

How the Covid-19 pandemic has affected the leadership and the direction of the organization

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Foreword

“The pessimist complains about the wind; the optimist expects it to change; the realist adjusts the sails.” (William Arthur Ward)

Writing this thesis together has been more than a process of research design, results and conclusion. It has been a work in collaboration remotely from Madrid and Stockholm. It has included external monitoring while the surrounding world was changing due to the adjustment requirements that arose by the Covid-19 pandemic. It has been an essay written under closure and restrictions with a constant concern for the health of near and loved ones. The writers have throughout the process found ways to adjust and create transparency toward the interviewees as well as helped each other get through the challenges that arose along the way. It is an essay written from the mind and the heart, not just the thought.

We have been blessed to get to know so many interesting and driven people that in some way or another make an everyday impact in people's lives. We want to send a special thanks to the leaders, Azita Shariati (CEO AniCura), Magdalena Gerger (CEO Systembolaget), Stig Martinsson (IT manager Swedish Public Employment Service) and all of their employees who have shared their experiences and thoughts on leadership, the direction of the organization and the customer needs during the Covid-19 pandemic from March 2020 to April 2021.

To the three experts, Magnus Karlsson (Amplify AB), Hans Åkerblom (LOTS AB), Ed Boswell (Conner Advisory), we want to thank you all for sharing your knowledge, time and thoughts with us and for being curious about our thesis. Keep spreading and sharing your knowledge and wisdom in the world.

Pernilla Ingelsson, our supervisor, thank you for your enthusiasm and guiding advice that has helped us adjust the sails when it was needed.

Last but not least, our loving families, thank you for your support and encouragement during this time.

We believe that these kind of interruptions, like the Covid-19 pandemic will happen again, so let's learn from what has happened and adjust the sails. We hope this thesis will spark curiosity, reflections, inspiration and action for many organizations to take time to reflect, improve, and grow after the Covid-19 pandemic.

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Abstract

The purpose of this thesis has been to explore how the Covid-19 pandemic has affected the leadership and the direction of the organizations.

The Covid-19 pandemic has affected various parts of the leadership. The results clearly indicate that managers feel overloaded since they have to handle a lot of administrative tasks and alternating meetings. Due to lack of time and balance between work and private life, the ability to have a holistic view, interpret and take in perspectives from outside-in and inside-out has been a challenge for the leaders. The result also indicates the need for clear communication between the leaders and the employees and their customers about what actions are required in order to adapt to the new situation that the pandemic has imposed.

During the pandemic the organizations were forced to take fast action based on the regulations and restrictions from the Public Health Agency and the government. Established digital channels were used but new digital channels had to be identified to create interaction and relations within the organization and with the customers.

The fast transformation to the digital world has affected the direction of the organization to think differently and be more flexible and adaptable to new unexpected changes, such as the pandemic. The organizations have used key indicators to identify and get a clear picture of how the pandemic has affected the direction of the organization internally and externally towards its customers. This new digital transformational shift has also forced the customers to enter new digital platforms and interact online with the organizations. The new digital awareness from the customers has induced new digital requirements and services which in turn have resulted in the need for new digital self-services and a higher and stronger digital competence from the organizations customer service.

A contributing discussion to the organizations and to the society is to refer to the concept of profitability as a value-creating effect sustainable over time, connected by the three elements: leadership, direction of the organization and customer need.

Keywords: Covid-19 pandemic, total quality management (TQM), change management, direction of the organization, customer need, organizational culture, value-based leadership, self-leadership, authentic leadership, goal oriented leadership, empathetic leadership, trust based leadership, health enhancing leadership, leadership during crisis, empathy, digital communication channels, digital competence, systems thinking, innovation, creativity, collaborative team, togetherness, reflection, conscious decisions, profitability, work smarter.

Abbreviations and definitions	
Continuous improvements	Move in the direction of a desired position through an unknown territory by being sensitive to act on the basis of actual conditions in the field (Rother, 2016, p. 33).
External and internal customer	Those whom we as an organization want to create value for. That might be customers and individuals that are existing internally or externally outside our own organization (Bergman & Klefsjö, 2012, p. 30).
Innovative capabilities	Individuals who have the ability to associate and connect technical solutions and the customer's unspoken needs, in an environment that is stimulating, supportive and has the ability to take advantage of these creative individuals' ideas. It's about the culture that prevails concerning willingness and the ability to discard old views and solutions in order to take on new approaches and to create new processes (Bergman & Klefsjö, 2012, p. 125).
Interviewees Respondents	The leaders and experts that were interviewed for the thesis. The employees that answered the digital survey.
Organizational culture consists of	Artefacts are values that are noticed once you are entering the organization such as furniture, clothing or the vocabulary that are being used. Common patterns of actions are values that are connected to how we work in our professional role, how we make decisions and how we act. The basic assumptions consist of deep rooted values for example how we treat employees of another gender, another religion, another skin color (Schein, p. 427)
Leadership	Produces change, often to a dramatic degree, and has the potential to produce extremely useful change (Kotter, 2012, p. 29).
Management	Produces a degree of predictability and order and has the potential to consistently produce the short-term results expected by various stakeholders (Kotter, 2012, p. 29).
Total Quality Management (TQM)	Constantly strive to meet, and preferably exceed, customers' needs and expectations at the lowest possible cost through continuous improvement work in which everyone is involved and which focuses on the organization's processes (Bergman & Klefsjö, 2012, p. 38).
Value	Values is connected to value chains in the organization and not solely to financial chains (Bergman & Klefsjö, 2012, p. 30).

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1 Introduction

The chapter presents the background of the study. The problem area is described and the chapter ends with the purpose and questions.

We live in a changing world where leadership, change management and organizational culture have evolved into complex, dynamic, systemic concepts that are completely intertwined with each other. Starting with leadership there has been a significant movement from command and control to transformational leadership, distributed leadership, servant leadership and humble leadership, just to mention a few (Schein & Schein, 2018).

As referred to in Burnes academic article on “Kurt Lewin and the planned approach to change” Lewin focuses on the concept of change as planned change that starts with some recognition of a problem and analyses the whole change process through various stages. Kotter (2012) refers to it as the eight steps of leading change systematically in organizations. These models and theories have been proposed for managers and leaders to monitor, evaluate and plan change by using structure for quick response to the internal or external environment in order to foresee the pattern of change by individuals, products, technology and the market (Schein, 2017).

Historically prevalent change models, largely based on Kurt Lewins’ model, are being replaced by the growing recognition that we are living in an uncertain world. A world consisting of volatility, uncertainty, complexity and ambiguity in which change is continuous, whether we like it or not. Leaders have been challenged by uncertainty before but never on the global scale that they are experiencing and will experience over the next decade. Burke (2019) predicts three big global challenges: global climate disruption, cyber terrorism and pandemics, all of which will likely be on a scale that was previously unimaginable according to Burke.

And what about culture? A more refined and complex concept of culture results from the changes in the nature of the work that defines many organizations. Leading cultural change can be seen as a complex intertwined move of iterative, inclusive, adaptive, nonlinear steps,

top-down, bottom-up and edge-to edge. Culture is the multifaceted learned structure and practice of the people who lead and people who follow people who work together and build a history that shapes the future (Schein, 2017).

From a quality management perspective the definition and understanding of customers' needs and expectations is essential to quality development, and should accordingly be central to the purpose of every organization. Customer orientation is based on the desire to create value and view one's own business from the outside-in-and-inside-out. The more customer oriented the organization is, the greater value their own competencies will get. Customer orientation requires empathy. The customer oriented business puts an honor in using its competence to create value and satisfy the customer's needs in the best way (Ljungberg & Larsson, 2012). Customer satisfaction depends on the customer's expectations in advance and the customer's assessment and experience of the customer of the product or service in question. The degree to which expectations are met is usually of great importance for the level of customer satisfaction that is achieved (Sörqvist, 2004). Customers might be internal employees or departments within or outside the organization. Value is linked to value chains in the organization. It is therefore important to use several different ways of working to create this understanding (Bergman & Klefsjö, 2012). Due to the pandemic, in response to changes in different sectors, it is of interest to explore how the Covid-19 pandemic has affected the leadership and the direction of the organization and to explore how the customer's needs have affected the organization during the pandemic.

1.1 Purpose

The purpose of this thesis is to explore how the Covid-19 pandemic has affected the leadership and the direction of the organization.

1.2 Research questions

- How has the leadership and the direction of the organization been affected during the Covid-19 pandemic?
- How has the customer's needs affected the organization?

1.3 Delimitation

The thesis has focused on specific leaders within private and public sectors. Based on the qualitative research method with semi structured open-ended questions the aim was to create a deeper understanding based on a few leaders and experts.

2 Theory

The chapter describes theories and previous research in the field of leadership, TQM, leadership during planned and unexpected change and organizational culture.

2.1 Leadership Approaches

At all levels in an organization leaders influence the culture based on how they act and behave (Liker, 2009). Schein (2017) mentions that understanding values, what they are and how they are developed, is a challenge for leaders. Values are part of an organization's culture and are reflected in the language, behaviors and symbol systems. Creating a shared understanding of the vision and values takes time (Schein, 2017). Four leadership approaches are described here.

2.1.1 Value-based leadership

The central point of value-based leadership is emphasizing on values that cause success and durability of the organization. Value-based leadership approach is a modern approach that is proposed in response to leadership approaches that worked in the past (Shatalebi and Hossien, 2011). Boyatzis and McKee believe that little attention has been given to understanding the culture and the role of values in leading an organization (Boyatzis and McKee 2005). They emphasize the need for leaders to become more aware of how to build a culture of resonance rather than a culture of dissonance. As they explain, a culture of resonance has proactive leaders with the ability to step outside of the stress and destructive patterns to renew themselves and their employees mentally, physically and emotionally. This requires a strong common core founded in shared values (Boyatzis and McKee, 2005). As Whitney et al., (2010) mention “appreciative leaders convey expectations and provide direction by putting their values into questions that direct the thinking and action of those

with whom they work" (Whitney et al., 2010, p 34). Accordingly, leaders have to make conscious decisions based on values (Whitney et al., 2010).

2.1.2 Self-leadership

Self-leadership, which is an intra-individual approach, is about describing how a person can become more effective as a leader. It is about identifying one's own personal goals, priorities and learning to achieve the goals in an effective way, to use one's time in an effective way, to analyze one's behavior and the consequences of this. From an employee perspective, self-leadership can create more responsibility and less dependence on a leader's ability to guide and motivate them (Yukl, 2012).

2.1.3 Authentic leadership

Yukl defines authentic leaders as leaders with qualities such as: strong, clear, stable and consequent. These leaders have a strong self concept and self awareness concerning their own values, perceptions, emotions, self identities and capabilities. They know who they are and what they believe in (Yukl, 2013). Authentic leadership is built on love for the mission of the work and for the people around you and described by Runebjörk and Wendleby (2013) as a process, both on a personal level but also as a process to create trust among the people around you by being consistent with what you stand for. In order to build that trust the leader must be able to clearly communicate its own point of view as actively listen to others. To create a common understanding of the actual problem and what actions should be taken, are essential qualities in authentic leadership when leading the organization.

2.1.4 The goal oriented leadership

The goal oriented leadership implies creating dialogue with the employees to develop activity plans that are created with the purpose of achieving the goals. To achieve the goals these activity plans have to continuously be followed up, improved and adapted according to the circumstances that are ongoing outside and inside the organization. Many leaders who run their organizations in general have adapted the logic of economic governance that emerged in the early 1920s and 1930s. This logic does not involve any continuous improvement and adaptation. The solution is not to replace management systems or

constantly reorganize, but to have a management system that can handle whatever unpredictable circumstances arise (Rother, 2016).

2.2 TQM and the cornerstone model

Working with TQM means to actively prevent, change, develop and improve instead of controlling and repeating. Development indicates that it is about supporting the personal development of the people who work in the organizations. Furthermore, quality is an ongoing work and not a special project (Bergman & Klefsjö, 2012). It is about developing and continuously improving goods, services and processes. TQM consists of values (the Cornerstone model), methods and tools with the aim to achieve a higher customer satisfaction with less resource consumption (Bergman & Klefsjö, 2012).



Figure 1. Total quality management model (Source: Bergman & Klefsjö, 2012, p. 423).

The cornerstone model consists of a set of values that work together to enable organizations' better focus on customers. The cornerstone model consists of six basic values that complete each other:

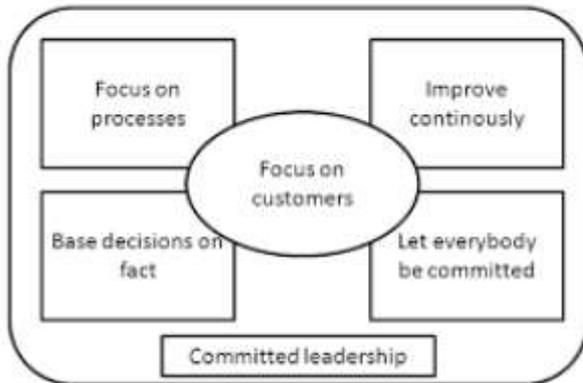


Figure 2. The cornerstone model (Source: Bergman & Klefsjö, 2012, p. 40).

Focusing on customers is about being aware of what the customer really wants and then preferably exceeding its expectations. This obviously applies to both internal and external customers (Bergman & Klefsjö, 2012). Without customer orientation the business risks being sensitive and losing opportunities for development. The more customer-oriented the organization is, the greater the value of its own competence. The customer-oriented business takes pride in using its expertise to create value and satisfy the customer's needs in the best possible way. Customer orientation requires empathy and for that the organization needs to put on the glasses of the customer's and see the world from their eyes (Ljungberg & Larsson, 2012). Several studies show that customer orientation results in increased employee satisfaction, reduced stress, well-being and commitment (Whelan et al., 2010; Sousa & Coelho, 2013). Customer orientation also contributes to increased innovation (Shah et al., 2006). Collaboration with the customer also provides increased efficiency and more satisfied customers (Ljungberg & Larsson, 2012).

Improve continuously in TQM presupposes small and large improvements that place demands on creativity and the ability to innovate, which means completely new approaches in the market in which the organization operates. External customer requirements are constantly increasing. New forms of businesses are created, and new technical solutions are developed. Therefore, organizations must constantly strive to improve the quality of products and services they offer as well as the processes of their own business (Bergman &

Klefsjö, 2012; Defeo, 2017). The ability to improve all people in an organization is the strength of the company. Therefore, it is better for an organization's adaptability, competitiveness, and survival that a large group of people systematically and methodically take many small steps of improvement every day than that a small group regularly carries out large projects and events. It is important to apply indicators when measuring progress and specifically the deficits in the organization as a way of the learning process. Periodic improvement and change efforts are only a sporadic addition to an organization that by its nature tends to remain stagnant (Rother, 2013).

Base decisions on facts can be achieved by obtaining information about internal and external customers' needs and wishes and structuring and analyzing it, but also in the service or production itself collecting information, analyzing and drawing conclusions. In order to be able to work effectively with improvements, verbal information also needs to be structured and analyzed, e.g. opinions, feelings or description of events. Customer focus requires a systematic collection of information about the customer's needs, wishes, reactions and opinions (Söderlund, 1997; Bergman & Klefsjö, 2012).

Focus on processes means that the business sets goals, measures and improves its processes. A large part of an organization's activities can be considered as processes. That is, networks that consist of coherent activities that are repeated over time. The goal of the process is to satisfy the customers with the end result produced and at the same time use as few resources as possible (Bergman & Klefsjö, 2012).

To let everybody be committed is important for achieving successful quality work. Engagement is described by Sörqvist (2004) as a sense of what the individual actually feels. By clearly communicating and keeping the employees updated and involved in the decision-making, engagement can be created even when the leaders and the employees are not able to interact physically. It is about allowing all employees to develop, be involved and influence decisions. Innovative capabilities grow in the kind of environments that are stimulating, supportive and let employees take on new approaches. Carlzon (2008) as

referred to by Bergman and Klefsjö (2012), points out that when the management delegates responsibility and authority it leads to employees being motivated and the result improved. The logical continuation will then be that the management gains trust which leads to further delegation of responsibilities and powers and so on (Bergman & Klefsjö, 2012). Carlzon (2008) refers to this as the good and the vicious circle.

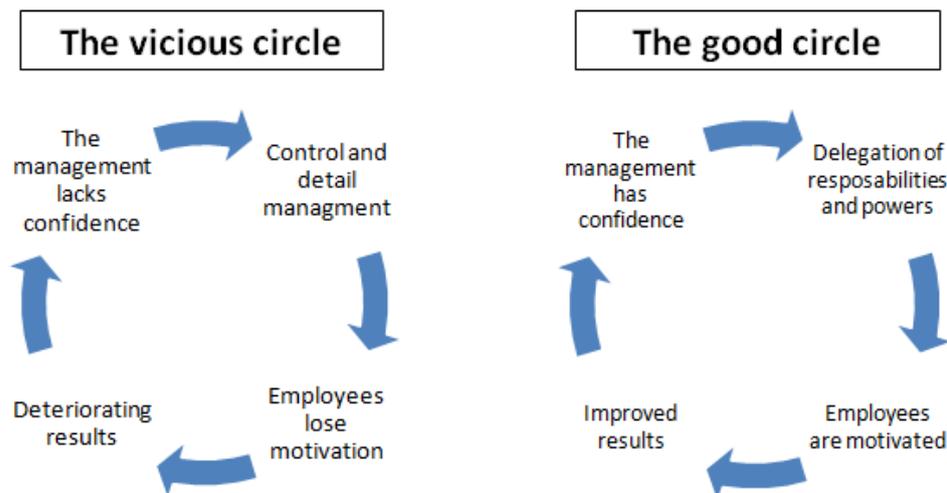


Figure 3. The vicious and the good circle (Source: Bergman & Klefsjö, 2012, p. 49).

Committed leadership is a prerequisite for any of the above values to work. Good leadership can be characterized by the employees feeling secure and proud of what they as an individual, group and organization produce and that the employees feel increased self-esteem and self-confidence (Bergman & Klefsjö, 2012). In order to create openness and transparency in an organization, it is required that leaders continuously inform and communicate about what is happening and the next step through different communication channels (Sörqvist, 2004). The leaders' communication has to align with the views, values and ethical principles that are communicated in the organization (Bergman & Klefsjö, 2012). The need to communicate in a new way, from informing and spreading messages in channels to a joint leadership creation, listening and conversation is the basis for leadership in a lean organization (Runebjörk & Wendleby, 2013).

2.3 Leading during planned change

Lewin, as referred to by Burnes (2004), saw successful change as a group activity, because unless group norms and routines are also transformed, change to individual behavior will not be sustained. Planned change starts with some recognition of a problem and the analysis of the whole change process through various stages. Refreezing often requires changes to organizational culture, norms, policies and practices (Burnes, 2004). Kotter and Heskett (1992), point out that organizations have to be flexible enough to respond to changing needs and expectations in their environment. A strong decentralized organization is needed to adapt to the customers' needs and expectations (Kotter and Heskett, 1992).

Managing change is important. Without competent management the transformation process can get out of control. But for most organizations the challenge is to lead change. Leadership can motivate the actions for change by altering behavior in a significant way, and it can also get change to stick by anchoring it in the organizational culture. Helping individuals understand transformation consists of two components according to Kotter (2012). The first is the various steps in the multistage process of change. The second component is associated with the driving force behind the process which is the leadership.

There is increasing evidence that the nature of change leadership really affects whether initiatives for organizational change succeed or fail. Battilana et al., (2010) claims that the requirement for leaders' competence to actually contribute to successful change to a large extent has been overlooked by leadership literature. Instead, many studies are based on the notion that the leaders have the skills and competencies required for implementing successful change management within the organization.

To be effective, a method for change must according to Kotter (2012) alter and address strategies, reengineer processes or improve quality. A fundamental insight is that transformation will not happen easily. Needed change can stall because of inwardly focused cultures, paralyzing bureaucracy, a low level of trust, lack of teamwork, arrogant attitudes, a

lack of leadership in middle management and the general human fear of the unknown. According to Kotter (2012) successful change of any magnitude goes through all eight steps. Normally people skip steps because they feel pressure to produce, or they invent new sequences. Normally after the first urgency phase the seven steps left end up operating in multiple stages at once. But initiating action in any other order than the eight steps indicated rarely works well. It comes across as forces or mechanistic. It does not create the momentum needed to overcome powerful sources of inertia (Kotter, 2012).

Successful cases of major change include communications that help employees to manage difficult intellectual and emotional issues. By highlighting and presenting positive improvements made internally from teams or individuals, a sense of togetherness and a positive view can be intensified and be seen as important and desirable by the employees. Thus the organizations' management team expresses their ability to take action and willingness to strive and work towards their common purpose. By having a common vision where the purpose is clear for the organization, it can reduce the turbulence that could affect the organization negatively when a crisis or unexpected situation occurs (Sörqvist, 2004; Kotter, 2012).

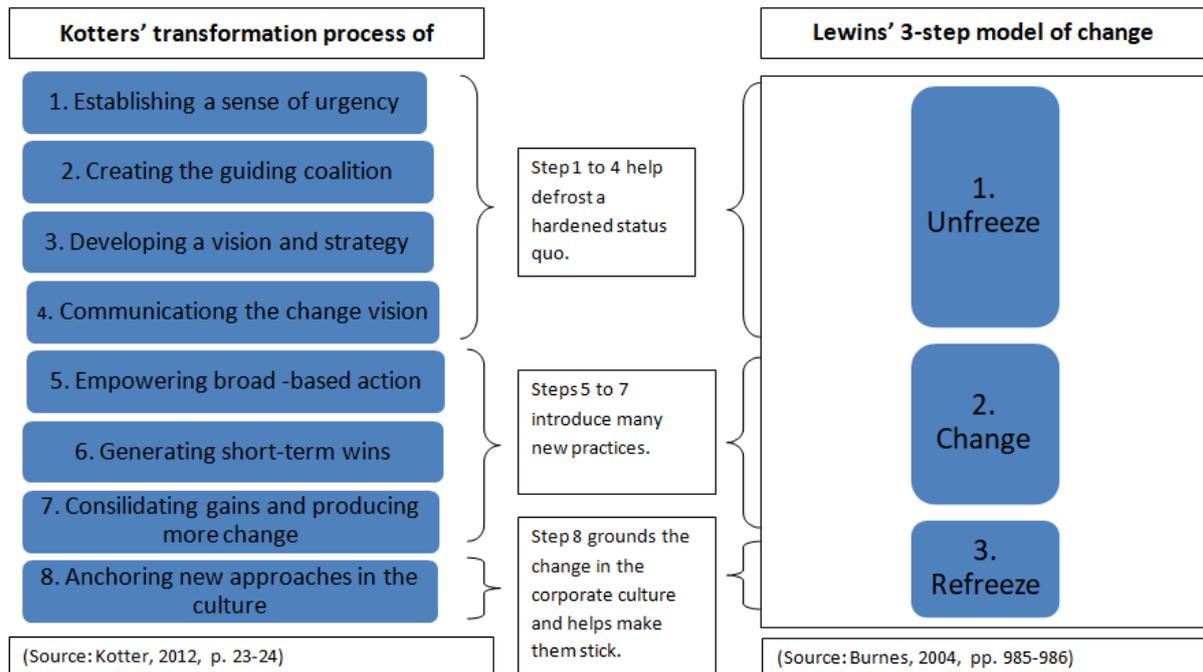


Figure 4. Kotter's eight step model of change and Lewin's three step model of change (Source: Kotter, 2012, p. 23-24; Burnes, 2004, p. 985-986).

2.4 Leading with uncertainty during unexpected change

A leader's success under unexpected change depends mostly on his/her ability to process information, act on it, and influence others within and outside of their organization (Bundy et al., 2017). Leaders have to make sense of the events unfolding with a high degree of uncertainty related to future developments and to the nature of the change itself. In order to be effective during critical events, leaders need to collect and assess multiple pieces of information coming from different sources while being mindful of their own individual biases that may affect this process (Hadley et al., 2011). One way to accomplish this is to maintain a deliberate calm that allows leaders to detach from the crisis and focus on how to navigate the situation at hand (Garcia, 2006).

Decisions need to be made based on imperfect information and usually involve much higher stakes (Bundy et al., 2017). Considering the urgency of the situation, they must be made quickly and without hesitation. Therefore leaders should be able to methodically generate response options, create sound criteria to evaluate them and consequently take action

instead of freezing under pressure or acting impulsively. In order to act effectively, they should learn to cope with uncertainty and need to remain open-minded to make necessary adjustments such that the overall crisis response could be more adaptive (Hadley et al., 2011).

Given the high uncertainty and ambiguity during unexpected change, employees and stakeholders are likely to experience extreme emotional reactions and develop divergent interpretations of the events (Sobral et al., 2020). Therefore, to effectively manage people's expectations, emotions, and to guarantee cohesive action and good communication flow, leaders have to work on the perceptions of the crisis within and outside of their organizations. In this regard, such actions as communicating in a timely and transparent manner, displaying bounded optimism, publicly defending the employees, and engaging in self-sacrificing behaviors have been shown to be particularly helpful in alleviating followers' anxiety and project confidence that the organization will find a way through. Leaders need to show empathy, signaling that they are attentive and concerned with people's distress and are taking measures to support them (Bundy et al., 2017).

Living through a highly disruptive event is likely to enhance a leader's self-efficacy and confidence in dealing with crises and increase their motivation to lead in general. But all leaders do not seem to be able to embrace this opportunity for growth and development. Because leading during a crisis is an enormous challenge, which requires extraordinary physical, technical, social, and emotional skills. Many appointed leaders may not possess them or may never have been asked to display them, which gives an opening for other individuals to engage in leadership behavior (Chan & Drasgow, 2001).

When unexpected changes coming from outside the organization occur, leaders are likely to face information from outside of their area of expertise. Given that critical events involve a high degree of urgency, leaders do not have time to learn new skills. Therefore, to increase the effectiveness of their response, they should be able to reach out to individuals with relevant knowledge. However, recent events have shown that some leaders cannot

recognize their limitations, and when making important decisions, they rely on their own intuition and ignore scientific evidence. Studies on leader humility have shown that managers who demonstrate willingness to learn from others and aim towards self-improvement are likely to stimulate collective action and increase company performance (Chiu et al., 2016).

Disruptive events drastically change the way people work, communicate, and socialize, which presents significant challenges to individuals and organizations. During the COVID-19 pandemic, the policy of social distancing and isolation has introduced people to a new reality of working from home suddenly, not by choice, and regardless of people's experience with remote work. This unprecedented situation has brought up several reflections about the role of leaders in managing employees remotely during difficult times. For example, distance working can be a confusing experience for everyone if leaders turn to their traditional set of leadership behaviors. This can cause problems with task completion, performance assessment, and employee engagement. While there is research addressing this topic in normal contexts, the same theoretical and practical features might no longer apply in critical contexts due to increased disruption of routines and higher uncertainty of both private and professional lives of the employees (Cho, 2020).

2.5 Engagement and organizational culture

Sörqvist (2004) stresses the fact that by applying a positive mindset, believing in the individual's willingness and ability to perform, respect and trust will be created between the leader and its employee. By actively listening and trying to understand the situation behind the negative attitude expressed by the employee, a mutual bond can be created between the leader and the employee and transform to a stronger commitment and engagement.

Schein, (2017, p. 6) defines the culture of a group as "the accumulated shared learning of that group as it solves its problems of external adaptation and internal integration. This accumulated learning is a pattern or system of beliefs, values, and behavioral norms that come to be taken for granted as basic assumptions and eventually drop out of awareness.

To fully understand a given group's culture, we will need to know what kind of learning has taken place, over what span of time, and under what kinds of leadership". Shared learning according to Schein can in many ways be seen as the group's sense of identity, both as an external part of how the organization presents itself to the outside but also as an internal part of what its inner self is. Organizational culture consists of artifacts, common patterns of actions and basic assumptions (Schein, 2017).

Alvesson, (2002) defines culture as "highly significant for how companies and other organizations function: from strategic change, to everyday leadership and how managers and employees relate to and interact with customers as well as to how knowledge is created, shared, maintained and utilized" (Alvesson, 2002, p. 2).

Leaders can influence the culture within an organization in different ways. The different types of impact can be divided into two broad categories. One method is about the leader's direct actions and the other is about creating or changing formal programs, systems, organizational structure, facilities and cultural forms. The leader's influence on culture is stronger when the two methods agree (Yukl, 2012).

3 Method

The chapter describes the work process and the motives for the chosen research approach and design for the study. The choice of study objects is presented. The chapter concludes with an account of reliability and validity.

3.1 Research method

In order to explore how the pandemic has affected the leaders and the direction of the organization during the pandemic, the topic of this study was selected. A qualitative method was chosen based on the purpose of the thesis and the research questions.

Both qualitative and quantitative methods and data provide different types of information. They have both limitations and strengths. Quantitative studies are highly systematic procedures carefully worked out and rules exist for them. On the other hand a qualitative approach allows room to be innovative and to work more within research-designed-

framework. It allows more creative, literary-style writing and in collaboration with participants. Based on the purpose and questions in this thesis, the qualitative method was considered useful to claim a broader understanding and knowledge of the current Covid-19 pandemic situation (Creswell, 2018). The thesis is based on a constructivist worldview where the objective is to understand the context in which the interviewees and the respondents had to manage since the pandemic initially started. And also understand how it has affected the leadership and the direction of the organizations. In order to strengthen the qualitative research design, exploratory verbs have been used to describe and convey the essence of the experience based on the interviews from collected data. Words such as “impact”, “affect”, “influence”, “cause” and “relate” (Creswell, 2018).

The qualitative research method in the thesis was based on hermeneutics' search to identify and understand various phenomena. Hermeneutics' goal is to understand meaning, intention or purpose (Creswell, 2018). Understanding is achieved through interpretation, and interpretation is the basis of hermeneutics. The interpretation depends on the researchers pre-understanding of the subject, language as well as the researcher's values and traditions. It must show coherence, i.e. that context, meaning and wholeness must be connected (Bryman, 2016). The qualitative methods in the thesis are characterized by verbal formulations in both speech and writing. It involves asking open-ended questions such as how and why, creating understanding and interpreting, collecting material according to the properties of the phenomenon and then identifying themes, structures or hidden patterns (Creswell, 2018). A common tool used has been the qualitative interview, where individuals are allowed to share their experiences of things or phenomena in society, participatory studies or studies of documents. Qualitative audiovisuals and digital recorder notes from the interviews were used during the interviews. Text messages and email were used to contact and keep the communication alive with the interviewed. Interview answers were then transcribed and analyzed to find themes and patterns (Creswell, 2018; Bryman, 2016).

The authors study work process inspired by Creswell and Bryman based on inductive logic in qualitative study:

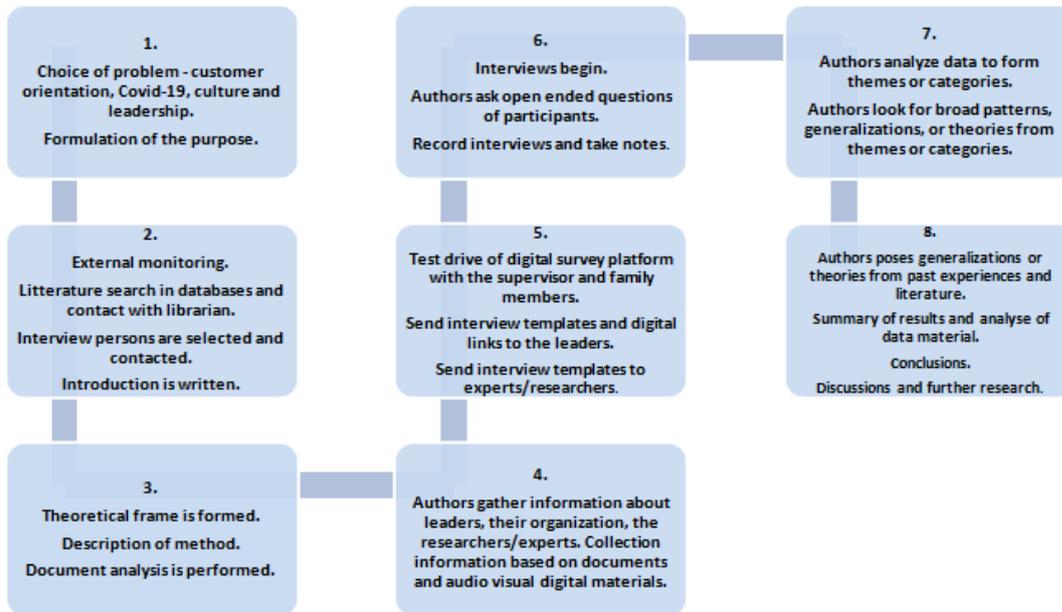


Figure 5. The authors study work process inspired by Creswell and Bryman (Source: Creswell & Creswell, 2018, p. 64; Bryman, 2016, p. 379).

3.2 Design and study work process

Figure 5 describes the work process inspired by Creswell and Bryman to give an overview of the work process. In this chapter the authors have chosen a descriptive approach. The authors have gained a pre-understanding of the subject in two ways. Acquiring knowledge in theoretical framework at the Master's program Quality management and Leadership development at the Mid Sweden University and by the authors own professional experiences gained working with change management, project management, quality development, continuous improvements and innovation development.

Because the thesis was written remotely, Mural, a digital workspace for visual collaboration, was used at first to establish a common choice of problem and purpose. Next the PDSA-model was used to systematically order and plan the different working phases: Plan-Do-Study-Act (Klefsjö et al., 2010). A Gantt chart was developed to get a structure and to acquire a clear overview of the time allocated between the activities. The Gantt chart was

shared with the supervisor during the work. All material has been saved on Microsoft G-drive and shared between the authors and the supervisor.

According to Creswell (2018) there is no single way to conduct a literature review but he recommends a systematic approach. Essential key words were identified to locate academic literature and peer-reviewed academic articles. Examples of such keywords were: management and leadership in crisis, organizational culture, leadership unexpected crisis, leadership Covid 19 impact, leadership under uncertainty, crisis management, effective leadership in crisis, consumer behavior, Covid 19, Levin planned change. This initiated the search in the university database with focus on journals and books such as: Diva, Science direct, Web of science, Primo, Journals Sage pub, online library Wiley, Emerald, Ebscot, and Proquest. Useful academic literatures were identified and major themes were summarized and structured in a working document while the introduction was written (Creswell, 2018). The theoretical framework was formed and a description of the method was shaped and a thorough document analysis was performed (Bryman, 2016).

The thesis consists of two empirical parts. First, industries and a wide range of organizations of interest for the thesis were identified. These were then broken down into three different organizations within retail, IT and animal health care. Two of them were public and the third private. This part consists of an inside perspective from the organizations, where interviews with managers and digital surveys answered by employees have been conducted. Two of the managers are CEOs from the public and private sector. The third manager is an IT manager in the public sector. The digital survey was sent out to a total of 30 employees, where 27 employees have responded. The reason to choose both private and governmental organizations was with the intention to bring a breadth of the whole perspective from both the private and the public sector since the Covid-19 pandemic has affected all sectors in the society.

The second part of the empirical data consists of interviews with three experts. The expert within the field of change management and neuroleadership was based in the United

States, and the two experts within the field of innovation management and executive coaching were based in Sweden. All of these have a global network of managers and leaders whom they have been working with during the pandemic. They bring an outside-in perspective, a broader external coverage and have been able to see how the pandemic has affected the managers in their leadership and their organizations (Creswell, 2018).

3.3 Selection of interviewees

Goal-directed selection is a selection method that Bryman (2016) describes as a strategic selection. The principle of a goal-oriented selection is an ambition to select persons that have knowledge of or are affected in some way by the purpose that is aimed to be investigated (Bryman, 2016). One type of goal-directed selection is the purposive sampling, where one approach is the critical case sampling. It permits sampling of a crucial case that allows a logical inference about the phenomenon of interest. Purposive sampling with a critical case sampling approach was used for the data collection since it provides the best way for creating an exploratory sample by selecting people that have the best experience or expertise to provide information that is qualitative and with valuable insights on the topic that is researched. The sample is hand-picked for the research on the basis of: relevance and knowledge (Denscombe, 2017; Bryman, 2016).

Creating a trusting relationship with the interviewees was essential in order to get a transparent, open and interesting dialogue. The authors contacted the interviewees through LinkedIn and by email in November 2020 with a description of the purpose of the thesis. Even though the acceptance of participation was settled through email, the authors chose to send an additional reminder with additional information on the thesis and the questions, one month ahead to the interviewees to show flexibility, in case circumstances had changed for them to be able to participate. Flexibility is mentioned by Bryman (2016), to be important and has been very essential for the authors in communication with the interviewees before and during the interviews. It has also been important in such areas as varying the order of the questions, following up leads and clearing up inconsistencies in answers and coping with audio-recording equipment breakdown (Bryman, 2016). Due to

limited time for the interviews the interview guide was thus emailed one to three weeks before the interview date to the interviewees. Thereby the authors made time for the interviewees to reflect on the interview questions with the purpose of receiving well thought-out answers to which follow-up questions could be made, the answers became clear and validated by the interviewees. Bampton and Cowton (2002) as referred to in Bryman, argue that by sending the interview questions prior to the interviews it takes the pressure off the interviewees to reply quickly during the interview. Instead it gives the interviewees an opportunity to provide considered replies. The authors recognize that this procedure may be a loss of spontaneity (Bryman, 2016).

3.4 Data collection and interviews

3.4.1 Interview guide

In total the collection procedure of the thesis for the empirical data collection included three of the four types mentioned by Creswell (2018). Qualitative documents, such as annual reports, qualitative audiovisual digital materials and structured open-ended interviews were shaped (Creswell, 2018). As Bryman (2016) mentions, qualitative research tends to view social life in terms of processes and bring about a sense of change. This is also applicable when using interviews and asking participants to reflect on the process during an event. Therefore, a qualitative interviewing was applied in order to receive rich and detailed answers followed up by questions that arose during the interview.

Prior to the interviews, semi-structured interview guides, which according to Bryman (2016) can make it easier to get answers to the study's questions, were written based on the cornerstone models six corners. According to Denscombe (2017), the interviewer should during a semi-structured interview touch on all themes, but interviewees can talk freely within the framework of the themes. To enable the interviewees to speak as freely as possible and the respondents to write as freely as possible, open interview questions were designed based on the cornerstone model. Bryman (2011) believes that open-ended questions are important if the topic is unexplored, but it also contributes to the interviewees and the respondents not being guided in one direction. By applying qualitative

“vignette questions”, the interviewees’ answers and experiences were clarified and strengthened based on the specific question asked (Bryman, 2016).

Every interview question for each leader and expert was carefully formulated according to the purpose of the thesis, the specific field of the organization and their expertise. All based on a thorough background research about the interviewees, their organization and their areas of expertise (Bryman, 2016). The interview guides and the digital survey appendix 1 to 7 were produced in Swedish and English. The Covid-19 pandemic is a global crisis that everyone is experiencing at the same time. In order to create an inclusive public discussion and learn about the results and conclusions presented in the thesis, it was chosen to be written in English in order to be spread to an international audience.

According to the code of ethics, the requirement of confidentiality (Bryman, 2016) the authors decided to let the three leaders’ select 10 employees that would be able to set time for answering the digital survey. Since the digital survey was anonymous no personal data was presented to the authors which strengthen the aspect of confidentiality. Survey monkey was used as the digital survey tool and consisted of 12 questions and the time was set to 6-10 minutes. All the answers were then solely and anonymously sent directly to the authors.

3.4.2 Conducting interviews

The kinds of questions asked in qualitative interviews vary. Kvale (1996), referred to in Bryman, suggests nine different kinds of questions: introducing-, follow-up-, probing-, specifying-, direct-, indirect-, structuring-, silence- and interpreting questions. These nine questions were used during the interviews. One of the main ingredients is listening and being attentive. And even if the interview is being recorded the interviewer has to be very attuned and responsive to what the interviewee is saying and doing. It is also likely that the kinds of questions will vary in terms of the different stages of a qualitative interview (Bryman, 2016).

The interviews were held digitally and to ensure that the technique would work, the interviews were deliberately booked with 15 minutes margins before the actual interview started. All the interviews were on Zoom and the time frame was set at 1 hour 15 minutes. All interviews were recorded on Zoom, on tape recorder and manually written. In order to create a trustful interview, the authors used their tones, mimics and gestures to show their engagement and total focus on the interviewees (Bryman, 2018). The authors also visually expressed their active listening by reflecting what the interviewees had answered and also used open-ended follow up questions to clarify the answers and to get the whole picture. Throughout the work process, the authors have been flexible and shown patience and consideration for the interviewees work situation and limited time management during the current pandemic.

Background research about the interviewees was gathered by reading and analyzing information through the company's websites, quality- and sustainability reports, annual reports, articles and video-clips which made it easier to create a dialogue during the interviews because of the interviewee's familiarity with their specific areas (Bryman, 2016; Creswell, 2018). The cornerstone model was a framework and a starting point for the authors' study and the interview questions (Bergman & Klefsjö, 2012).

3.5 Analysis of data

Even if only three leaders and three experts were interviewed, the open ended questions resulted in well formulated answers. The qualitative method with open-ended questions to the three leaders and the digital survey to the employees, have resulted in more descriptive answers. This in turn has led to a comprehensive data and analysis process. The analysis was based on searching for themes. This is a common approach to qualitative data analysis. However, unlike strategies such as grounded theory or critical discourse analysis, this is not an approach with an outlined cluster of techniques. The search for themes can be implemented in different ways (Bryman, 2016). When looking for themes a thematic analysis was used as the basis for a generic approach. Braun & Clarke (2006) as well as Attride-Stirling (2001), referred to in Bryman (2016), have identified generic qualitative data

analysis approaches. The data from the leaders and the employees were analyzed separately from the experts. These steps were used when analyzing collected data (Bryman, 2016, p. 587-589):

1. Read through at least a sample of the materials to be analyzed - transcripts from the recorded interviews and images have been read and watched.
2. Begin coding the materials - small portions of texts was clustered in keywords
3. Elaborate many of the codes into themes - the number of codes were seeked to be reduced by searching in common elements in codes and elevated them in higher themes and write summaries of what the themes meant in form of memos.
- 4 a. Evaluate the higher-order themes - in this stage it was seeked to find sub-themes or dimensions among the themes.
- 4 b. Give names or labels to the themes and their subthemes - the authors referred to the literature that relates to the focus of the study. But the crucial issue was to develop names that adequately reflected the codes, underpinned them and allowed the authors to capture data.
5. Examine possible links and connections between concepts and/or how the concepts vary in terms of features of the cases - the authors considered the concepts being related in a temporal sequence, divided in three different phases.
- 6 a. Write up the insight from the previous stages to provide a compelling narrative about the data - here the writing was in focus where insights were shared, the themes were tied to the research questions and to the literature that relates to the thesis.
- 6 b. Make sure you justify your themes - during this step the authors have had to ensure that inferences are drawn about the themes' interconnections with each other and their implications. The themes written have had to relate to the research literature and the topic. During the writing process there has been a constant interplay between conceptualization and reviewing the data (Bryman, 2016).

3.6 Validity and reliability

Bryman (2016) defines the notion of validity as a matter of one or more indicators that have been designed in order to measure if it actually estimates that specific concept and if the conclusions that have been generated from a survey are interrelated or not. Mainly three types of validity are distinguished (Bryman, 2016, p. 72-74):

- Measurement validity
- Internal validity
- External validity

Reliability is described by Bryman (2016) as consistency, conformity and reliability when measuring a concept. When deciding if a measure is reliable or not, three important factors have to be taken into account (Bryman, 2016, p. 208):

- Stability
- Internal reliability
- Inter estimate reliability

Qualitative validity is described by Creswell (2018) as one of the strengths of qualitative research and is based on determining whether the results are accurate from the standpoint of the researcher, the participant, or the readers of an account by employing certain procedures whereas qualitative reliability indicates that the researchers approach is consistent across different researchers and among different projects (Creswell, 2018).

Validity according to Denscombe (2017) refers to relevance, accuracy and precision of the data, and is generally discussed in relation to internal and external factors. Reliability is specified by the author to whether a research instrument is neutral in its effect and consistent across multiple occasions of its use (Denscombe, 2017).

General conclusions cannot be made from the collected results. The difficulty has been in generalizing because the collected data have not been based on a large sample. By asking follow-up questions during the interviews with the leaders and the experts the validity of the answers has been ensured. The questions in the digital survey towards the employees were purposely written as open-ended questions with the aim to receive descriptive and

reliable answers. The three organizations have shown conformity and reliability when answering the questions. Internal validity has strongly been identified between the leaders and the employees in their organizations. The external validity has been strengthened by the experts' views and aspects. Due to the global expansion of the pandemic no reliable historical data could be found based on previous research within organizational studies.

3.7 Ethical considerations

Bryman (2016) defines fundamental ethical matters as voluntariness, integrity, confidentiality and anonymity for those individuals that are directly involved in the research. Some of the ethical principles that are applicable are (Bryman, 2016, p. 170-171):

- If the participants may suffer or experience discomfort through their participation.
- If some kind of fraud or false predictions is in question or if important information is withheld.
- If one intrudes on privacy matters.
- Information requirements.
- Consent requirements.
- Confidentiality requirements.
- The utilization requirement.

Creswell (2018) expresses the anticipated ethical issues as a requirement when making an argument for a study. Researchers need to protect their research participants; develop a trust with them; promote the integrity of research; guard against misconduct and impropriety that might reflect on their organizations or institutions; and cope with new, challenging problems. Ethical questions are apparent in topics related to: personal disclosure, authenticity, and credibility of the research report; the role of researchers in cross-cultural contexts; and issues of personal privacy through forms of Internet data collection (Creswell, 2018).

Denscombe (2017) describes codes of research ethics as guidance on the kind of actions that should be taken and the kind that must be avoided when undertaking research. The

author addresses four key principles which underlie codes of research ethics (Denscombe, 2017, p. 340-347):

Principle 1: Participants' interests should be protected.

Principle 2: Participation should be voluntary and based on informed consent.

Principle 3: Researchers should operate in an open and honest manner with respect to the investigation.

Principle 4: Research should comply with the laws of the land.

Consent and confidentiality requirements have been highly rated during the research process. By sending frequent information pre- and during the interviews to the interviewees a mutual engagement and understanding was created about the content and the participation in the study. To strengthen the ethical significance, the authors could have developed an ethical agreement involving the ethical aspects towards the interviewees and to the respondents.

4 Result

The results are presented based on the various data sources. Several different themes have emerged that show how the leadership and the direction of the organization has been affected during different phases of the pandemic and it also reveals how the customer's needs have affected the direction of the organization.

The purpose of this thesis has been to explore how the Covid-19 pandemic has affected the leadership and the direction of the organization based on two main questions:

- How has the leadership and the direction of the organization been affected during the Covid-19 pandemic?
- How has the customer's needs affected the organization?

The results have shown that the pandemic has affected the organizations in both positive and negative ways.

Mindset and personal development

Leading remotely has required leaders to inspire and motivate the employees to act and utilize a high level of self-leadership. They also emphasize that time for reflection has been important but they have not had the time to actively do so. The employees on the other hand have had time to reflect due to more flexibility when working remotely.

The leaders emphasized the need to use active and patient listening, to work smarter rather than faster in order to increase preventive work by working proactively. At least 80% of the meetings have been online which has saved time. It has been much easier to participate in workshops and meetings because of timesaving, not having to move from different meeting rooms physically. Employees have been forced to find new efficient ways to work. One way has been to work smarter rather than faster. Another way has been collaborative network channels within the organization. There has been more time and flexibility when it comes to finding the balance between the private and professional life when working remotely. The leaders emphasized that they are bound to have a stronger personal commitment, stronger personal responsibility, higher self-awareness and active listening towards the employees. Both employees and leaders underline that the pandemic has required a higher need of self-leadership. The employees felt that they have had more time to reflect compared to the leaders.

The experts mentioned that both leaders and employees needed to have a curious mindset, listen actively, observe and ask curious open questions. Leaders ought to create trust and trust in people around them and have self-confidence to ask important questions.

Communication

The leaders and the employees have used more channels to communicate and reach out with information such as: Facebook intranet, Microsoft teams, Skype, WhatsApp, SharePoint, Intranet apps, emails, local newspapers, Instagram, text messages, broadcasting online, posters. The employees have experienced a higher use of digital services used more by customers, an increase in digital communication with customers as well as internally. The

pandemic has affected the leaders' communication from informing and spreading messages in different communication channels to create a sense of togetherness. The leaders and the employees have emphasized that active listening has been crucial when working with digital communication platforms. The leaders emphasize that they have had to strengthen their internal communication and have had to listen actively and patiently to their employees. The communications channels had to double or triple during the pandemic because everyone didn't respond to only one channel, according to the experts. The frequency also needed to increase.

Digitalization and customer need

The leaders have seen a challenge to support the internal digital competence to support the customers and to find smarter digital channels to meet the customer's needs. The increased volume of customer inquiries have escalated the workload and thereby the need to ensure staffing. Also, the on-boarding for new employees to get the right introduction and support from organizations remotely has been challenging.

Regarding the question on how the customer need has affected the organization, the employees respond that the pandemic has enabled more digital features for the users, which has led the organization to work smarter during the pandemic when delivering quality services to the customers. One leader has specifically mentioned how the development of an app for interaction with customers was developed iteratively in collaboration with the customers. This working method has been a smarter way compared to previous ones. Employees consider they have been engaged, adaptive and adjustive to maintain the operational service towards the customers with the goal to create value and benefits for them. A broader need from the customers has evolved to receive support when using self-service online. For example: helping the customer with digital payments and other technical support. The leaders see a big challenge in finding new smarter digital channels to meet the customer needs. The customers have increased their use of self-service flow and booking online due to higher digital awareness. However, the interviewees

and the experts have indicated that a rapid digital implementation will in long-term create digital exclusion and thereby social divisions in the society.

Employees and leaders have experienced the customers being more concerned and required more information and help. It has led the organizations to engage in a more targeted support for the customers to use digital platforms. There has been a lack of efficient ways for digital cooperation with customers/stakeholders. The employees have realized that digital platforms have to be more customized and user friendly. Due to the pandemic the organizations have not had the possibility to physically interact with the customers. Thereby it has been a challenge for the organization to get the dialogue with the customers in order to understand their needs. The pandemic has enforced a significant shift in customer service from physical to digital service. It is also emphasized from the results of this study that the increased volume of customer inquiries have escalated the workload and thereby the need to ensure staffing.

Leadership and culture

When working remotely it has been difficult for the leaders to notice signs of psychosocial illness. Lack of micro-pauses has led to physical ergonomic health problems. Both leaders and employees point out that it has been a challenge to create trust due to lack of social interactions. The experts mention different leadership styles important to apply during the pandemic such as: engaged leadership, entrepreneurial leadership, future focused leadership, trust-based leadership, situational leadership, courageous leadership, and coaching leadership.

More meetings scheduled after one another has led to less time for micro pauses and time for reflections between meetings. The employees say there has been a lack of spontaneous meetings where creative ideas usually are brought up. There has been a lack of time for continuous improvements because of the higher pace and changing requirements coming in from outside of the organization connected to the pandemic.

It has been hard to solve complex problems due to difficulties creating effective teams remotely. A challenge here has been to work with inclusion and collaboration internally/externally. The leaders and employees see this as a challenge further on after the pandemic.

Employees have experienced challenges when using digital platforms to create work relations remotely. The employees experience that the leadership has been very invisible. It has been a challenge to lead and keep the spirits up according to both leaders and employees without the physical encounter. The experts say that by creating common ground rules when having meetings, especially when working remotely, it clarifies what is expected by everyone and simplifies involvement in the discussions.

Strategy & planning

Both leaders and employees mentioned that there has been a stronger sense of togetherness and being part of the whole. Employees have had a stronger focus on the production and the leaders say they have had a stronger purpose driven focus. Online meetings have been more democratic and inclusive.

The experts emphasize that we all are part of a larger system, both in private and professional life. Togetherness exists in the service of a higher purpose. The higher purpose can create the sense that we are in it together. The experts state that leaders during the pandemic should have the ability to interpret perspectives from outside-in and inside-out and adapt more flexibility to changes. Leaders need to be more curious and monitor external influences. They need to have a higher purpose in sight, connect it to the values and communicate it clearly throughout the organization during the ongoing pandemic. In order to communicate and move the organization forward the leaders need to act empathically, be more vulnerable and honest.

The experts also indicate the importance of communicating the sense of urgency and connect it to the direction of the organization and look at what is important in the long run.

By doing so, the organization can work incrementally and work with continuous improvements as well as focusing on what really brings value for the customer and the organization. By building teams, fostering innovative capabilities with focus on the higher purpose and enabling to work systematically with innovation the organization can elevate its iterative capacity and make it part of its organizational culture.

Both doing the right thing and doing things right have been important. Accordingly, early in the pandemic doing the right thing was at a premium for the leaders. To do things right came later on. Finding the balance between those two is important.

5 Analysis

In this chapter the results from the various interviews, digital surveys and documents based on theory and articles connected to the purpose are analyzed.

From the results of the interviews and documents based on theory, the concepts were related in a temporal sequence, divided in three different phases (Bryman, 2016) to answer the questions how the leadership and the direction of the organization have been affected during the Covid-19 pandemic, and how the customers' needs have affected the organization.

Phase 1 was mainly managed by crisis management and contingency plans. The urgency was real and as Kotter (2012) mentioned a sense of urgency is the first step when managing change. Doing the right things to keep structure and order becomes very important in the initial phase.

During the first phase of the pandemic three areas that affected the leadership has been noticed:

1. Ensuring the physical safety of the organization by coordinating crisis management teams and safety measures that could provide correct and relevant information according to the regulations and restrictions given by the Public Health Agency and the government.

2. Rethink and reorganize working methods from office to remote by ensuring that the digital devices were evenly spread and given to everyone in the organization.
3. Producing proactive contingency plans in order to ensure staffing and thus be prepared for unexpected situations that might occur due to the pandemic that would affect the organization as a whole. By collecting information, producing and presenting status reports and activity plans the organizations could keep track of their production and their service towards their customers and the direction of the organization. Bundy et al., (2017) underlines the importance of the leader to acquire the ability to process information, act on it, and to clearly communicate to others inside and outside the organization when an unexpected crisis such as the pandemic occurs. Hadley et al., (2011) also addresses the need for the leaders to be mindful of their own individual biases when collecting and assessing various pieces of information coming from different sources.

Phase 2: The initial crisis management meetings decreased from everyday to a few per week. New routines came in place and the leaders found a new normal. Many managers indicated that the digital transformation to working remotely worked out well. The employees used different digital collaboration and communication platforms. During phase 2 a growing understanding and realization came to place that the situation would not be over. Many managers realized that this was the beginning of a crisis and would not end until 2021. The workload, despite new routines, was still extreme for many managers. The biggest challenge for the leaders was to make sure that the production was still on-going and kept its pace and that there still existed a willingness to follow the guidelines and restrictions recommended by the Public Health agency and the government within the organization.

Phase 3 after approximately four months, the new normal way of working was somehow accepted. During this phase the leaders started to observe more signals of mental illness among their employees and the leaders themselves felt demotivated due to lack of social physical interaction. The challenge still was to keep on working efficiently and at the same

time be in line and comply with the safety regulations and restrictions from the Public Health Agency and the government. One way for the leaders to be able to navigate through the crisis was to maintain a conscious calmness that enabled them to set aside their own personal feelings from the crisis and to have a clear focus on how to proceed and steer the organization forward (Garcia, 2000).

During phase 3, four specific challenges have been noticed among the leaders which have affected their leadership:

1. The need for self reflection and finding time to re-energize.
2. Developing a holistic view of what digital leadership requires.
3. Identifying sustainable working processes and methods in order to interact, communicate, engage and motivate digitally.
4. Finding digital ideas for building trust and self-motivation by working with self-leadership and coaching within the organization.

All leaders indicate there has been a stronger sense of togetherness within their organizations with a strong purpose driven focus. Runebjörk & Wendleby (2013) underlines the importance of acquiring authentic leadership in order to strengthen and create a collaborative togetherness within the organization. Diana Whitney (2008) describes togetherness as a relational dynamic that “emerges when people join together for a common cause, a meaningful purpose, or a provocative curiosity in ways that bring out the best of each other and the situation”. “No matter what the form, relationships are at the heart of leadership and its capacity to make things happen” (Diana Whitney, 2013, p. 4). The stronger focus on communication to move the organizations forward has required a more authentic leadership to grow due to the need to show and be more vulnerable and honest in contact with the employees.

Both leaders and employees emphasize the challenge of solving and discussing complex problems. Liker (2009) mentions putting together teams with several competences in order to improve the quality and the productivity and to create stable production flows when solving complex technical problems.

Having a higher purpose driven focus and leading goal oriented is also mentioned by Rother (2013) as a movement in direction towards a desired state through an unknown territory by being perceptive for and act based on the actual conditions on the field. Other effects that have affected the leaders during the pandemic have been the need to make fast decisions without hesitation considering the urgency of the crisis (Hadley et al., 2011).

Communication is essential in leadership during normal circumstances as well as during change management and uncertain events like the pandemic. It consists of explaining, describing and arguing to communicate various issues to create participation, understanding and conviction (Sörqvist, 2004; Bergman & Klefsjö, 2012). As indicated by the results, new and more communication channels have been used which have made leaders and employees realize the importance of patient and active listening. As Runebjörk & Wendleby emphasize, joint leadership creation, active listening and conversation is the basis for leadership in a lean organization (Runebjörk & Wendleby, 2013). Change management that succeeds includes communications that help employees to manage difficult intellectual and emotional issues. This happens because managers, supervisors and executives look at all of their daily activities through the vision of the organization. When people in the organization do this they can easily find many meaningful ways to talk about the direction of change (Kotter, 2012).

Self-leadership has been required from the leaders and the need to prioritize time for self-reflection. Yukl (2012) describes self-management as a set of strategies that a person uses in order to affect and improve its own behavior. By taking more ownership for one's own life employees will become less dependent on a leader's ability to guide and motivate them (Yukl, 2012). By involving and giving responsibility, a culture of self-leadership is created (Bergman & Klefsjö, 2012). When employees actively participate, influence decisions and participate in the improvement of work, value creation is achieved. It requires a delegation of responsibilities and powers. This positive view of the human is referred to as the good circle (Bergman & Klefsjö, 2012).

Creating trust virtually during the pandemic has been a severe challenge for the leaders due to lack of social interaction. This has made it difficult for the leaders to notice any signs of psychosocial illness. Diana Whitney (2013) defines trust as something we do, not just something we feel, the confidence in and acceptance of what is. The leaders have had to be more empathic, have active dialogue and dedication when being in touch with their employees online.

During the pandemic, development and continuous improvement work has been less prioritized by the organization. Among the interviewed leaders, those organizations that already had a culture of committed leadership where the employees were engaged and committed and worked with continuous improvements before the pandemic, found it easier to continue working and adapt to the new circumstances. Liker (2009) mentions that the organization has to put effort in continuously reflecting and improving as well as Rother (2016), who claims that the ability for continuous, gradual development and improvement, is the best guarantee for a lasting competitive advantage and survival. In many cases, there is no improvement in the organization's normal operating conditions. Many people see improvement as something that occurs periodically as a project. Periodic improvement and change efforts are only a sporadic addition to an organization that by its nature tends to remain stagnant (Rother, 2016).

Engaged leadership according to Bergman & Klefsjö (2012) is based on a culture that lies on the foundation of the values: focus on customer, base decisions on facts, working with processes, working with continuous improvements and creating preconditions for engagement. During the pandemic working with continuous improvements has not been in focus due to high pressure on the production. The fast digital transformation has made it difficult to meet all the customer needs virtually. More online-services have been in demand by the customers and new digital channels are to be developed. The fast digital service has also created a need for digital competence within the organization in order to meet their customers' different needs. Focusing on the customer according to Bergman&

Klefsjö (2012) means that one is trying to put oneself in the perspective of the customer in order to understand what the customer actually needs, this has according to the organizations been a challenge digitally. This can be linked to Rother's (2016) discussion that if we want our organizations to develop and feel good in the long term, it is important how they are integrated with conditions both inside and outside. The goal is to develop the organization's capacity to continue to improve, adapt and satisfy customers' ever-changing requirements. Periodic improvement and change efforts are only a sporadic addition to an organization that by its nature tends to remain stagnant (Rother, 2016).

To keep track and focus of their performance internally and towards their customers, the organizations has, during the pandemic, continued steering and follow up their profitability based on their indicators: IT index, leadership index, employee index, index for user satisfaction towards customers, index for good management, index for time saving versus costs, and index to adapt and adjust daily operations with customer safety and need in mind. Bergman & Klefsjö (2012) addresses the importance of gathering, structuring and analyzing different kinds of information by the cornerstone, Base decisions on facts. Rother (2016) addresses the importance of applying indicators when measuring progress and specifically the deficits in the organization as a way of the learning process. Liker (2009) underlines the importance of generating value for the customers, the society and the economy as a focal point and that every function within the organization should be evaluated in relation to how value can be created.

Rother (2016) mentions the importance of goal oriented leadership, which implies creating dialogue with the employees to develop activity plans that are created with the purpose of achieving the goals. These activity plans have to continuously be followed up, improved and adapted according to the circumstances that are ongoing outside and inside the organization, with the purpose of achieving the goals. The leaders and their organizations have experienced a lack of continuous improvements during the pandemic and as Rother (2016) emphasizes, it is because many leaders who run their organizations in general have adapted a strategic mindset to lead an organization based on the industrialization era in the

early 1920s and 1930s. The challenge is not that the leaders have adapted to the logic itself but that it does not involve any continuous improvement and adaptation. Rother (2016) emphasizes that the solution is not to replace management systems or constantly reorganize, but to have a management system that can handle whatever unpredictable circumstances arise. From the results in the thesis it is clear that those leaders who have had a habit of working with continuous improvements in the organization have been better equipped when facing uncertainty, because they are accustomed to follow up and continuously improve on a regular basis (Rother, 2016). The absence of working with continuous improvements before the pandemic has affected their ability to adapt to the new circumstance resulting from the pandemic.

How has the customer's needs affected the organization?

The customers have been affected by the pandemic in a way that has forced them to change their needs and expectations from the organizations. The new needs that have been claimed are more consumer adapted self-services online with wider service offers in customer support. Even if the employees consider themselves being engaged, adaptive and adjustive to maintain the operational service towards the customers, the leaders see challenges in finding new smarter digital channels and working methods to meet the customer's needs.

- Customers have been affected because they need to find new channels to meet the organization digitally.
- Customers have been forced and placed higher demands on organizations to deliver higher digital quality services due to new digital requirements caused by the restrictions of distancing during the Covid-19 pandemic.
- The production has been affected because the leaders lead and work digitally.
- The pandemic has had an impact on the production focusing on here and now not much on the direction, vision and strategy ahead.

Focus on customers is the heart of the cornerstone model. This implies that organizations actively have to investigate what the customers' demands are by systematically trying to fulfill or exceed the customers' needs and expectations. Customers are crucial to improvement work because they determine how good or bad something is (Bergman & Klefsjö, 2012; Sörqvist, 2004). Customer orientation means wanting to create value for the customer and see the business from the outside in. Customer orientation requires empathy and for that the organization needs to put themselves in the shoes of the customer's and see the world from their eyes (Ljungberg & Larsson, 2012). Rother (2016) also mentions that if we want our organizations to develop and feel good in the long term, it is important how they are integrated with conditions both inside and outside. The pandemic has affected the leadership to acknowledge the needs of prioritizing and working smarter within the organization in order to meet the customers' changed needs from the outside.

6 Conclusion

The chapter describes the study's conclusions based on interviews, estimates and document analyzes as well as an assessment of whether the purpose of the study can be considered answered.

The purpose of this thesis has been to explore how the Covid-19 pandemic has affected the leadership and the direction of the organization. Two research questions were set to explore the purpose:

- How has the leadership and the direction of the organization been affected during the Covid-19 pandemic?
- How has the customer's needs affected the organization?

During the pandemic the need to think new and adapt to uncertain circumstances has been crucial to leaders and the direction of the organization. As Kotter mentions, helping individuals understand a transformation consist of two components: first the various steps, which have been based on uncertainty, and second the driving force which is the leadership

(Kotter, 2012). The leaders have had to manage uncertainty, use insights based on daily updates from the public health authority and the government and hence tried to adapt to the organization's context according to the restrictions. This in turn has put a higher pressure on the organization to respond to new customer needs while they had to navigate through uncertainty (Rother, 2013). But as Kotter and Heskett (1992) point out, organizations have to be flexible enough to respond to changing needs and expectations in their environment. As indicated in the results and as mentioned by Kotter, for most organizations the challenge is to lead change. Leadership can motivate the actions for change by altering behavior in any significant way, and it can also get change to stick by anchoring it in the organizational culture (Schein, 2017). The conclusion is that the leaders have to prepare and continuously work proactively in order to be prepared for unexpected crises such as the Covid-19 pandemic.

The pandemic has not enabled the leaders to work with strategic development and continuous improvement. Time for reflection about the change and its affects and effects and the ability to solve the actual causes of the problems rather than the symptoms has been a huge challenge for the organizations. Therefore, as underlined by Sörqvist, it has been of high importance to continuously communicate and inform the employees about the change, in order for the employees to feel secure and be able to process from within. The conclusion is that active listening has to be given a greater role in communication as well as using established digital platforms and exploring new ones that are adapted to the organizations and the customers' needs.

By highlighting and presenting positive improvements made internally from teams or individuals, a sense of togetherness and a positive view can be intensified and be seen as important and desirable by the employees. Thus the organization's management team expresses their ability to take action and willingness to strive and work towards their common purpose (Sörqvist, 2004). Sörqvist also mentions that, by having a common vision where the purpose is clear for the organization, an unexpected crisis such as the pandemic can reduce the turbulence that could affect the organization negatively (Sörqvist, 2004).

The conclusion is that by strengthening collaborative teamwork a sense of togetherness can ease and prepare the organization for external negative impacts.

Knowledge is another essential element that has a vital impact on the individual's ability to assimilate new information that can affect and change the attitude and the willingness to meet the change. By prioritizing the need for knowledge within the organization, a greater understanding and new creative ideas and thoughts can be brought up which in turn can enhance collaboration and create efficient teams (Sörqvist, 2004). Bergman & Klefsjö (2012) emphasizes that an engaged leadership should rest on a culture that has its ground values based on the cornerstone model. The pandemic has forced the organization to change their behavioral patterns as working patterns. Rother (2013) explains that by actually doing and thereby learning from the experience, new desired behaviors and attitudes are developed which over time will affect the organizational culture. The conclusion is that by learning from the experience during the pandemic, spread and share competences among the employees continuous learning and improvements can then be part of the organizational culture over time.

Customers are crucial to improvement work. It is the customer's experiences and assessment that determine how good or bad something is. This means identifying and analyzing the customer's situation, needs and improvements in a systematic way. Decisions, analyzes and solutions are then based to a large extent on the knowledge and understanding of the customer (Sörqvist, 2014). The conclusion is that the customer has to be engaged from the beginning when improving or developing new services and products that are in line with the customer's needs.

The leaders have mentioned the challenge to meet increased digital needs of the customers. The physical distance has made them realize, as Sörqvist (2017) also indicates, that it is the customer's experiences and assessment that determine how good or bad something is. The organizations lack of digital platforms for collaborating with the customer have made them realize the need to work smarter and in some cases iteratively while

launching a new digital platform. The gap in digital competence has been more evident during the pandemic which requires more attention of the need's within the organization and towards the customer's. Therefore, as Bergman & Klefsjö (2012) underline, the organizations need to understand the customer's needs and get insight of internal and external sources in order to systematically build insightful knowledge to utilize expected and unexpected needs. The conclusion is that the organizations have to identify which digital platforms are efficient, time-saving and create a win-win situation for both the organization and the customers.

It all boils down to creating a culture with a strong common core, founded in values (Boyatzis and McKee, 2005), with a leadership that makes conscious decisions based on those values (Whitney et al., 2010). The leaders have to communicate expectations and provide direction by putting their values into questions that direct the thinking and actions of the employees (Whitney et al., 2010) towards the common vision and goals of the organizations. The conclusion is that the organization has to establish common values and grounds by regularly communicating their vision and how they ought to vitalize them.

One value being mentioned by all the interviewees and the respondents is trust. As shown in the good circle, when the management delegates responsibility and authority, it leads to employees being motivated and the result improved. The logical continuation will then be that the management gains trust which leads to further delegation of responsibilities and powers and so forth. This requires daily practice by leaders and employees. When leaders try to get every single person in an organization to think and act in a certain way, it means that the leaders work with the organizational culture (Rother, 2016). The conclusion is that self-leadership is obtained within the organization by managers delegating responsibilities and giving mandate to their employees and thereby a circle of trust is created.

7 Discussion

In the concluding chapter, there is a discussion about the study's results and conclusions as well as a method discussion. The chapter concludes with thoughts on proposals for further research.

7.1 Result discussion

The authors recommend the interviewed organizations to, after the pandemic, identify sustainable working methods that promote health and quality in work. Five themes have been suggested to focus on: Mindset & Personal Development, Strategy & Planning, Digitalization & Customer need, Leadership & Culture and Communication.

Mindset & Personal Development

Keywords that have been recognized during the study are: togetherness, self-leadership, active and patient listening, self-perception of the leaders.

Leaders should consider the urgency of the situation, act efficiently and learn to cope with uncertainty and remain open-minded to make the most necessary adaptive adjustments to handle the crises (Hadley et al., 2011). Chan & Drasgow (2001) stresses the fact that leading a crisis requires extraordinary physical, technical, social and emotional skills from a leader which all leaders are not able to handle. During a high degree of urgency, leaders do not have time to learn new skills, therefore they should reach out to individuals with relevant knowledge and show willingness to learn from others and aim towards self-improvement (Chiu, Owens, & Tesluk, 2016). Implementing and working with coaching and mentorship to support leaders and employees could help them reflect consciously in order to make sustainable decisions.

Strategy & Planning

Keywords that have been recognized during the study are: focus on production, linking to a higher purpose, ability to interpret perspectives from outside-in and inside-out, communicate clearly, establish common ground rules and work smarter.

Liker (2009) addresses the importance of continuously searching for the root causes to the problem that drives the learning within the organization by reflecting and continuously improving. By asking five why and working with continuous improvements leaders could be able to work through and find root-causes to problems (Rother, 2013). The organizations need to continue to follow up the key indicators that were used pre- and during the pandemic in order to get the different perspectives on how the pandemic has affected the organization and the customers.

Digitalization & Customer need

Keywords that have been recognized during the study are: innovation, entrepreneurial mindset, creativity, common digital platforms. Digital on-boarding for managers during the pandemic has been a challenge. In order to work smarter the organization should focus on doing things right and not only focus on doing the right things (Liker, 2009). Collaboration with the customers, suppliers and stakeholders requires the organizations to work with digital transformation. This means the organizations need to create digital ways and methods to strengthen work and communication processes, both internally and externally that enable the creation of new business models and customer offerings. Profitability that focuses on delivering service and products that meet the customers' needs always creates a win-win for the organization and the customer (Bergman & Klefsjö, 2012). Innovation is about solving problems and creating value for the customers and is connected to the leadership, the direction of the organization as well as the customers' needs. Successful work with innovation happens when employees are involved in the purpose, understand it and work purpose driven in order to perform. Leaders need to foster safety, whereby deliberately expressing opinions and engaging in debates is seen as constructive and contribution is shared. In order to think differently the organization needs to bring under the spotlight ideas that did not exist. Diversity is the centre of creativity, leading to fluency and flexibility of ideas. Collective contributions are a far greater asset to innovate and a true enabler to problem solving.

Leadership & Culture

Keywords that have been recognized during the study are: common vision, trust, empathy, building trust, news digital interactions.

Liker (2009) addresses that the organizations should work to develop and direct the whole organization towards a common goal that is larger than making profits. The authors believe that this is the way for achieving healthy organizations. By aligning organizational strategies with personal values the organization may excel to a higher maturity level. In order to create a culture based on strategic development and continuous improvement and to better meet the customer needs, Bergman & Klefsjö (2012) underlines the importance of accepting failure within the organization. Without failure the process of change will be difficult to apply since failure creates experience and thus learning what is necessary in order to create improvements and also work with innovation. When filtering down, leadership is all about two parts: first, leading the self and others and second, leading in the context of the role. It is the context that makes the leadership unique. The difference now is that we understand the context of digital, the context of ambiguity, the context of disruption. All of those things drive a lead for leaders to really be clear on purpose and vision, make sure that it's aligned with where the business is trying to go. Agility and flexibility is much more important now in order to manage and tolerate risks as well as having confidence to learn, adapt and the overall self awareness. It's important to understand the difference between the leaders themselves, in the context they operate in and the skills and mindsets they need to deal with and be prepared for future unexpected events like the pandemic.

Communication

Keywords that have been recognized during the study are: new digital communication channels, multiply communication by a significant factor, transparency.

Bundy et al., (2017) emphasizes the importance of the leaders working on the perceptions of the crisis from within and outside of their organizations. By showing empathy signaling that they are caring and concerned with people's distress and communicating in a timely,

transparent and optimistic way, the leaders can help alleviate the anxiety of the employees and project confidence that the organization will find a way through the crisis.

7.2 Discussion about the thesis contribution to the society

Based on the results from the interviews with the leaders and the digital survey with the employees, the authors have observed a clear pattern between leadership, direction of the organization and customer's needs. By explaining the profitability not only as a measurement for maximizing revenue balancing costs the authors recommend it should rather be motivated as a value-creating effect sustainable over time. By connecting the three elements, leadership, direction of the organization and customer's needs the organizations can identify the most important factors that create true value for them and thereby see the real effects that are sustainable over time.

Profitability as a value creating effect sustainable over time



Figure 6. A model created by the authors to explain profitability as a value creating effect sustainable over time connected by the three elements leadership, direction of the organization and customer need.

Based on the results from interviews with the leaders and the digital survey answered by the employees, it clearly sends an indication that the leadership needs to be more health

enhancing in order for the organizations to feel in balance to be able to meet the needs of the employees and the customers. The authors therefore recommend organizations in general and the government to present key indicators that induce education and coaching regarding mental and physical health at workplaces. The experience observed from the leaders and the employees should be taken into account as a valuable learning experience and thus help other institutions to work towards a health oriented organizational culture.

7.3 Method discussion

The decision to choose a qualitative approach was based on the authors' belief and perception to get the best reliable data and result based on open-ended questions from the interview guide and from the digital survey. By having a one-on-one digital dialogue with the leaders based on openness and authenticity, a mutual trust and understanding was created by allowing the interviewees to freely answer the questions on camera and on the digital survey. Thus the authors were able to get a clear understanding and picture of their situation. Critique of qualitative research has been preceded by four concerns: Quality research is far too subjective, difficulties in replicating an investigation, problem with generalization and lack of transparency (Bryman, 2011).

One reflection and learning is that the digital survey containing 12 questions required more time to complete. The digital survey platform, Survey monkey estimated a result of 6 minutes completion of the 12 questions. The feedback from the employees was that a minimum of 10 minutes were needed to complete all 12 questions.

The procedure of sending out the questions in forehand might have led to a loss of spontaneity during the interview but on the other hand the leaders have had the ability to reflect on the questions in advance due to their busy time-frame.

7.4 Further research

For further research four areas of interest have been identified:

1. The dynamics between stability and change has been more crucial during the pandemic. It would be interesting to look further on stability and change and question how stability

and change as potential synergetic allies could bring about improvements in frameworks and management models to lead and govern through rapid changes.

2. As revealed in the thesis, finding smart ways to work and self leadership has been important for the leaders during the pandemic. Increased demands on delivery both internally and externally, increased workload and lack of time to reflect on the decisions made, place higher demands on working smarter. An interesting question here would be to study what concepts and mental models could be used to better utilize the ability to solve problems or better handle challenges. The aim would be to find concepts and mental models that would help leaders balance traditional leadership with self-leadership.

3. Quality- and innovation management are both different parts of the same coin. It would therefore be interesting to research further on how quality management and innovation management can overlap one another and be used in organizations with the focus on increased sustainable value creation for the customer. The aim here would be partly to find the intersection between quality management and innovation and find out what the organizations and the customers think and feel when they hear the words: quality, innovation and sustainability.

4. A wider systems perspective is needed when creating value for the organization, the customers and the stakeholders. Therefore, it would be interesting to study how quality management could evolve even further by taking the step from advocating to applying systems perspective.

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9 Appendices

Appendix 1: Interview guide for the leaders in English

Develop a committed leadership

1. What positive effects has the pandemic contributed to your work?
2. What challenges has the pandemic brought to your work?
3. Have employees' needs and behaviors changed during the pandemic? If yes, in what way? If not, please describe why?
4. How can leaders support employees to work for continuous improvement?
5. How has your leadership developed?
6. Has your motivation and participation in employees been affected during the pandemic? If yes, describe in which way. If not, describe why.
7. Has your leadership changed since the advent of the pandemic? If yes, in what way? If not, describe why?
8. How has the pandemic affected the organization's vision, values, and business idea and business communication? And is it the same for employees as for the customers?
9. Has the pandemic led you to take new directions in goals and strategies in your own organization? If yes, describe in what way? If not, describe why?

Let everybody be committed

10. How are organizational values and vision communicated to employees?
11. Have there been conditions for creating participation during the pandemic? If yes, how was participation created? If not, describe why not.
12. What does self leadership mean to you?
13. How have employees been involved in and contributed to the organization continuing forward during the pandemic?
14. Have digital platforms created opportunities in collaboration between the employees? If yes, describe in what ways? If not, describe why.
15. Has the organization been able to benefit from internal competencies during the pandemic in order to be able to work forward? If yes, in what way? If not, describe why.
16. Have employees' needs and behavior changed during the pandemic? If yes, describe in what way.
17. How can employees help the management to continuously improve the organization?

Focus on customer

18. Have customers' needs and behavior changed during the pandemic? If yes, describe in what way.
19. Have digital platforms created opportunities in collaboration with the customers? If yes, describe in what ways? If not, describe why.

20. Has the pandemic contributed to new types of customers looking for you, or have you found other customer segments that may be of interest to your organization? If yes, describe why. If not, describe why?

Improve continuously

21. Do you think that the pandemic has been a catalyst in thinking new and working with continuous improvements? If yes, describe why. If not, describe why.
22. What focus has been important during the pandemic, to do the right things or do things right? Please describe.
23. Do you capture impulses such as ideas, deviations and improvement proposals during the pandemic? If yes, how do you do it? If not, describe why not.

Base decisions of facts

24. What does the concept of profitability mean for you and your organization?
25. Do you measure customer satisfaction and employee satisfaction? If yes, how do you measure these during the pandemic?
26. Which indicators do you consider to be the most prioritized within your organization in order to be able to measure, follow up and constantly improve during the pandemic and beyond.

Work with processes

27. Have you changed your working methods and structures used toward external customers and towards internal employees? How and in what ways have you changed these?

Create clear and transparent communications- and information channels

28. What new channels have you identified to inform and communicate to your employees and customers?

Appendix 2: Intervju guide for the leaders in Swedish

Utveckla ett engagerat ledarskap

1. Vilka positiva effekter har pandemin bidragit till i ditt arbete?
2. Vilka utmaningar har pandemin fört med sig i ditt arbete?
3. Har medarbetarnas behov och beteenden förändrats under pandemin? Om ja, på vilket sätt? Om nej, beskriv gärna varför.
4. Hur kan ledarna stötta medarbetarna att arbeta med ständig förbättring?
5. Hur har ditt ledarskap utvecklats?
6. Har din motivation och delaktighet till medarbetarna påverkats under pandemin? Om ja, beskriv på vilket sätt. Om nej, beskriv varför.
7. Har ledarskapet förändrats sedan pandemins uppkomst? Om ja, på vilket sätt? Om nej, beskriv varför?
8. Hur har pandemin påverkat organisationens vision, värderingar, affärsidé och affärskommunikation? Och är det samma för anställda som för kunderna?

9. Har pandemin lett till att ni har fått ta nya inriktningar i mål och strategier i den egna organisationen? Om ja, på vilket sätt? Om nej, beskriv gärna varför?

Skapa förutsättningar för delaktighet

10. Hur kommuniceras organisationens värderingar och vision ut till medarbetarna?
11. Har det funnits förutsättningar för att skapa en delaktighet under pandemin? Om ja, hur har delaktighet skapats? Om nej, beskriv gärna varför.
12. Vad betyder självledarskap för dig?
13. Hur har medarbetarna varit delaktiga i och bidragit till att organisationen fortsatt framåt under pandemin?
14. Har digitala plattformar skapat möjligheter i samarbete mellan de anställda? Om ja, beskriv på vilket sätt. Om nej, förklara varför?
15. Har organisationen kunnat dra nytta av den interna kompetensen under pandemin för att kunna arbeta framåt? Om ja, på vilket sätt? Om nej, beskriv gärna varför.
16. Har anställdas behov och beteende förändrats under pandemin? Om så är fallet, beskriv på vilket sätt?
17. Hur kan medarbetarna hjälpa ledningen att ständigt förbättra organisationen?

Sätta kunden i centrum

18. Har kundens behov och beteenden förändrats under pandemin? Om ja, beskriv på vilket sätt?
19. Har digitala plattformar skapat möjligheter i samarbete med kunderna? Om ja, beskriv på vilket sätt. Om nej, förklara varför?
20. Har pandemin bidragit till att nya typer av kunder sökt sig till er, eller att ni har hittat andra kundsegment som kan vara av intresse för er organisation? Om ja, beskriv varför?

Arbeta ständigt med förbättringar

21. Upplever ni att pandemin har varit en katalysator i att tänka om och tänka nytt och jobba med ständiga förbättringar? På vilket sätt? Om nej, beskriv varför.
22. Vilket fokus har varit viktigt under pandemin, att göra rätt saker eller att göra saker rätt? Vänligen beskriv.
23. Fångar ni upp impulser som idéer, avvikelser, förbättringsförslag under pandemin? Om ja, hur hanterar ni impulser för förändringar som ägt rum under pandemin? Om nej, beskriv varför.

Basera beslut på fakta

24. Vad betyder begreppet lönsamhet för dig och din organisation?
25. Mäter ni kundnöjdhet och medarbetarnöjdhet? Om ja, hur har ni mätt dessa under pandemin?
26. Vilka indikatorer anser ni är mest prioriterade inom er organisation för att kunna mäta, följa upp och ständigt förbättra under pandemin och framåt?

Arbeta med processer

27. Har ni förändrat era arbetssätt, er struktur och era metoder gentemot extern kund och gentemot interna medarbetare? Hur och på vilket sätt har ni förändrat dessa?

Skapa tydliga och transparenta kommunikations- och informationskanaler

28. Vilka nya kommunikationskanaler har ni identifierat för att kunna informera och kommunicera till era medarbetare och kunder under Covid 19?

Appendix 3: Interview guide for change management and neuroleadership expert

1. What skills and mindsets do leaders need to acquire to cope with the kind of challenge such as the Covid-19? Please describe why you think of those specific skills and mindsets?
2. How can leaders develop their mindset in order to keep up and be one step ahead with unexpected changes such as the pandemic has implied?
3. What attributes do you suggest companies and clients should pay attention to during the pandemic in order to sustain competitiveness in the market?
4. What communication channels do you think and predict will be of major importance for an organization since the pandemic started?
5. How can a company maintain continuous improvements and continuous learning in the organization when the home office is now remote during the pandemic?
6. How can the leaders create an inclusive organizational culture when the workplace has shifted from the office to remote?
7. How can a company maintain an inclusive organizational culture when the workplace has shifted from the office to remote?
8. What focus has been important during the pandemic, to do the right things or to do the things right? Please describe.

Appendix 4: Interview guide for executive coaching expert

1. What is the core essence in the LOTS(R) model according to you?
2. What does self leadership mean to you? Is there any difference with self leadership whether you are an employee or a leader?
3. How do you create prerequisites for engagement according to you?
4. How do you develop engaged leadership during the pandemic according to you?
5. What do you consider is continuous improvements from an Outside-In and Inside-Out perspective?

6. How is the concept “customer” defined according to LOTS(R)? What relation according to LOTS(R) has the customers towards an organization?
7. How does coaching leadership promote the development of an organization according to you?

Appendix 5: Interview guide for innovation expert

1. Which determinant factors are required according to you in order to create innovation and future focus within an organization?
2. Based on the 8 innovation principles, what/which of these do you consider as most critical in order for an organization to be competitive and profitable in the market?
 1. Value Creating
 2. Future focused leader
 3. Strategic direction
 4. Culture
 5. Explore inner insights
 6. Managing uncertainty
 7. Adaptable approaches and structures
 8. Systems Thinking (comprehensive view)
3. What does innovation mean to you? Do concretize with examples from real life experience.
4. How is an innovation culture created?
5. What challenges do you see when working with innovation based on the maturity level the organization currently is in during Covid 19?
6. Is creativity a prerequisite when working systematically with innovation? If yes, please describe with concrete examples from real life experience.
7. What qualities do you see in a leader that promotes innovation within the organization?
8. What prerequisites need to be in place before introducing innovation within an organization?
9. How should one maintain a systematic innovation work within an organization when the prerequisites are in place (working with processes, agile working methods, engaged leadership, create conditions for engagement, put customers in focus, base decisions on facts, and continuously work with improvements)?

**Appendix 6: Interview guide for the employees in English, Survey Monkey
April 2021.**

How the Covid-19 pandemic has affected the leadership and the direction of the organization.

1. What positive effects has the pandemic contributed to your work?

2. What challenges has the pandemic brought to your work?

3. Has there been preconditions for creating participation during the pandemic? If yes, how was participation created? If not, describe why not?

4. What does self leadership mean to you?

5. Have customer needs and behavior changed during the pandemic? If yes, describe in what way.

6. Have digital platforms created opportunities in collaboration with the customers? If yes, describe in what ways? If not, describe why so?

7. Do you think that the pandemic has been a catalyst in thinking new and working with continuous improvements? If yes, describe why? If not, describe why so?

8. Do you capture impulses such as ideas, deviations and improvement proposals during the pandemic? If yes, describe how? If not, describe why so?

9. What does the concept of profitability mean for you and your organization?

10. What do you consider is most vital to prioritize within your organization in order to measure, follow up and to continuously improve during the pandemic and forward?

11. Has the organisation changed its working methods and its structures towards its customers and its employees? If yes, how have you as an employee been able to impact these changes? If no, describe why not?

12. What communication- and information channels have you used to communicate with your colleagues, managers and customers during the pandemic?

Klar

Tillhandahålls av



Appendix 7: Interview guide for the employees in Swedish, Survey Monkey April 2021.

Hur Covid-19 pandemin har påverkat ledarskapet och dess riktning av organisationen.

1. Vilka positiva effekter har pandemin bidragit till i ditt arbete?

2. Vilka utmaningar har pandemin fört med sig i ditt arbete?

3. Har det funnits förutsättningar för att vara delaktig under pandemin? Om ja, hur har delaktighet skapats? Om nej, beskriv gärna varför.

4. Vad betyder självledarskap för dig?

5. Har kundens behov och beteenden förändrats under pandemin? Om ja, beskriv på vilket sätt?

6. Har digitala plattformar skapat möjligheter i samarbete med kunderna? Om ja, beskriv på vilket sätt. Om nej, förklara varför?

7. Upplever du att pandemin har varit en katalysator i att tänka nytt och jobba med ständiga förbättringar? Om ja, på vilket sätt? Om nej, beskriv varför?

8. Fångar ni upp impulser som idéer, avvikelser, förbättringsförslag under pandemin? Om ja, hur hanterar ni impulser för förändringar som ägt rum under pandemin? Om nej, beskriv varför.

9. Vad betyder begreppet lönsamhet för dig och din organisation?

10. Vad anser du är mest prioriterat att mäta, följa upp och ständigt förbättra i er organisation under pandemin och framåt?

11. Har organisationen förändrat arbetssätt, strukturer och metoder gentemot de externa kunderna och gentemot de interna medarbetarna? Om ja, hur har du kunnat påverka dessa förändringar. Om nej, beskriv varför.

12. Vilka kommunikations- och informationskanaler har ni använt er utav för att kommunicera och informera internt med era kollegor och chefer samt med externa kunder, under pandemin?

Klar

Tillhandahålls av
 SurveyMonkey

Appendix 8: Results from interviews with two CEOs, one manager and the employees

How has the Covid-19 pandemic affected the leadership and the direction of the organization?

CEO and branch manager answers

Positive effects

A sense of togetherness.
 A stronger purpose driven focus.
 More time for private life due to working remotely.
 Self- leadership in focus.
 Time to reflect has been important.
 Decisions are made faster.
 Equal conditions when working remote due to the pandemic restrictions.
 Stronger personal commitment.
 Stronger personal responsibility.
 Higher self-awareness.
 Being part of the whole.
 Faster transformation to the digital world.

Profitability described by the CEOs and branch manager:
 Maximizing value for every crown spent. Consists of the 2 indicators:
 1. Utility measuring the user satisfaction. Time efficiency for our users.
 2. User satisfaction towards customers.
 Adapt and adjust daily operations with customer safety and need in mind.
 (CEO 1) That is the effect of good work we have done.
 (CEO 2) This means that our value creation pays off in the form of economic profitability.
 Essential key indicators to measure, steer and follow up:
 IT-index.
 Leadership index.
 User satisfaction towards customers.
 Good management.
 Time saving versus costs.
 Adapt and adjust daily operations with customer safety and need in mind.

Digital communication channels internally:
 Intranet app.

Employees (leaders) answers

Positive effects

A sense of stronger togetherness.
 Stronger focus on production.
 More flexibility due to a balanced private/professional life.
 Self- leadership in focus.
 More time to reflect.
 Online meetings are more democratic. In meetings where everyone is online, people talk in turn. In meetings where some are gathered in one room and some are not, the conversation in the room can take place on the side of the meeting agenda itself.
 Full focus on the production.
 Easier with participation in digital workshops since everyone is at one place at the same time, saving time and costs.
 Digitalization has created incentives for the organization to make successive progress.
 Faster transformation to the digital world.
 Increase in preventive work by working proactively.
 Digital services used more by customers.
 Increase in digital communication with customers.
 Active listening and patient listening.
 Increase in digitalization.
 Work smarter rather than faster.
 At least 80 % meetings online – save time.
 Find new efficient ways to work.
 Improvement of self-service flow, bookings online.
 The pandemic has accelerated a lot of internal organizational development.
 The pandemic has contributed to enabling more digital features for the users.
 The organization has had to work smarter during the pandemic in order to deliver quality services to the customers.
 Employees have been engaged, adaptive and adjustive to maintain the operational service towards the customers.
 Profitability described by the employees (leaders):

Microsoft Teams.
 Weekly internal information letters by email.
 Unit meetings have increased to increase the flow of communication.
 Skype.
 WhatsApp.
 SMS.
 Phone calls.
 Confluence (digital platform).
 SharePoint.
 Infocura (Intranet).
 Facebook Jammer (Intranet).

Digital communication channels with customers:
 External homepage.
 Microsoft Teams for external meetings online.
 Digital signage.
 Broadcasting online.
 Posters at the clinic.
 Facebook.
 Local newspapers.
 Video meetings.
 Instagram.
 Apps for external customer use.

Challenges

Creating trust due to lack of social interactions.
 Lack of physical social contact.
 Internal communication and the need for active listening.
 Difficult to notice signs of psychosocial illness working remote.
 Creating effective teams remotely.
 Lack of micro-pauses leading to physical ergonomic health problems.
 More meetings scheduled after one another which leads to less time to recover.
 Hard to solve and discuss complex problems.
 On-boarding for new employees to get the right introduction and support from the organization.
 Internal digital competence to support the customers.
 Find new smarter digital channels to meet the customer needs.

Create value and benefits for our customers.
 Indicators mentioned by the employees as important to measure profitability:
 Most important is first employers health/well-being, then leadership and commitment and last customer focus and financial results.

Digital communication channels internally:
 Intranet app.
 Microsoft Teams.
 Weekly internal information letters by email.
 Unit meetings have increased to increase the flow of communication.
 Skype.
 WhatsApp.
 SMS.
 Phone calls.
 Confluence (digital platform).
 SharePoint.
 Infocura (Intranet).
 Facebook Jammer (Intranet).

Digital communication channels with customers:
 External homepage
 Microsoft Teams for external meetings online
 Facebook Jammer (Intranet)
 Digital signage
 Broadcasting online
 Posters at the clinic
 Facebook
 Local newspapers
 Video meetings
 Instagram
 Apps for external customer use

Challenges

To gain and create trust.
 Staffing concerns due to stronger health restrictions during the pandemic.
 Leadership is very invisible.

Difficult to create a sense of belonging and maintain social relations.

Lead without physical encounter.

Keeping the spirits up.

Difficult to notice signs of psychosocial illness working remote.

Creating effective teams remotely.

Lack of spontaneous meetings where creative ideas are brought up.

Lack of micro-pauses leading to physical ergonomic health problems.

More meetings scheduled after one another which leads to less time to recover.

Hard to solve and discuss complex problems.

On-boarding for new employees to get the right introduction and support from the organization.

Challenging to find creative solutions.

Faster transformation to the digital world.

The increased use of digital infrastructure has led to shortage of technological capacity and also an increased demand for digital user competence.

Forced to think differently when working conditions have changed.

Lack of time for continuous improvement.

Creativity has been required to spark innovative ideas.

New ways to create relations.

Be flexible and adapt to changing situations.

Thinking new has been crucial but with less focus on continuous improvement during the pandemic.

Digital services used more by customers.

Increase in digital communication with customers.

Customers are more concerned and require more information.

Customers require more help and targeted support to use digital platforms.

Lack efficient ways for digital cooperation with customer/stakeholders.

Digital platform has to be more user- friendly.

The customer can constantly influence. But we do not always get the dialogue with customers that make us understand their needs. We don't always know what we are doing right or wrong.

<p>Significant shift in customer service from physical to digital.</p> <p>Increased volume of customer inquiries have escalated the workload and thereby the need to ensure staffing.</p> <p>Continue to work with emphasis on inclusion, dialogue and collaboration internally/externally.</p>

Appendix 9: Results from interviews with three experts

How has the Covid-19 pandemic affected the leadership and the direction of the organization from an outside perspective?

Experts

Ability to interpret perspectives from outside-in and inside-out is important.

Communicate clearly based on the current situation, also what's required to adapt to the new situation.

Linking to a higher purpose.

Act empathetically.

Be vulnerable and honest.

Self-leadership.

Mindset focused on the higher purpose (the bigger vision of the organization).

Create a sense of urgency.

Curious mindset- listening and observing, lead with curious questions.

Developing a collective mindset among the team with focus on the higher purpose of the organization.

Make conscious decisions.

Engaged leadership.

Identify the root-cause of the problem in order to find the best suited solution.

Establish common ground rules.

Honest and genuine open questions and active listening.

The coaching leadership is based on curiosity and focus on the adept.

Future focused leadership creates an innovation culture.

Trust based leadership.

Courageous leadership that protects the culture that is entrepreneurial.

Entrepreneurial leadership.

Situational leadership based on the 8 innovation principles.

Time for reflection.

Self-confidence, dare to ask questions and actively listen to the employees.

Trust in people around me.

“Necessity is the mother of invention” for change and innovation.

Casual conversations that would spark a new idea have been missing due to remote work.

Continuous improvement needs to become part of the culture.

Be curious and monitor external influences.

"We are part of a larger system than ourselves" both in private life and professional life.

Togetherness in the service of a higher purpose. The higher purpose can create the sense that we are in it together.

Make sure that the employee's voice is heard- leaders need to multiply that by a significant factor.

Both doing the right thing and doing things right has been important.

Phase 1 of the pandemic: Doing the right things was at premium early in the pandemic.

Phase 2 of the pandemic: To do things right came later. Finding the balance between those two is important.

The term Agility means following up continuously. Asking: Are we heading in the right direction, or what's going on? The more follow ups the more agile.

Systematic and system focus is needed to create innovation and future focus. System focus means the ability to create innovation within an organization. Ability to capture trends and weak signals.

Important to talk about a sense of urgency. What is important in the long- run? By looking up, you can work incrementally and work with continuous improvements.

The organizational focus is to create value within the organization and externally towards the customers.

Competitiveness and profitability is prominent in different ways in different organizations.

Build teams and do things together remotely.

The system perspective is important.

During the pandemic: production focus was most prioritized with the strategic direction in mind.

After the pandemic: Evaluate, reflect and act according to the new direction of the organization.

Mindset that acts. Experimental approach.

Requires several communication channels, double or triple it, everyone doesn't respond to only one channel. Also increase the frequency.

Active and patient listening is needed more during the pandemic because of remote work.

The digital divide is creating exclusion and social division.

The customer is the organization's reason for existence.

Look at what problems we have to solve. How can we get a closer understanding of the problem, how can we learn more from the customer. Find new ways to communicate and get the employees involved.