have events and projects outside and I think I will probably have to go to the office every day and go back.

Michal: If we talk about why would you prefer working from the office, would you say that it's mostly meeting with people and having meetings in general is easier than online?

Person A: Yes.

Michal: Are there any other benefits that you see when you work let's say “normally” from the office?

Person A: From the office? No, not really...hahah some type of tasks in my job can only be done in person, I don't wanna specify which ones but some can only be done in person which we're currently not doing.

Michal: What are the scenarios where you think that telework could benefit your life in future? So if you see yourself in 10, 15 years are there any scenarios where you would say, ok in this period in my life, I could use telework instead of going to the office?

Person A: Hmmmm... yeah maybe when you have a family it would be nicer I guess if you could choose if you want to stay at home or go to the office.

Michal: So you would like to have the possibility once you have kids to telework as well.

Person A: Yes.

Michal: We are towards the end of my questions, I have one more. How has the implementation of working from home affected your motivation and productivity? Are you more or less motivated or productive compared to the office?

Person A: At the beginning I was less motivated but once you got used to the situation I think it doesn't matter if I'm at the office or at home, it's the same, the same amount of motivation hahah.

Michal: And when we talk about productivity, do you feel that it's similar to motivation in your case?

Person A: Productivity depends on the task or on the project I'm currently working on. Sometimes it's easier to do that when I'm in the office for example when you can easily talk to people and your boss. Some things are better when done in the house.

Michal: Do you work more or less compared to being in the office?

Person A: I think it's the same. I work in a foreign company but the culture is very Japanese, the top management is Japanese. I often work until 10 pm, during Corona even under the state of emergency we work long hours.

Michal: That's it from me, would you like to add something?

Person A: Nothing I can think of.

8.2 Interview 2

Michal: We will talk about your experience of working from home. If you have anything to add please feel free to interrupt me. Are you currently teleworking?

Person B: Yes, 100%.

Michal: So you work from home 100% at the time at this point?

Person B: Yes, for around a year.

Michal: If you're saying for around a year, I would assume that this started when Corona pandemic also started?

Person B: Yeah, my company is pretty fast about that so around when Corona started we started to work from home.

Michal: Have you worked from home before at the company as well or was it your first time working from home with them?

Person B: So my company had a policy about working from home like once in a while maybe a few times a month but not this much. It was the first time like this but I did work from home before sometimes.

Michal: How do you feel about working from home?

Person B: Work from home is the best! I do not want to go back to my office honestly, as you can see with my hair hahah.

Michal: What are the advantages and disadvantages for you when working from home?

Person B: I don't have to ride the busy train in Japan, the train is the worst in the morning. I save all that commuting time, that's the best I would say. A lot of freedom like, when I work in the office a lot of people would come up to me all the time. When I work from home, you can decide when to respond at a certain time to focus more so focusing is better. The worst things are the social, you miss the social events with people but also like lunch time, during lunch you can build good relationships with your co-workers. Another negative is that I definitely don't walk as much as I used to. If you think about and realize how much you walk to the office every day and during lunch and now when you work from home you're just in

your house so definitely exercise like health is kind of worse when working at home. I would say those are the main benefits and disadvantages.

Michal: How long is your commute usually going to work?

Person B: 30 minutes I would say, it's not so bad for Tokyo but it's actually quite short but still the train is so crowded.

Michal: You touched a little bit on the relationships and the social aspects of being in the office. How do you feel about your relationships with your colleagues and supervisors when working from home? What are the differences for you when it comes to the interactions?

Person B: That's hard to say because even when I worked from the office I felt that some of the colleagues and bosses were kind of avoiding me, hiding in their corner. On one hand if you work in the office you can go straight to someone and get your answer really fast, on the other hand when it comes to working from home you have less connection to people for sure. I would say, when you work in the office you're very social and you can talk about your social life very easily. For example a lot of people are joining my team but I haven't even met them yet so it's bit different. That type of, especially new members, it's especially hard building relationships with the new members compared to maybe someone that I met before the pandemic and we worked before in the office together. It's completely different I guess, anyone I used to socialize with in person and now we socialize online. It seems that that's okay but when it comes to new members it seems that it's much harder to build a close relationship with them. That's the key difference. I don't know, I feel that my relationship with my manager hasn't really changed that much, we got even closer I feel since working from home. But it's probably because we've been working together longer.

Michal: Are there any things that you miss when you work from home compared to the office?

Person B: Yes, I used to work at the Tokyo Station so I miss a good lunch hahah. I cook my own food at home now so I save a lot of money which is a good thing but I also kind of miss eating good food and that area has so much good food so it's kind of like every day is a food adventure so that's a negative I would say. Other than that, I don't feel like there's too many

negatives honestly, just social things. I do want to have a meeting once in a while in person, I don't perse to return to before where you were always in the office but who knows.

Michal: Do you feel that your experience is a typical teleworking experience in Japan? Do you feel that your colleagues have the same experience as you do?

Person B: I would say I'm a quite unique case because I work at a foreign company and it's quite different from a Japanese company. I feel that the majority of the population actually goes to work and a lot of company who try to telework don't have the infrastructure yet or the cultural, not cultural but the managerial will to fully commit to teleworking since there is this culture of working at the office I guess so I would say that my experience is not anywhere near the average people but I would say that definitely a lot more technology companies and foreign companies are embracing the work from home more and the bigger companies especially. When it comes to the small domestic companies, maybe they are less adaptive to the change even though they've been trying to keep up with the government's demands. I'd say it depends on the company, industry and stuff like that. It's definitely different at my company.

Michal: Do you feel like your colleagues have the same experience as you with telework? It seems so far that you are very satisfied with work from home, do you feel that your colleagues also have similar experience to you?

Person B: Yes so I think this depends on person really. I talked to some people who like it a lot like me and then I talked to some people who really miss going to the office and are very kind of not distressed but feel that the current situation is very tough on them. I think especially if you have children or other responsibilities, those people tend to like it less because it's kind of tough on them but I would say the majority have liked it more. I work in tech and especially a lot of tech people are fine with that but there are also people who don't like it that much. They are not so vocal about it, but you can tell that they don't like it.

Michal: Do you feel that the women in your office have the same experience as you do? If you would take someone who is married and has kids and is a woman in your office, do you feel that they have the same experience?

Person B: I don't know. It's hard to say. I think it depends on the person. It can be tougher when you work from home if you're a mother for example. But I could be wrong, I don't know what their situation is, that's just my impression. Corona has been tougher on working mothers but I couldn't answer that to be honest.

Michal: That's fine, no worries. Do you wish that anyone would change in regards of work from home for you, do you wish that you or the company would do some things differently to make it more enjoyable for you to work from home?

Person B: I think I'm generally satisfied. I don't feel like there is anything to improve right now except maybe for the social aspect that are kind of less now since I'm working from home. I think if for example Corona ended tomorrow and they would want us to go back to the office, I would probably switch companies honestly. I'm pretty satisfied with where I'm at right now, I could probably do this forever honestly hahah.

Michal: What do you think will happen once the restrictions are lifted and Corona is over and you're able to go to the office. Would you like to still work from home and do you expect to still work from home?

Person B: Yes so I would prefer to work from home still but I kind of know that, this is still Japan so probably some things would, Corona was beneficial in some ways because it pushed Japan to telework more but I don't know what will happen after this ends. I imagine it's going to be a hybrid style but I could be wrong and it could go straight to everyone going back to work. So I can only hope for the best that we continue this working from home trend, I don't mind going to the office once a week or twice a week to socialize and have meetings about important things, I think that the hybrid system is very good but it's hard to foresee in Japan. I feel that in Japan, a lot of things have historically been done in person and the working culture has been very office heavy. I used to work in the US and we had telework and we were very serious about telework a long time ago, this was 5 years ago and half of the office was teleworking already. When I started to work here in Japan it was like not that many people were teleworking, it was not the norm. It wasn't until the Corona virus happened that companies started doing it but out of necessity not out of like shifting to that direction. It's hard to say what will happen but I hope for the hybrid system but if I can stay at home, that would be the best because my job is just coding so I don't have to socialize that much I guess.

Michal: So your best case scenario would be basically staying at home and whenever you need to go to the office or you need to go to the office then you would just go but generally speaking you would like to keep working from home.

Person B: Yeah, I would say like 80% working from home, 20% important meetings like social gatherings, meeting with a client or something, I would say that would be a good 20% so something like that would be ideal I think.

Michal: Could we just go back to basically the benefits of working from home for you and why do you prefer to work from home compared to going to the office?

Person B: The benefits are no commuting, that's the first thing. Just think about the time you save, it's 1 hour every day maybe 1 hour 30 minutes. It's also that as soon as the work ends, you're already at home, that's another benefit. Also the freedom and working without being constantly watched. You're just kind of free. The other thing is that my job is coding, you are not really needed to do the work in the office I feel.

Michal: If Corona is over and we would take yourself in 10, 15 years. What are the scenarios where you think that work from home could benefit your life?

Person B: I think it could benefit me for the rest of my life. Just all the time saved, if I calculate one hour per day for entire year, 10 years, there is a lot of stuff I can do in that time right? Especially in the future if I have a family, as I get older things will get changing. This type of telework makes your life more flexible compared to being in the office every day where you are like locked down. Right now, a lot of my colleagues that have children and are working, it's tough on them to take care of their children and be working, you can sometimes hear them in the background but that's the part of being human. To be understanding that this person has a child and they are working but so I hope that the culture will move towards more acceptance of people that work from home but also have children to take care of or older family members to take care of or other responsibilities. I would hope that this telework continues but I would also hope that people, workers would be more considerable to the employees that have other circumstances in their lives so that for example mothers can work freely and not be restricted, people can take care of their family members or any other

responsibilities that they may have. But I feel that right now, that's kind of neglected in the society so that's like, other than telework, that's the next step for equitable work I guess.

Michal: Thank you very much. Now to my last part, how has the implementation of home based telework influenced your motivation and productivity?

Person B: Well, I think that my productivity is off the roof if I'm being honest with you and I think, well, I can't really talk about an actual metrics on this call but my productivity is up and it feels that most people are working more, which is a good and a bad thing I guess. I think, with telework, the boundary between home and work is connected so people tend not to shut their computer down and just continue working. Telework has been negative in that way because it makes people work later and it's harder for them to tune out their work versus their personal life so that's one thing but I would say that productivity wise, most people seem to be working more efficiently from home. For one, I used to have this coworker who would come up to me every day and ask me questions, now that he's not doing this, I'm definitely more productive hahaha. That's just a joke but you know what I mean. Being able to work at home helps me focus. You have quiet and I guess some people, depends on the person, may not be able to focus but for me, I can focus very well at home. The fact that I can focus in this quiet environment means that I can get a lot of work done.

Michal: In your specific case, do you feel that you're working more or less compared to working from the office?

Person B: I feel like I'm working more honestly, but yeah, that's one negative I guess where I'm working a little bit more. As I mentioned, there is a boundary between private life and work life. I'm a coder right so the focus is the most important thing related to the productivity, so if you're in the office, there is a bunch of people talking and doing stuff around you which disrupts your train of thought I feel so that's a negative of going to the office.

Michal: That's it from me, I don't have any other questions, would you like to add anything?

Person B: Not really, thank you!

8.3 Interview 3

Michal: Are you currently working from home?

Person C: It has been like almost 1 year since I've been working from home. During this time, I've never been to the office and things have changed but yeah, we're managing to increase productivity not from the office but from our homes.

Michal: You said that you started to telework basically when the pandemic started right?

Person C: Yeah.

Michal: Have you been teleworking before as well?

Person C: No I've never never worked from home, I always went to the office and had my own desk and my laptop there.

Michal: You've now been working from home for a year, how do you feel about working from home?

Person C: Hmm.. the very first period of work from home was tough because, it was tough that I needed to manage myself mentally because when you work from the office, you have your colleagues around and you can see them working very hard and that made my motivation harder and to work more. But at home, you are alone and you have like youtube or any other place, stuff around you so you need to manage yourself you need to make the surroundings by yourself to concentrate on your work so it was tough to manage my surroundings as well as manage my time but gradually I started to know how to prepare stuff and manage myself, put some schedules and timelines, milestones to complete my work on time. Gradually I managed to, you know, live in this lifestyle and right now it's way better than the very first time when I started working from home.

Michal: How did you manage to get to the point where you were able to structure things? Was this something that was your own initiative where you tried to find ways to make things work for you or did you get some kind of guidelines from your company?

Person C: Yeah, our company prepared the guidelines but actually I learned by myself to arrange everything to work from home. For example, I basically like working with people in person, meeting people and talking to people in person to find out new things - that was one of my motivations to work for the company but I couldn't do that. I realized that I loved seeing people doing some things offline in that kind of environment so like going outside, going to a cafe. You know we have an emergency state from the government but I like going to a cafe, look at people how they work and you know looking at them I motivate myself, that kind of like managing and arranging environment where you work at is one of the things that I did and at the same time you need to manage the time by yourself because when you're working from home you can manage your working time as well so make a schedule, set a timeline and try to commit to those kinds of schedule plans.

Michal: You already touched upon this a little bit but could you please tell me what do you feel are the advantages and disadvantages of working from home?

Person C: The advantages are one, you have more time that you can manage. As you don't need to use the public transportation to go to the office you can have more spare time to do other things so that's one benefit. The disadvantage is that you need to manage your own motivation, it needs to be made by yourself you know. There are no colleagues working for you, when you are at the office it's easy to talk to your colleagues and discuss things but basically you need to create chat tools and make a phone call to communicate with people. You cannot have misalignment of communication with people so that's kind of like inefficient to run business with the team.

Michal: How is your relationship with your direct supervisor and other colleagues now? You already said that it's a bit inefficient to talk through the messaging platforms let's say. What are the other differences that you feel compared to being physically in the office?

Person C: It's very different from working from the office because like, where I work, the company is a Chinese company so our staff is multinational and multilingual so most of the people are from China and not fluent in Japanese. So it was really difficult to communicate in chat tools that they use a second language and it was really difficult to understand what they

are thinking to do the task. I needed to check multiple times to understand what they really mean so that was a bit difficult for me to adapt myself when working from home.

Michal: What about your direct supervisor? Did anything change in your relationship when you started to work from home?

Person C: The relationship didn't change much. We had more time to do 1on1, to have like 15 or 30 minutes to communicate together so that you know, each of us can understand the condition that we have right now and the things that we need to do from now on. That 1 on 1 session made us continue to work with the way we did when we worked at the office so nothing had changed much.

Michal: When working from home, what are the things that you miss from the office?

Person C: Interaction with colleagues for sure, we had more time to you know have teambuilding or Christmas parties and so on, meeting with people, sharing information with each other. Sometimes eating and drinking together and having fun - we can only do that now through video calls. It's totally different, it's way better to meet in person and communicate together offline but having conversation online is sometimes not enough for me to understand each other so that's one thing I've missed for sure.

Michal: Do you feel that your experience with working from home is a typical experience or do you think that your colleagues have a similar experience to you and why is that?

Person C: I think let's see, similar things that my colleagues have because for the communication for example, we work at a Japanese office and we basically use Japanese but we always had a language barrier to overcome so this kind of working from home made ourselves spend more time to understand each other through texts and it's not only me but all of our people from XXX are probably are thinking of this difficulty and taking it seriously.

Michal: Do you think that the women in your office also have the same experience as you?

Person C: I guess so, yeah.

Michal: If you would think about people that may have a different experience from you, who do you think that would be?

Person C: I think those that have kids have a different experience because when you are in the office you can bring your kids to the kindergarten but when we have Covid-19 and emergency claims from the government, the kindergarten is closed as well which means all the parents need to take care of their parents at home while they work at the same time which is totally different from me because I'm single, I don't have any kids so I can work and spend more time and concentrate on my work so those who have their own kids and have to raise them especially when the kids are small, their parents need to manage their time and their kids as well so that's the different struggle that they have.

Michal: Taking your experience with working from home, if you could change anything, do you wish that anything would be different from how it is currently set up?

Person C: Hmmmm.. yeah, there's one thing that we can improve. When we are at the office we have strong internet conditions and we didn't have any concerns when working and using the Wifi and working online. When you're at home you need to use a mobile Wifi and sometimes when you're doing video calls, for me as well but even if you want to communicate and use the internet it sometimes stops and you need to struggle with the IT problem. If we had any IT infrastructure that is stronger than that, we would be able to access internet easily then our working from home experience would get better as well.

Michal: What are your future plans once the restrictions are lifted? Do you expect and want to continue working from home?

Person C: Yeah I would like to work from home. Now I figured out how to manage myself using my entire daily times and I find another things that I wanna do outside my full time job so yeah I'd like to work from home. When I can, I would like to choose whether I want to visit the office or work from home?

Michal: In which kinds of situations would you like to stay at home and when would you like to go to the office?

Person C: Maybe once a week going to the office and the rest of the days I would work from home, that would be better. I would still like to meet in person with my colleagues and communicate you know, know each other at least once a week that would be better.

Michal: How has the implementation of working from home affected your motivation and productivity?

Person C: It decreased a lot when I started to work from home but gradually I found out how I can improve communication, manage my time, managing the tasks as well. We have a lot of tools online and little books from which we can learn. Right now the productivity is the same or maybe even better than before.

Michal: My last question is, do you work now more or less compared to being in the office?

Person C: Hmmmm...interesting. Let's see, I think I work more after I started to work from home. I needed to spend more time chatting or texting so that made me spend more time during my working time.

Michal: Thank you very much, is there anything that you would like to add?

Person C: I think it depends, working from home conditions is different from country to country probably. In Japan, we don't have such a strong quarantine and restrictions so I think that it's different so yeah, relatively in Japan, people can choose where to work and with whom they work easily so that's different thing from different countries probably so that's something I wanted to add.

Michal: Thank you very much and thank you for your time as well!

8.4 Interview 4

Michal: Let's start discussing your experience, my first question is - are you currently teleworking or working from home?

Person D: Yes, as of now, I'm working twice a week from home. Before that, I was going to the office daily but a few weeks ago my manager provided me with 2 days telework.

Michal: So during the Corona crisis, basically when it started in March 2020, were you going to the office regularly so is this just recent for you?

Person D: No, no. Since April I got full work from home so from April till about End of January 2021 I've been working from home completely so from February 1st I've been commuting to work daily until the past 2 weeks where I actually started to work from home for 2 days a week.

Michal: I see, have you been working from home before the pandemic or is this a new concept for you?

Person D: It's a new concept for me. I'm a fresh graduate so I just started working anyways.

Michal: Mhmm, and how do you feel about teleworking in general?

Person D: I actually love the concept you know. Myself being computer science engineer, I can do things where I don't need to be present at the office right. So if that's the case, I mean why not? You wake up in the morning, you have a morning meeting with your manager and with your colleagues, so through the meeting you're being told about the tasks that you need to complete by the end of the day so you have your tasks, you have your laptop at home, what else do you need? So you have the comfort of your own home and you have your laptop on which you can work and finish the task as required so I think it's very good.

Michal: Did you get some sort of guidance from the company when you started to work from home like best practises, how to make sure that you work efficiently or did you just realize these things by yourself?

Person D: There weren't any guidance as such but there was definitely things like - please don't break the laptop hahah, it's an office laptop but no other guidance as such.

Michal: How would you describe your experience when it comes to advantages and disadvantages of working from home?

Person D: I think that the advantages far outweigh the disadvantages. The disadvantages, I'll start with the disadvantages because I feel there is just one which is when you get stuck at something that needs to be discussed with someone face to face, that's the only disadvantage that I have faced when working from home. If I'm stuck then I need to make a Zoom call or a Google Meet call and I need to discuss with them but that also, you cannot be sure that the problem can be solved like that because you can't show them the code, you can't show them your laptop so that is one issue. The advantages are much better I think because it gives you time to think, it gives you time to work at your own pace, it gives you time to get up in the morning, you don't need to commute every day 2 to 3 hours so I think this way the advantages far outweigh the disadvantages.

Michal: What is your relationship with your colleagues like? I know that you're still very new to the company let's say but how do you feel that working from home is affecting your relationships with your colleagues and supervisor?

Person D: Yes, this is strictly in my case because I am a foreigner working in Japan right now and the company I work at is a typical Japanese company. It's not one of those modern Japanese companies which follows the western way of work but the company I work at, my colleagues are very much focused on their work and they make little to no conversation outside of work - everything regarding the day to day life and things like that but the manager that I have is a very sweet guy and he has gone out of his way to allow me to work from home, actually you need various technology policies and many proxy staff connections so he helped me get those things so I can work from home at least twice a week. So they've been very friendly definitely. But when it comes to talking with them through telework, I think in my current company, I don't have as many video calls or meetings as such rather than just emails.

Michal: So you keep the communication brief when you work from home.

Person D: Yes.

Michal: When you work from home, are there any things that you miss compared to being in the office? Is there anything that you miss in particular?

Person D: No, I don't. Personally, I don't. I'm much better off working from home.

Michal: Do you feel that your experience is a typical teleworking experience in Japan or do you feel like your colleague may have a different experience?

Person D: Yeah I think it's a typical experience for everyone. Basically it's a chilled out working environment because you're at home, that's it. You work at your own pace and you complete the tasks. I think everybody's routine is just the same.

Michal: If you would take the men and the women in your office, do you feel that they have the same experience or do you feel like one group has a different experience from the other one?

Person D: I think it's not necessarily the same experience but everybody has a task to complete by the end of the day. In between doing those tasks you can have your coffee, have lunch and whatnot but otherwise I think it's the same for everyone.

Michal: Do you wish that anything would change in regards to working from home? Is there anything that you would like to do differently?

Person D: No, not really. At the current company where I'm working, the work pressure is not that much but there was a lot of work pressure at the previous company. During that time when I was working from home, I preferred when my boss or my company would provide me with a working table and chair, many of my friends who are working in India are getting those things. But in Japan, we are not. One of my friends that is working in a different company has been offered that if you need anything else like chair please let us know - so those are the things that I would rather have, yeah.

Michal: Can I ask you, what was the difference between those 2 companies where you worked and their attitude to their workers working from home. Did you notice any differences there?

Person D: Yes, I have. So the previous company where I was previously working at, it was a strict company. Much stricter compared to where I work now because of the work pressure which is understandable. The manager there was a bit, what can I say, he was a bit strict and rude I guess which is not really typical for a Japanese person, definitely. He used to be a bit rude to his subordinates, be that a foreigner or be that a Japanese person. In the current company, I have not faced such issues. The instructions come now very clear so there aren't any issues so you finish whatever task you're assigned and you have no problem at all.

Michal: Are there many foreigners at the company where you work now?

Person D: Not really, the one where I work now probably has like 2,3 foreigners. I guess in my department that I can see. The previous one had a lot of foreigners, yeah.

Michal: I was just curious about that, I'll go back to the topic. What are your plans once the restrictions are lifted and the government will say that if you want to return to the office you can do that. Do you expect to work from home and would you like to still work from home?

Person D: This is again personally my own opinion but I think that being a computer science engineer, the work can be done remotely as well, so you don't necessarily need to be in the office to get the work done, unless there is a very important meeting with a client in which case I think it's better to do some face to face interaction as well. But other than that, for routine daily work, I think working from home is sufficient. In such case I think that work from home is better and I would much rather continue working from home after the pandemic. But that is for my case and nature of my job, if someone is mechanical engineer or civil engineer, they have to visit the site - that's a different case and whole different story.

Michal: You already touched upon this, but I would still like to ask, why do you prefer to work from home?

Person D: I prefer working from home because it gives me a peace of mind. I don't have to commute and use the metro for 2 hours daily because I can just wake up and log in to my system and do the same thing that I would do at the office. But let's say my duties are a bit different, if I needed to meet clients. In that time, no questions asked, I would definitely go to

the office. But as of the responsibilities that I have now that I can complete from the comfort of my home, why not?

Michal: That make sense. What are the scenarios where work from home could benefit your life in the future? What are the stages of life where you'd say that this is in particular beneficial?

Person D: Right now, I'm a bachelor in my 20s. Also I'm living alone here, my family is not here. But the day I begin to have a family of my own, I would much rather prefer to spend time with them as well. So that's the stage of life in which I definitely think that companies should allow their employees to work from home as an option. Like whenever you want, you can come to the office, whenever you want you can just do telework - it's fine both ways. That's the phase of life where you should be definitely allowed to do that.

Michal: How has the implementation of home based telework affected your productivity and motivation?

Person D: I would say it hasn't affected my productivity but it has affected my motivation a bit. Because when you're going to work daily, you have a reason to wake up early in the morning and go. Because you have to catch the train, otherwise if you miss it, you may be late to work. So that's the motivation for me to get up to the office, also when I know that tomorrow I'm going to the office, I may need to prepare my lunch in advance. The night before you prepare your lunch and get everything ready to go to work in the morning. But when you're doing telework, you wake up and log in into the system - that's it, that's pretty much it. But productivity wise, I don't think there's any issue. If a case occurs as I said when I need someone to help me in something in which they have to be face to face with me to run me through the whole process, that's when the productivity may be affected a little bit but that's when I would decide that okay I may need to go to the office today and ask him to come as well so that it doesn't affect your productivity.

Michal: So you feel like this would be the worker's responsibility to decide like okay now I'm working on a project where I need someone's assistance so it would make sense to come to the office and tell someone to also come to the office to help me out.

Person D: Definitely. It depends on your work and project actually.

Michal: I have my last question, do you work more or less compared to being in the office?

Person D: I don't think I work longer when I work from home, I also wouldn't say that I work harder. I think it's pretty much the same. Because if you're going to your office, yeah, you're motivated a little bit more because you got to the office and the whole environment is that everybody is working there so you are motivated, I'll finish this task before noon, I will finish this task before the meeting that I have so yeah you're motivated to work. But when you're at home, the motivation is teeny tiny less you know? Like okay, I'll take a quick nap, then I'll grab coffee and will get to this again.

Michal: Thank you very much, I don't have any other questions, is there anything that you would like to add?

Person D: No there isn't anything in particular that I would like to add but thank you for your question!

8.5 Interview 5

Michal: I have set of questions prepared so we can go through them but if you feel that you would like to add anything to the conversation please let me know, the interview is quite open. My first question is, are you currently teleworking?

Person E: Yeah, I'm working from home.

Michal: How long have you been working from home?

Person E: Since last year, so, last year April I started to work from home.

Michal: Have you worked from home before the pandemic?

Person E: Not really, I actually graduated from my university last March and started working as full time worker in April. So the beginning, so working from home is quite normal for me.

Michal: Is this your first office job or have you had an office job before?

Person E: I have experience with some internships when I was college student.

Michal: So this is really interesting! So you started working at this company and you're already working from home so you were not in the office ever from the start, right?

Person E: No, also I actually changed jobs this month, in March. So from last year April, I was working for the other company which is a telecommunication company.

Michal: Could you please describe your experience at both of these companies? If you could give me some differences between those two companies just by looking at working from home and how it's been working out for you so far.

Person E: For the first one, I started working from home from the beginning. There was actually like a ceremony on the first day, for the new employees. It was also online, we used Zoom to do that. Then all the training was online as well. During the trainings, I didn't even go to the office at all. I received all of my equipment like PC, mobile phone via mailing and yeah I didn't even need to go to the office to pick those things up. Yeah, then from June, I visited office because I got assigned a position officially so I needed to go to the office. Then from that point I went to the office maybe once or twice in a week, and then also when I needed to visit customers as well. Even though I didn't go to the office, I need to go to the client's offices. That was the thing for that job, that kept going on until February - last month, then I changed my job for this one, in March. For this one, I needed to pick up some stuff at the office on the first day and also to say hi. But the office was kind of empty as well. With this current job, I don't need to see the customers face to face so basically everything is at home. I use video calls usually. That's a huge difference that I don't need to visit the customers in person.

Michal: How was it at the company you worked before where you visited the customers, were you also spending the full day there working from their offices?

Person E: It was just a short visit, around an hour or something. Sometimes we switched those meetings to online, we were using Zoom mainly, sometimes, the clients preferred Microsoft Teams so we used these apps.

Michal: Thank you, what would you say are the advantages and disadvantages of working from home for you personally?

Person E: There are lots and lots of advantages for me. For example, probably the biggest thing is that I don't have to commute to the office and get to save that time. When I need to commute from where I live in the greater Tokyo area to the office in Yokohama, it takes about 40 minutes, door to door so I get to save that time and energy as well. So that's the biggest thing. I can have more time for my private life as well, that's pretty good. And disadvantage, maybe the team building? That's an disadvantage I think. You know it's so difficult to ask someone about these tiny things.

Michal: How do you feel about your relationship with your colleagues especially for you when you started your job already during the pandemic, there was no way for you to connect to someone, physically being in the office you know, having a chat over coffee...all these things that would be maybe a little bit awkward to do online through Zoom, so how was your experience there and what's your relationship like with your colleagues and superior?

Person E: Well so for the former job, I couldn't really build a good relationship with my coworkers, especially with my boss. We talked quite less than normal so it was quite difficult. Now for the current job, the manager is trying so hard to build a good relationship with us. For example we sometimes eat lunch remotely together, sometimes we do like a happy hour thing online. He organizes these kind of events to build a relationship with the team. It's actually a lot better than the former job. I think it really depends on the boss and the team leader.

Michal: Would you say that these kind of things are important to you, that the manager takes these extra steps especially when working from home to make sure that everyone feels included?

Person E: Yeah, yeah, I think that's great. But I think there are also times where you want to take time for yourself, for your private life as well. I think it's really good to have these short meetings during the working hours.

Michal: You come to the office currently once or twice a week right or was that the previous job?

Person E: I don't go to the office at all now.

Michal: Ah, okay, thank you! If you work from home now and don't go to the office at all, is there anything that you miss from the office that you wish you would have at home? I don't mean just physical things but also things like having lunch with coworkers or something like that.

Person E: Well, hmmm... right. Well, yeah, probably like the small conversations with the colleagues. Sometimes, customers get crazy during the meetings, that would be nice to talk about with my colleagues, like small talks. I miss these small talks a lot, they make me feel better and I can be more easygoing about these things.

Michal: Do you think that your working from home experience is a typical one?

Person E: Yes, I think so. We use chat to talk about the small things and sometimes my colleagues want to talk and we do a super short meeting like 10 minutes to talk about these thing.

Michal: Do you think that the men and women in your office have the same experience or do you think that there could be some differences?

Person E: Well I don't think there's a huge difference between men and women, but probably there is. In my previous job, the women especially preferred working from home, they really liked it but most of men or male workers came to the office.

Michal: Do you know why was it like that?

Person E: I think it's because, all of them have families at home, so wife and kids so probably they just don't feel comfortable working from home in that environment.

Michal: We already touched on this a little bit but who do you think has a different experience from you? Which group of people would have a different experience with working from home than you do?

Person E: Yes, yes, I do think so. People having families like I mentioned, have completely different opinions because they have kids. Especially when kids are super little and they need to take care of the kids so they can't really focus on work. Also, I think this is related to like Japanese traditional culture. It used to be like women need to stay at home and do household chores and men need to go out for working, some guys still have these kinds of stereotypes, these people especially tend to go to the office often. Their wives don't work and stay at home so they probably don't feel so comfortable with it.

Michal: How do you feel personally just out of interest about the traditional gender roles in Japan?

Person E: Personally, I think it's slightly changing but it's also quite strongly related to the generation I think. The younger generation like us, under 25,30, they prefer that both men and women should work but like probably over 30 or 35, those people prefer women staying at home and doing household chores and men going to work.

Michal: Thank you, I was interested in your opinion since I was researching this also a bit myself. Going back to working from home, do you wish that anything would be different, would you change anything in your current set up?

Person E: Well, I just want a better chair hahah for my back. Other than that, I could personally work from home forever. It is probably because I started office work from the beginning from home so I'm quite used to it, I don't think I would change it.

Michal: So this is not a new normal for you but it's just normal.

Person E: Yes, it's pretty normal for me so going to the office would be the new normal for me.

Michal: This brings me to my other question, what are your plans after the restrictions are lifted, you said that you would like to continue working from home but do you expect to be allowed to work from home? What are your expectations at your current job?

Person E: Yeah so my company will probably continue with work from home if we prefer it. My client actually might actually force us going back to the office because it was part of the contract. So we need to work in a secured area in the office, that was the basic contract. But then the pandemic happened and we had to work from home and change the contract a bit but we might need to go back to the office, maybe they will require us to do that but we're not sure yet.

Michal: Looking into your future as of now, are there any scenarios where you would imagine that you would prefer to work from home?

Person E: In the future? Yeah, I think working from home will become normal and probably employees will have some options of mixing the things up like 2 days working in the office, 3 days at home.

Michal: Do you think that for example when you're older and maybe have family or get married, do you think that in that scenario it would make sense for you to work from home?

Person E: I think I would definitely prefer working from home also after having family or something, I also really hope that I'll be able to work from anywhere but it really depends on the role. For example as a sales person, it's quite difficult because you need to have a lot of meetings with customers. But probably like engineers or marketers, they can probably already do that.

Michal: My next question is little bit tricky in your case, but it is how has the implementation of working from home affected your motivation and productivity? You haven't really had this switch to working from home but how is your motivation and productivity when you compare it to those days when you used to go to the office?

Person E: I'm not sure honestly but I think that my productivity is almost the same compared to when I'm in the office. Because when you have tasks that you need to get done, you just get them done. One thing that is good about working from home is that as I mentioned, I can save energy for commuting. For example in Japan, the train rush time in the morning and in the evening, the trains are really packed so you need a lot of energy just to commute. In that point of view, I think working from home is more productive.

Michal: Do you feel that you work more or less when you work from home?

Person E: Working hours in general, in the formal job, I actually didn't get assigned a lot of work so the hour and working hour was quite short honestly and when you get to the office, you just had to be there. I think it really depends on the tasks that you have. At my current job, I actually have a lot of things to do so my working hours got much longer than before.

Michal: Do you think that it would be the same even if you would be working from the office?

Person E: I don't think so. For me, I just get the things I need to get done done, so I don't think there's any difference for me.

Michal: Thank you, I don't have any more questions, is there anything that you would like to add?

Person E: I'm not sure if you're aware of the Japanese situation but here, a lot of companies try to go back to the office after the pandemic but people actually really like working from home, they actually prefer that. There is probably a gap between the company's policy and what the employees actually want. I think it's also because of the difference of the generations. At the top of the company there is always the older generation but the employees are younger so there are some gaps. That's gonna be a future problem for Japan I think.

Michal: Seeing the benefits, do you think that the employees will pressure a bit the management to introduce these policies even after the pandemic or do you think that the employees will just accept the fact that the pandemic is over, it's been great working from home but now it's time to return to the office?

Person E: Thinking about Japanese culture and people's way of thinking, people just follow those rules, that's a Japanese thing. I think the employees will just go back to the office even if they don't want to and then they may just change their job where they can work from home.

Michal: Thank you very much and thank you for your time today!

8.6 Interview 6

Person F: In society in general, in this time last year (March 2020) schools were also closed and people had kids and small kids, teenagers and trying to work - it was a disaster! Many people were just stressed and we didn't know when to finish. But it got better when the schools opened again. People started to feeling positive about working from home once they started to have more conversations internally and informal talks via video calls. Especially, have you been to Tokyo and have you experienced the crowded train?

Michal: Yes, I've been there but I did my best to avoid the rush hour hahah.

Person F: The crowdedness is over the threshold over human resilience hahah. People didn't really say explicitly but now they're saying that they don't want to experience the train anymore. That's the general atmosphere in the society. Let me share a little bit from the survey I ran. It was in October/November time last year and I made a question saying: Do you have any issues working from home? Many people said yes, regarding the space at home and also like proper furniture and utility fee burden like energy and not really many but some were saying that they couldn't decide when to finish working.

About efficiency, the question was: What's your efficiency like when working from home? Half of the employees said it's equal. A little bit more than quarter answered that it's better than working in the office, and a little bit less than a quarter said worse than in the office. That came from the situation that they relayed on the paper documents and hanko and these things. Those people felt that it's making them trouble being away from the office and not having access to the paper files and folder.

I asked, do you want to continue working from home? Like 95% of people said yes haha. And of course they need to solve the paper issue and hanko as well.

I also followed with a question asking: If yes, what is your preferred attendance to the office frequency? $\frac{2}{3}$ of the people said 1 or 2 days per week. A quarter said 3 days or more, a quarter said only if needed - so there are people that really prefer to stay at home.

So the problems in details were paper documents, stamp signatures and sales guys, our sales guys are really old style classic type of sales go, go, go type of people, they like to do face to face meetings, that's their communication style. They prefer having meeting physically, together. Other than that, my department, HR department, worked perfectly okay utilizing phones, chats and anything similar. Everything for us is on cloud so it's okay. So the findings are that the employees want to continue working from home and that the employees want to solve the problem of paper documents and get some type of allowance to get them ready in terms of furniture. We actually ran out a big display (monitor) that you can connect to the laptop for everyone. In the very beginning we also didn't supply VPN to everyone, only the executives had that but we started purchasing VPN for everyone - that was a must for us.

Michal: Is that for internet security reasons?

Person F: Yes, security. And yeah, that's that.

Michal: I just want to say hats off to you for organizing this, from the interviews that I've been having, it seems, that this is lacking in many companies so it's great that you are listening to your employees.

Person F: If you're focused on Japan, there is one issue that I also wanted to share from the legal side. Japan has very strict framework for working hours. Even if you are under the flexible contract and your working hours should be recorded and you should be in a situation that everybody can supervise you so you don't do overworking. But now we have the work from home situation and we didn't really know how to measure how long should you be working and how to count the working hours. It has been issue for many years but at the end of last month, they issued a certain guidelines saying that you can have a good chat between management and employee on how to count the working hours, so you may be working 6 hours, you may be working 9 hours but we can recognize the working hours to be 8 hours. It's called minashi, but that type of recognition-based counting is now legally recognized too.

Michal: Do you feel that, were there some groups of people that were overworking during this time?

Person F: Yes, but not in our company I think.

Michal: I also have a few questions prepared, when did you start with working from home system? Did you have some sort of a system prepared before the pandemic?

Person F: We didn't have a set policy but we allowed some people that had sick children at home, then the manager agreed so they were able to work from home.

Michal: How was the switch, you were saying that there were some concerns about the equipment and so on, how was it in general for the employees and for you as well?

Person F: Maybe 2 departments were struggling, one is the sales guys who love the face to face communication and the other one was finance as really paper bound department.

Michal: Did you make some changes internally to put some of these documents online or do these people need to still come to the office like once a week to fill out the necessary papers?

Person F: It's them who need to make the changes, so far, I didn't see the initiative.

Michal: So it's still in the old system.

Person F: Right, it's the part of the struggle that I had in the organization, but anyway, that's a different story hahah. People are so reluctant implementing the new system, saying that they don't know how it's going to be connected, if it's allowed by the headquarters but they should be discussing this with upper part of the organization but they were so busy, I don't know.

Michal: How was your experience personally? What are the advantages and disadvantages for you?

Person F: Hmmm, well I actually have more frequent and close meetings with each department heads. When in the office, even if we set a meeting time in the meeting room,

their heads are somewhere else you know. When I book a Teams meeting, they are more concentrated on the topic that I was raising - like development of your subordinates, what's your plan, onboarding process and those kind of things. I feel that the quality of these meetings improved when I do them from home. I didn't really find any disadvantage, the thing is, we have 2 factories and I couldn't really visit them during this time and I just missed that opportunity of getting to those places and talk to the employees direct.

Michal: So is this something that you would normally do on regular basis?

Person F: Yes, once a month I try to make a visit there.

Michal: Did you notice any other changes when it comes to the communication with your colleagues and supervisor?

Person F: Hmm... Actually some employees, it's me who needs to listen to the employees if he or she has any problems at work. Normally they are hesitant to come to my desk to talk to me in the office but if you're working from home, they are more inclined to just call me and ask me to have a call with me. We can talk in more secret.

Michal: Do you feel that there is that anonymity that no one can see them coming to you physically, is this maybe helping out?

Person F: Yeah, this kind of things are difficult to talk about like being misunderstood by your boss for example.

Michal: It's very sensitive so I understand that it's of an advantage to do this online.

Person F: Right, I prefer working from home and once Covid is under control, it's nice to have gathering opportunities once in a while.

Michal: Are there any things that you miss when you work from home? You were saying that you can't go physically to the factories or the gatherings that you just mentioned, is there anything else that you wish that you'd have?

Person F: Maybe for the new employees, if we employ new people, I'd rather want to talk to them face to face in a more cultural manner. When you set up an online meeting, it sounds very formal and I try to take the advantage of the time, getting coffee, going out for lunch. So those informal types of set-ups would be more appropriate in many ways.

Michal: How is actually the onboarding process changed for you? Did you take many new employees during the pandemic?

Person F: Actually, no. There was a strict control about the expenses and we completely stopped recruiting so we haven't had any new employees.

Michal: Have you noticed any differences between men and women in your office when it comes to their experiences with work from home?

Person F: I haven't really noticed any gender differences, it's more the type of work that you're doing.

Michal: The reason why I'm asking this is that I often read about the gender inequality in Japan and the traditional gender roles so I was curious how it is at your company.

Person F: We have some working mothers but they have a nice collaboration relationship with their spouses, that's why they make it work. I would say that this company is how to say, behind when it comes to gender equality, that's true. Even in the gender role ranking, Japan is ranking very bad and I think that's true, particularly in the politics field, Japan is very behind but the next generations, people are more sharing the work at home and respect each other and each other's careers. In the life levels, things are changing but the authoritarian side of society, it's very difficult to change.

Michal: Going back to working from home, I also wanted to ask you what are your personal plans and maybe also if you know the company's plans after the restrictions are lifted and it's again allowed for everyone to go to the office.

Person F: I think that we were going to continue having this work from home policy. It became a part of the life and if you have a good agreement of each functional manager, we

say that it's fine to work from home but there will be times where there are physical department meetings where the employees should go to the office. Yeah, we'll see, there will be more flexibility about attendance to the office I think.

Michal: Thank you, if you take someone's professional life so starting to work after graduation up until retirement. Do you think that there are any specific points in this timeline where one could benefit with working from home specifically?

Person F: Yeah, things happen in life. You may have children, some type of physical problems, your partner or your kid may have some problems so it's definitely nice to have some flexibility. Contributing to the company with your skill and knowledge can be done even if you're taking care of yourself and your kids. I think work is part of your life so we should be wiser about working. Working is not about devoting the whole humanity of yourself to the company, you just provide something you can do to the company. As long as you're sincere with what you're doing, the company will be happy about that. For the newly graduate people, they want to know the feel of the company. They learn by observing how people are acting, how people communicate. I think that's the part that we need to figure out when we work from home.

Michal: My last question, you already touched upon this topic but how do you feel that work from home has affected your and the employee's motivation and productivity? Have you noticed any changed?

Person F: I think they have better control over what they need to do.

Michal: So do you feel that they have more ownership of the task?

Person F: Right, yeah. They need to be very clear, actually to my junior subordinate I proposed the question, what are your plans today? And after they shared with me, I said, you don't need 8 hours for that! So it's nice for them to remember what they're up to.

Michal: Thank you for your time, is there anything that you would like to add?

Person F: Not particularly.

Abstract

This thesis is focused on advantages and disadvantages of working from home during the Covid-19 pandemic in Japan and the differences between female and male office workers. After defining telework, its advantages, disadvantages and teleworking history in Japan, the gender differences between female and male office workers in Japan as well as the culture of salarymen is briefly explained to give broader context to the topic. In order to provide the background introduction, desk research of the available literature is presented. Afterwards, an interview analysis of 6 office workers in Japan is provided with 3 interviews with female office workers and 3 interviews with male office workers. When defining the target interviewees of this research, young childless workers were selected. Contrary to the literature review, the experiences of women and men in this context were very similar and mostly positive where they wish to continue working from home after the Covid-19 pandemic due to the noticeable benefits that this working system has brought to their lives.

Key words: teleworking, covid-19, work from home, home office

Abstrakt

Diese Masterarbeit beschäftigt sich zum einem mit den Vor- und Nachteilen des Home-Offices während der Covid-19-Pandemie in Japan und zum anderen mit den Arbeitserfahrungen zwischen weiblichen und männlichen Büroangestellten während der Coronakrise. Nach diversen Definitionen, die für diese Masterarbeit relevant sind, werden die Vor- und Nachteile des Home-Offices beleuchtet. Im Anschluss daran wird die Geschichte der Telearbeit in Japan erläutert und die geschlechtsspezifischen Unterschiede zwischen weiblichen und männlichen ArbeiterInnen in Japan sowie deren Arbeitskultur analysiert. Für diese Masterarbeit wird zuerst eine systematische Literaturanalyse herangezogen. Anschließend werden Interviews mit insgesamt 6 ArbeitnehmerInnen in Japan (3 Interviews mit weiblichen und 3 Interviews mit männlichen Büroangestellten) durchgeführt. Die Zielpersonen dieser Studie sind junge, kinderlose ArbeitnehmerInnen. Das Ergebnis der Analyse ist, dass die Arbeitserfahrungen und Meinungen zwischen japanischen Frauen und Männern während der Covid-19-Pandemie sehr ähnlich und überwiegend positiv ausfallen. Es hat sich außerdem herauskristallisiert, dass alle sechs Interviewpartner die Vorteile des Home-Offices genossen haben, sodass sie sich weiterhin die Option wünschen von Zuhause aus zu arbeiten.

Key words: teleworking, covid-19, Work from home, home office