The Human Touch in A Digitalized Business World

A Qualitative Study of How the Digital Transformation in Business Impacts the Emotional Interactions Between Leaders and Followers

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Term: VT21
Program: Leadership and Management in International Contexts
Subject: Degree Project
Level: Master
Course code: 4FE41E
“People will forget what you said, people will forget what you did, but people will never forget how you made them feel”

- Maya Angelou
Abstract

Linnaeus University Kalmar
School of Business and Economics
Leadership and Management in international Contexts 60 credits

Title The Human Touch in A Digitalized Business World

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Date May 2021

Number of pages 80

Keywords Leadership, Relational Leadership, Emotional Value, Emotional Intelligence, Digitalization, Digital Transformation, Leaders, Followers

Due to today’s digital transformation, traditional ways of communication are increasingly replaced by virtual and digital communication channels. The challenge for leaders in this digital environment is consequently to reach out to their followers to the same extent as in physical meetings. Leadership is about influencing people to strive towards a desired direction and leaders’ aims are thereby to impact their followers both cognitively but also emotionally in order to stimulate motivation. Emotional intelligence revolves around the necessity of understanding and reading others’ emotions and how to act upon that in order to successfully interact with others. By reason of the current Covid-19 pandemic, we have the rare opportunity to explore the interaction between leaders and followers during the time of a global pandemic and understand how the accompanying social distance may impact the emotional aspects in leadership. The research question for this thesis is thereby: How can emotional value be created in the interaction between leaders and followers in today’s digitalized world? The theoretical framework that constitutes the basis of the thesis is divided into four main concepts which are: the relational perspective of leadership, emotional intelligence, creating emotional value and the digital transformation in the business world. The study has an exploratory purpose and is of a qualitative approach. In order to collect empirical data, semi-structured interviews were held with eight participants whereof four leaders and four followers. The findings could be divided into four themes which are: Human touch and individual need, Social skills and individual adaptation, Work satisfaction and motivation and Future strategies. The result of the study shows that emotional value is highly important in the interaction between leaders and followers in order to maintain engagement, satisfaction and motivation in a digital work environment. The conclusion is however that emotional value indeed can be created through digital communication but that it has to be created in a quite different way than in physical meetings.
Acknowledgments

We would like to take the opportunity to acknowledge everyone who contributed to making this degree project possible. Without the invaluable inputs, support and engagement from all of you, the final product would not have been the same.

To begin, we wish to extend our special thanks to our supervisor Mikael Lundgren who has coached us with worthwhile insights about leadership and thoughtful feedback on our work not only for this degree project, but throughout the entire program. Thank you! We also want to thank our examiner Krister Bredmar for inspiring seminars and great communication during the course which have contributed to and eased the process for us tremendously.

Continuously, we would like to show our highest gratitude to the participants of the study who has not only provided us with fruitful findings but also inspired us to dig even deeper into the research topic. Their enthusiastic approach to the study and their understanding of its importance definitely impacted us emotionally to engage in the project even more.

Finally, we would like to dedicate our deepest gratitude and love to our families and significant others who consistently supported us during this entire year. Our families for their continuous understanding and unconditional support and our boyfriends for standing by us during a year of long-distance relationship and while encouraging us to pursuing our goals and dreams.

Kalmar, May 28, 2021

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1 Introduction

This chapter starts with an introduction to the topic that is addressed in this thesis. Further on, the problem and relevance of the study is discussed followed by a presentation of the research question and research objective. The chapter ends with a brief outline of the thesis in order for the reader to easily orient in the continuing reading.

1.1 Background

A digital transformation can be seen all over the world today and the internet is the biggest contributor to this change. Traditional ways of communication are increasingly replaced by virtual and digital communication channels and having coworkers working from other continents is no longer unusual. In developed countries, the number of internet users increased by over 60 percent from 2005 to 2019 and today are more than 87 percent of the people in these countries using the internet (Johnson, 2021). The easy access to the internet has made online communication a first choice for many and Johnson says that billions of people have been helped staying connected despite social or geographical circumstances thanks to the internet. This digital transformation and growth of virtual communication can furthermore be seen in the business world. Leaders and managers are increasingly using digital tools rather than face-to-face meetings in their communication and a new way of interacting is consequently evolving. The new innovative techniques for communication with employees and the digitalization for improving the business operations is however not entirely optional but rather essential in order for businesses to stay alive in today’s competitive business world. To meet the modern demands of customers these days, companies must keep up with the digital change or risk getting left behind, and this is why digital transformation matters in today’s business world (The Edge Markets, 2021).
Companies around the world are demonstrably adopting the digital approach in order to stay in the competing front but this development is for most business leaders, given. Statistics of the phenomenon was recently presented in an article of Forbes Magazine and according to the article, up to 70 percent of companies either already obtain a digital transformation strategy or are developing one. Moreover, 52 percent of market managers reveal that their top strategic focus is to drive growth through digital transformation and 68 percent of business leaders around the globe are saying that the future can be found in humans and artificial intelligence working together (Morgan, 2019). In conclusion, today’s world seems to surely support the ongoing digitalization and strive towards a less socialized business world and we could likely expect to see this development steadily proceed for some time to come.

As a catalyst to the already fast paced development, the current Covid-19 pandemic that put the world “on hold” in the beginning of 2020, has speeded up the digital communication to mind-blowing rates (Borrett, 2020). As the pandemic covered the entire planet, the freedom of choice that many of us took for granted is no longer a given option and the ease to travel across the continent for a few hours meeting is a past luxury. The pandemic restrictions have consequently forced many businesses to adapt to remote work almost exclusively and the challenge is real for many businesses in this sense. A crucial component to keep the business alive during the pandemic has demonstrably been to manage the digital communication and even the people who resolutely stood by the traditional communication channels and embraced the face-to-face meetings before, have today been forced to cave in for the pandemic in order to keep their businesses going. The abrupt change from one day going to the office to the next day being deported to work from home has consequently put a high pressure on today’s leaders who now are expected to guide their followers through this “new normal” and run their businesses from a distance.
Murray said in April 2020 already that throughout the upcoming Covid-19 pandemic, leadership will be a central and crucial component for companies and most likely one of the most tested skills during the pandemic (Murray, 2020). The challenge for leaders in this digital environment is however not only to manage the digital communication tools that now solely constitute the connection to their followers but also to reach out to and motivate their followers to the same extent through these digital channels as in the face-to-face meetings. Abraham Maslow, the American psychologist who developed the five-step hierarchy of needs that is used to study human motivation, says that when our vital physiological and safety needs are fulfilled, needs of love, affection and belongingness emerge (Maslow, 1943). This means that in a well physiological state, when we are not suffering from hunger and do not feel that our safety is threatened, our highest prioritized human needs revolve around social affection and emotional fulfillment. Now, in the social restricted reality during this Covid-19 pandemic but also in an expected future state as we are heading towards a more digitized business world, we do not meet in the workplace in the same obvious way and these needs consequently have to be fulfilled through digital communication channels instead. The question is however if this is possible. Will a remote work state with a minimum of physical contact let our social and emotional needs be fulfilled and more precisely, can employees be emotionally impacted and thus motivated to the same extent as in face-to-face meetings? We believe the answers to this lies in the practice of leadership and from Murray’s (2020) statement in the beginning of the Covid-19 pandemic, she thinks so as well.

Leadership is about influencing people to work and strive towards a desired direction and leaders’ aims are thereby to impact their followers both on a cognitive level but also emotionally in order to stimulate their motivation (Cameron & Green, 2020). Though, while the cognitive abilities were almost solely in focus in this sense until just recent years, we can see a big change in this area today and a well discussed topic in business magazines and forums.
all over the world is now emotional intelligence. Other than pointing out that emotional intelligence is acknowledged as a primary factor for success (Murray, 2020; Wiman, 2017), the topic is often seen in contexts revolving leadership and discussions usually regard how leaders can be smart and lead with their emotions. It is thereby not unusual to read about this “new” intelligence as a crucial leadership trait and which is constantly empathized as a key to good relationships in business. For example, McClesky (2014) says that leadership is an “emotional process” and that emotional intelligence thus plays a role in effective leadership. Murray (2020) is of similar opinions and talks about how leaders’ ability to change behavior in order to adapt their leadership to different circumstances depends on their level of emotional intelligence. She gives examples of how leaders can learn how to make behavioral shifts in order to tailor their leadership to changing circumstances and her arguments are all based on the sense of emotional intelligence. Moreover, a research survey from 2019 asking when emotional intelligence will become a “must-have” skill in business shows that 36 percent of executives around the globe estimate it to be one to three years. The phenomenon in this article is simply explained as the capability to understand and manage emotions in order to improve interpersonal relationships (Statista, 2020).

Emotional intelligence demonstrably revolves around the necessity of understanding and reading others’ emotions and behavior and how to act upon that in order to successfully interact with others. We also know that the emotional factors play a big role in the basic needs for human motivation (Maslow, 1943) which can be confirmed in how many requested competencies in business today are connected to emotional intelligence. At the same time, Mikael Klintman, professor in sociology, says in an interview that it is in our nature as human beings to have a strong drive to belong to a group and that sociology research shows that we are created to quickly snap up social codes in our surroundings in order to fit into groups as we have a need of social
affirmation (Lingärde, 2018). To be emotionally impacted is thereby essential for people in order to feel satisfied and thus motivated in their work and leadership is the relationship which within this value is created and delivered. But is it possible to practice the same leadership and thus create the same emotional value in a digitalized reality as when being physically present?

These observations of today’s situation enticed us to dig deeper into the topic and thereby conduct this study to explore what effect the ongoing digitalization of today’s business can have on the quality of leadership. By reason of the countrywide lockdowns and mutual social distance that we are facing during this year of global pandemic, we are given the rare opportunity to explore this phenomenon further and thus get a sneak peak of how business life could look like in just a couple of years if digitalization continues to evolve at the same pace as today. Because even though the current “stay-home” situation, that we today are forced to adapt to, may not last forever, the rapid pace of digital transformation in the business world indicates that we likely can expect to see a similar way of working in the near future. And although we look positively on the evolution of two interesting areas in business; the digital transformation and the emotional intelligence, a correlation of them may not result in a favorable outcome. Because given that leaders both influence their followers by emotional attributes but also that they understand and tailor their leadership style after emotional states and needs among their followers, the social distance and the digitized work environment will most likely affect the leadership.

1.2 Problem Discussion and Relevance of Study
In a relational perspective, leadership is not an act that leaders alone practice on their followers but rather something that occurs in the interaction between them two. This means that leadership can occur in any direction and Uhl-Bien (2006) describes this relational leadership as sometimes more of a mutual influence process rather than an act of leaders leading followers. In this sense,
leadership can be successful only if the interaction between leaders and followers are as well and it is thereby not an independent competence of the individual. Yet, it relies highly on interpersonal and behavior skills.

As discussed in the background, emotional intelligence has been detected as an essential trait among leaders and it relates to the relational skills in the sense of understanding and managing emotions in order to improve interpersonal relationships (Statista, 2020). Cameron et al. (2020) says that leadership is about how leaders bring cognitive and emotional connection in order to make sense of the reality and in that way, influence their followers toward a desired direction. At the same time, emotional intelligence is also about the awareness of one’s own emotions in order to adjust and manage them to reach aimed goals and act in favorable ways. In leadership, this could be described as how leaders can tailor the leadership to their followers but also how they constantly radiate a self-awareness and “leader-aura” that impacts the followers positively (Bennis, 2009; De Pree, 2004). To this end, the essence of non-verbal communication, soft skills and emotional influence is demonstrably impacting the quality of leadership and it is for that reason not surprisingly that emotional intelligence is a highly empathized phenomenon in leadership research today. However, these interpersonal competences and relational qualities that define leadership also shows that leadership is highly dependent on personal interactions and atmospheres between people, something that simplest is achieved through face-to-face meetings in which non-verbal communication and soft skills can occur.

Moreover, research has shown that employees’ work performance can be directly connected to their emotional state and that positive and optimistic emotions then have favored their work (Walter, Cole & Humphrey, 2011). Li, Gupta, Loon & Casimir (2016) confirms these statements by explaining how the ability to understand others’ feelings by being observant of language, tone of voice, behavior and body language, makes it possible for leaders to behave
in a certain way that does not evoke negative feelings among their followers. Leadership is thereby about impacting the followers emotionally and instilling a well-being among them in order to gain trust and devotion. It is for instance about creating an emotional value that provides a reason for the followers to assimilate the goals and purposes. By doing so, a desired behavior among the followers can be gained and goals and visions can furthermore be achieved and realized. This emotional value is consequently depending on the relationships between leaders and followers and again, the interpersonal meetings are crucial.

The digitalization of today’s business world can in this sense be questioned whether it will have a positive impact on the leadership. Because how could leaders tailor their leadership to their followers when they cannot see what mood or behavior the followers are in when they turn off the web-camera? Moreover, how could leaders influence the atmosphere and create emotional value for their followers through e-mails and virtual meetings only? The social interactions that are crucial for leaders in order to know their follower’s levels of motivation and moreover, to impact their level of engagement, will unlikely appear in the same manner due to the digitalization. For these reasons, we aim to take the opportunity of today’s current pandemic and mutual social distance, to gain an understanding of what affect this social distance and digitalized communication could have on leadership and furthermore reflect upon what changes we thereby can expect to see in future leadership.

1.3 Research Question and Objective of Study

The purpose of this thesis is to explore the interaction between leaders and followers during the time of a global pandemic and understand how the accompanying social distance may impact the emotional aspects in leadership. To fulfill the purpose of the study, following research question are used:
How can emotional value be created in the interaction between leaders and followers in today's digitalized world?

The aim of this study is to, from both a leader and follower perspective, localize the emotional aspects within the relationship between leaders and followers that brings a value to the context and thus makes good leadership. The intention is to explore how the creation of this emotional value in digital communication differs from how it is created in the physical meetings and furthermore how that may impact the followers in their job. By conducting this study in today’s global pandemic and situation of mutual social distance, this thesis aims to contribute to a deeper understanding of how emotional value can be created in the digitalized world that we can predict in a near future.

1.4 Thesis Outline

In order to give the reader a good experience of this degree project, we aim to keep a clear and simple structure throughout the entire thesis. In that sense, this outline intends to brief the readers about the structure and thus provide an overview of what can be expected from the upcoming reading. The thesis consists of six chapters which is: Introduction, Literature review, Methodology, Findings and analysis, discussion and conclusion.

The first chapter aims to introduce the reader to the overall topic and by providing background information and discussing potential problem areas, intrigue to continuing reading. The initial problem and relevance of the study is further discussed followed by a presentation of the research question and the research objective.

Chapter two is a literature review and consists of the theoretical framework that covers the research area. This chapter has the purpose to clarify and explain the topic in hand and starts with describing the four concepts that the study is based upon. These are: The relational perspective of leadership,
Emotional intelligence, Creating emotional value and Digital transformation in the business world. Furthermore, it provides previous research about these four concepts in order to elaborate on what is already known about the research topic as well as to empathize the importance of further research.

The third chapter declares the methodology of the study and is thereby presenting the practical aspects of the study’s conduction. The chapter starts with elaborating on the study’s approach and design and continues with describing the practical actions regarding the empirical study such as data collection, sampling and conduction of the research. The chapter finishes up with declaring the considered ethical aspects as well as the limitations of the study and as a last part it discusses the credibility and dependability of the study.

The fourth chapter presents the findings of the empirical data. In this stage, the empirical material has been processed by us researchers and summarized in four different themes which thereby constitutes the findings of the study. The findings are objectively declared with the purpose to prepare the reader for the following discussion.

Chapter five consequently consists of a discussion about the findings and the chapter is for the readers’ convenience sectioned after the same themes as in the previous chapter. In this part, the findings are compared to and discussed in relation to the theoretical framework of the thesis. This chapter provides the overall result of the study and it consequently leads up to the final conclusion that is presented in the next and final chapter.

The sixth and last chapter constitute the conclusion of the study which is meant to answer the research question. In this chapter, key research findings as well as implications and limitations of the study are declared. Even reflections by the authors and suggestions for future research are discussed.
The thesis finishes up with a complete list of resources followed by the appendixes used in the project.

2 Literature Review

In the following chapter, the theoretical framework and previous research of the topic is presented. The chapter consists of four concepts which aim to clarify the research topic as well as working as a framework for the empirical research. The concepts are: The relational perspective of leadership, Emotional intelligence, Creating emotional value and Digital transformation in the business world. Under each section, previous research of these four concepts is also discussed in order to declare what is already known about the topic as well as to empathize the importance of further exploration.

The theoretical framework that constitutes the basis of this thesis is divided into four main concepts which are: the relational perspective of leadership, emotional intelligence, creating emotional value and the digital transformation in the business world. The interaction between leaders and followers is the target and focus of this study and the relational perspective of leadership is therefore essential to understand. The concept captures the area in which the research objective is ought to be found and is thereby important to elaborate on in this chapter. Moreover, as the study revolves around emotional value, it is relevant to be aware of the concept of emotional intelligence and thereafter understand how this intelligence can be used to motivate, impacting and thereby creating value for others. The two concepts: emotional intelligence and creating emotional value, are for that reason central pieces in this thesis and to clarify their roles and contribution further, they are given a section each in this theoretical chapter. Finally, to justify the last concept, the relevance of this study is to understand how these emotional aspects will come through in a digitalized work environment. The digital transformation in the business
world can be seen as the overall reason for this study to be conducted because without this digital change, our research question would not obtain the same relevance. Moreover, as the leadership-follower relationship we ought to explore mostly occurs in a business environment, it is essential to elaborate on today’s digital transformation of the business world before moving on to the empirical study in this project.

2.1 Leadership - The Relational Perspective
The signs of leadership lie in the social interaction between leaders and followers (De Pree, 2004). This is something that Uhl-Bien (2006) also mentions and elaborates further by describing that this view of leaders and followers can be seen through a relational perspective and which explains leadership as a social construction. In this sense, without followers there is no need for leaders. Leadership can be discussed in many ways and for instance what characteristics and social skills a good leader requires. We however want to focus on the concept that leadership is all about the social interactions between people. The positive effects of the interaction between leaders and followers are related to performance and can bring many great benefits and outcomes such as innovation and motivation for individuals and further on in whole organizations (Gerpott, Fasbender & Burmeister, 2020). To elaborate on this, our perception is that followers need to accept the leader in order to be influenced in the social interaction.

As mentioned before, leadership is a social construction and social process which creates a social collaboration that enables individuals to work together in connection (Cameron & Green 2020). This view of relational leadership is something that Uhl-Bien (2006) explains as a social influence process between leaders and followers and which involves emergent coordination by involving social order and changing attitudes and behavior etc. Furthermore, she also mentions that this perspective does not put leadership in a hierarchical role, instead it can be seen as something that occurs in relational dynamics in
organizations. In this sense, we think this relational perspective of leaders and followers can be an interesting perspective in relation to how we used to look at leadership back in the days. Then, leadership was influenced by a strong hierarchical view while in today’s environment, leadership is rather empathized as a social construction and expressing process.

Some important strengths related to leadership is to create connection and lead with authenticity which is achieved if the leader is committed and connected within the purpose of the followers (De Pree, 2004). Cameron & Green (2020) mentions that leaders who lead with relational authenticity lead with qualities such as awareness of others, acting with care, active listening, building community, showing empathy, embracing employees through their potential, inspiring with trust and acting respectfully. Furthermore, to build trust in social interactions between leaders and their followers, being authentic in interactions brings trust in the relationship (Gerpott et al., 2020).

Leaders also have some responsibility to deliver to their organizations in terms of financial health and in appropriated service, tools, products and all equipment that people in the organization need to be accountable for achievements including motivation and sensemaking to their work (De Pree, 2004). In this sense, Cameron and Green (2020) stresses that the old leadership that promotes inspiring visions is no longer the answer for motivation, performance and development today. They also say that new ways of thinking are now required and needed in order to deal with both interdependence, diversity, cross-cultural collaborations and increased meaning in our new ways of communication in the digital world (Cameron & Green, 2020). Through this, we believe that this relational view of leadership is something that can contribute to a foundation of deeper insights into what will be required of leaders and within the social interactions to followers, in this new way of removing the work environment.
2.2 Emotional Intelligence

Leaders have a highly significant role to play in all spheres of life and especially in the business world. Businesses and organizations can commit incredible achievements with the influence of a strong and successful leadership. A vital part in what has been noticed as successful leadership is emotional intelligence which has proven to play a big role in the effectiveness of leadership (Yadav & Lata, 2019). Yadav and Lata say that emotional intelligence moreover has been introduced recently as an interesting approach in business life. At this point, leadership has become more people oriented and focusing on social skills in order to gain incredible achievements and profits for the business and organizations. Ugoani, Amu & Kalu (2015) say that leaders with emotional social skills and intelligence seem to have the capacity to influence and inspire others, leading teams and catalyzing change in organizations. With that moreover, emotional intelligence has increasingly become a topic for educational and leadership research (Chen & Guo, 2020). Furthermore, this is something that has been highlighted in the last two decades regarding how emotional intelligence is appreciated in leadership. To elaborate, emotional intelligence is defined as the capability of localizing others’ feelings and emotions in order to understand how to guide personal thinking and actions (Yadav & Lata, 2019). By this sense, our assumption is that those benefits of this emotional impact and social skills from leaders, can be even more necessary to influence in today's digitalized environment.

Gardner (2002) mentions that for many centuries, our human knowledge did not have a scientific explanation to intelligence but used informal expressions like “talented” and “wise” or “stupid” and “unclever” when describing a person’s intellectual qualities. Later when the research about intelligence really took off in the beginning of the 20th century, focus was most on our cognitive ability. Scientists talked almost exclusively about the concept IQ and tools to measure intelligence and intelligence tests were invented. It was not until later that we started to really look at our emotional oriented traits as
valuable qualities as well (Gardner, 2002). By this sense, leaders who both have traits of emotional intelligence and are professional and emotionally stable, are more likely to cope with uncertainty and imperfections in the organization sphere since they are not critical and striving for a win-win situation (Yadav & Lata, 2019). To conclude, these traits of emotional intelligence combined with a radiation of stability and security within the profession could likely have a positive impact on the social interaction between followers and leaders.

Emotional intelligence can be defined as the traits of empathy and optimism, and in having a good self-awareness of one’s own emotional management (Yada & Lata, 2019). Moreover, the concept of emotional intelligence can also be seen as referring to the ability to recognize and regulate emotions in ourselves and in others (Ugoani et al., 2015). By this, we think this ability is something that may be important in a digital environment in order to maintain a good sense in social contact and increase understanding for each other. To elaborate on the phenomenon further, emotional intelligence can be described as the emotional oriented, mental abilities that constitute one part of the human being’s intelligence and which are said to come from the emotional part of our brain (Neale, Spencer-Arnell & Wilson, 2010). According to Kimber (2009), emotional intelligence is our ability to adjust and handle our feelings in different situations in order to achieve goals. She explains that emotional intelligence is a standard of one’s ability to express, experience, assess and adjust emotions in relation to intelligent thinking. Given this, the quality of these traits determines how well one manages different situations and interpersonal relationships for instance. Emotional intelligence is furthermore not the same as being nice, nor is it about the ability to release feelings. The concept is rather about controlling feelings in order to express them in an effective and appropriate way (Goleman, 1998). Moreover, emotional intelligence is not genetically given, and it is not something that evolves in an
early stage in life. In contrast to our cognitive traits, it is also said to be developed consistently throughout our life.

Yadav and Lata (2019) say that emotional intelligence also can be defined as a combination of non-cognitive skills, capacities and competences that has a strong influence on the ability of a person to successfully manage environmental pressure. In this sense emotional intelligence almost sounds like the “superpower skills” that today’s business and organizations more often requires from leaders in high positions. Ugoani et al. (2015) mentioned that this way of seeing emotional intelligence as a wide array of social competencies and skills, is something that drives leadership performance and is classified as a successful leadership when it comes to dealing with environmental demands. Furthermore, our assumption is that a certain level of this emotional intelligence is necessary to have the ability to learn the emotional competencies that have been mentioned above. For one example, the ability to recognize precisely what another person is feeling, enables one to develop a specific competency that can be utilized as an influence (Ugoani et al., 2015).

Although emotional intelligence has many and similar definitions about social skills and empathy, (Ugoani et al., 2015; Goleman, 1998) there can be categorized in five dimensions of emotional intelligence; self-awareness, self-regulation, empathy, motivation and relationship management. The first one is self-awareness, and the authors explain that this comes into existence when an individual knows what he/she is feeling at the current moment and utilizes those preferences to guide decision making with a realistic assessment of his/her own abilities. The self-regulation involves how we are handling our emotions in a facilitated way rather than interfering with the task at hand, for example when we pursue goals we manage to recover well from emotional distress as well to perform in a sustainable way. Empathy is related to understanding and sensing what other people are feeling, and that we are able
to see from their perspective with an understanding of their minds. When it comes to motivation, emotional intelligence involves using deepest preferences to guide and move individuals forward toward desired goals by helping them take initiatives and inspiring them to take actions (Ugoani et al., 2015; Goleman, 1998). Given this, our interpretation is that it is important to be aware of how these five dimensions of emotional intelligence influences the quality of our social skills in leadership and that in order to lead other people, we first need to have this awareness and ability to lead ourselves.

In relation to great leadership and emotional intelligence, relationship management is about utilizing people’s social skills in order to pursue and lead in cooperation and team works as well as networking and interacting in a smooth and appreciated way (Ugoani et al., 2015; Goleman, 1998). In order to do this well, it is important to manifest and handle emotions well in relations and accurately read social situations. The capacity to manage the emotional side of leadership is one strong advantage when leading changes but is at the same time undoubtedly challenging during rapid changes (Chen & Guo, 2020). Therefore, our assumption is that relational view of leadership and emotional intelligence is something that may be even more important in a digital environment and above all, in crises or global happenings like this pandemic.

2.3 Creating Emotional Value

To begin with, a company’s sustainability and social responsibility lie at the heart and core of the corporate management which is to create and share value for stakeholders and shareholders (Chang-Hyun, 2018). Just as it is important to create value to the company’s stakeholders, one can argue that it is equally important to create and communicate this value within the organization. Moreover, regarding the human perspective in being a leader and within teams and organizations, Wolf, Haddock, Manstead and Maio (2020) argues that it is important to create emotional value on a daily basis that involves engagement and development. This value can moreover be defined as abstract
guiding principles or goals for individuals. In many outcomes it can also be identified in attitudes, behavior and social actions. In this sense, these outcomes can also show that individuals who endorse value as what is important in their lives and what really motivates them, can create guiding directions that rather focus on social interaction, freedom, family, self-development etc. (Wolf et al., 2020).

If leaders lead with their emotional intelligence and strive to both create and share value to their followers/employees, our assumption is that this will bring outcomes as emotional value to the individuals. As mentioned before, a big part of leadership is to influence their followers on an emotional level in terms of behavior that influences others’ thinking, attitudes and behavior. In this way, an emotional approach can increase motivation, vision, guidance, creativity to individuals, teams and whole organizations etc. (Cameron & Green, 2020). Given this, emotional value can contribute to the individuals’ motivation and overall work satisfaction which in turn will show in profit and financial dividends of the company. In this sense the organization will furthermore experience a win-win situation.

Regarding emotional intelligence and mental abilities, feeling a value is something that has a major impact and influence on a person’s thinking, attitude and behavior (Cameron & Green 2020). Value can also have a social and individual impact on what choices people make, how they feel in certain situations, what people they gain trust in and who they want to follow for example (Cameron & Green 2020). According to Kinder et al. (2008) creating emotional value is to communicate and transmit a content that is connected to a feeling. In positive terms, this can bring feelings of joy, happiness, motivation, engagement, feeling of belonging which in turn can capture an individual's interest. The emotional value can also be expressed in a way when the individual feels both understanding and when the phenomenon is making sense. Kinder et al. mentions that this is just as important whether it is in the
interactions between leaders and followers or within the whole organization. Moreover, just as it is stressed in corporate social responsibility to gain maximum profit and increase sustainability of value creation in companies, just as important is it to acknowledge and raise awareness that its core comes from the people within the organization (Chang-Hyun, 2018). By this, we think it is important to reflect upon the fact that the core of an organization comes from the people within it and that it is from their engagement, which in turn is a product of emotional value and cognitive development, outcomes like organizational profit can occur.

To continue, our interpretation is that emotional value can be related to sensemaking. To elaborate on that, sensemaking can be explained in a way when an individual feels both emotional and cognitive connection, and the outcomes can make the individual feel emotional affirmation and cognitive support (Cameron & Green, 2020). This can furthermore improve the individual's motivation as well as increase creativity and learning when things make sense. If the emotional value is confirmed for individuals, further teams and also the whole organization, this can improve many steps in the business. Furthermore, if the employees are happy and communicate as a healthy and complete team, potential conflicts can also be prevented in an early stage (Kinder et al., 2008).

When individuals feel emotional value in social interactions and to their working tasks, it can increase motivation and engagement. From a psychological state, the individuals need to be present in the moment and situation to experience emotional value (Makransky & Lilleholt, 2018). Presence can be one entrance gate to intrinsic motivation, happiness, enjoyment and increased active learning (Makransky & Lilleholt, 2018). When individuals feel emotional value in social interactions and a meaning to their work, the outcomes can also include many cognitive benefits such as reflective thinking and improved understanding as well as a positive attitude
towards learning overall (Makransky & Lilleholt, 2018). In this sense, we think those emotional and cognitive benefits are important for individuals' performance and development in their personal lives but also within organizations.

Moreover, when individuals feel emotional value, they tend to feel energy, passion and importance about those things. This in turn increases motivation as well as strengthening their drive forces to achieve goals and maintain challenges (Makransky & Lilleholt, 2018). When it comes to that emotional value having a strong impact on individual’s feelings, attitudes and behavior, it is also likely that individuals find sensemaking in what they do from their personal value (Rankin, 2013). Therefore, Rankin mentions that all individuals have personal value based on their own experiences and frame of references which creates their sense of feelings and sensemaking in experiences. Furthermore, when it comes to social interactions, creating and sharing emotional value is one part to maintain the dialogue with adding positive emotions, which is something that promotes curiosity and interest in both the topic but also in the individuals (Volkova & Panchenko, 2020). Regarding the benefits of adding and involving positive emotions in social interactions, our assumption is that it on one hand may be more difficult to do in a digital environment but that it on the other hand could be even more important in these digital interactions.

Another important view of creating emotional value and awareness about social skills is when leaders are aware of their own strengths, potentials, feelings, and behavior and can have a fingertip feeling in social situations. In this sense, they can use their emotional intelligence to bring trust and create emotional value in relationships, which their followers in turn can adapt to (Kinder et al., 2008). Furthermore, the combination of emotional intelligence and creating shared value in social- or digitalization interaction is something that we assume can bring outcomes as emotional value to individuals within
the organization. For this matter, with the knowledge of the importance of transmitting value as a corporate social responsibility to stakeholders, it is just as important to create emotional value within the organization. This, furthermore, makes it interesting to dig deeper into how emotional value can appear in social interaction between leaders and employees in their digitalized communication. Moreover, this also makes it interesting to see if emotional value will be a part of our new community to gain sustainability in organizations but also for motivations, sensemaking and engagement for individuals.

2.4 Digital Transformation in The Business World

For about 30 years, digitalization has made huge transformations in developing both technologies and digital communication through the internet (Solberg, Traavik & Wong, 2020). In the last decade, no one could have possibly missed the digital transformation that has stormed worldwide, and this has become the new focus of competitions, communication, information among countries all over the world and especially in the business world (Wang, Feng, Zhang & Li, 2020). Over the time, this transformation has also increased the way of communication, information and creating competitive advantages on the market. We can today see that businesses and organizations have developed their strategy after digital transformation and digital resources which also have created new opportunities and value of how we can interact with each other all over the world. In this sense, this digital transformation enables us to be efficient in working in multiple ways and cross-boundaries which in a way could be fantastic. Yet, our concerns are however if this digital transformation has evolved too fast for us humans and our human nature to cope with.

By these considerations, this digital transformation and digital strategy that now has transformed in the business world, still needs to be considered by the psychological factors such as motivations, emotions and social interactions as well as the background of this transformation (Wang et al., 2020). Regarding
this, the digital transformation has made the environment even more complex than usual when it comes to transmitting emotions, feelings and motivations among social interactions (Wang et al., 2020). This is something that further becomes even more intense in organizations when an organizational change is coming up. Additionally, it is often discussed whether the success of digital transformation initiatives is also dependent on the employees’ active effort and voluntary engagement (Solberg et al., 2020). This fast development and acceleration of digital transformation is moreover empathized by the belief that this technological and digital communication brings great potential to drive innovation and competitive advantages (Solberg et al., 2020). Furthermore, this is also a way to maintain and improve the business development and the economic world, even if the world is affected by a pandemic (Solberg et al., 2020).

Today’s social interaction through digitalization in business is more often known as virtual meetings in which people see each other through the computer screen or communication by email and phone. Broader, our social interactions are something that makes people feel emotions, gain new social impressions and positive outcomes which can create creativity, enjoyment and motivation for both individuals and organizations (Makransky & Lilleholt, 2018). By this, our assumption is that those social interactions in today’s virtual world are limited when it comes to expressing and interpreting emotions and moreover to seeing what is actually said beyond in the communication which usually is much easier in physical interactions. Solberg et al. (2020) mentions that organizations that will understand those benefits involving emotions and what facilitates employee engagement have in those processes, will also see the conditions that give rise to engagement and will thereby also be more successful with digital transformation. To this end, the crucial point for organizations and businesses is how to conduct a sustainable digital transformation so as to keep the employees' active effort and feelings in their interactions. Additionally, it would also be interesting to see how social
interactions could keep impacting individuals on an emotional level even through digital communication tools.

3 Methodology

In the following chapter, the methodological choices and considerations that direct the process of the study are presented. In the first introductory parts, a description of the study’s methodological basis together with explanations to why they are used, is declared. This is followed by a presentation of the study’s process including planning, data collection and analysis. The chapter continues with presenting the considered ethical aspects and limitations of the study and ends up with a discussion about its credibility and dependability.

3.1 Research Approach and Design

Research studies are usually designed after its purpose and the methodology that is best suited to answer the research question. For that reason, a primary decision is to determine whether the research aims to explain or explore a phenomenon or if it is of a descriptive or evaluative approach. Exploratory research aims to study a topic of interest in order to gain understanding about it while explanatory research rather aims to explain a phenomenon by using the study to make sense of an already existing framework (Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill, 2019). This study aims to gain insights about a certain phenomenon and without further pre-assumptions or theoretical framework, understand the outcomes of it. To that end, this study has an exploratory purpose. The exploratory purpose is also justified in how the research topic regards a current and future state and we consequently aim to explore and build new understandings from the collected empirical material rather than using it to test already existing theory. As a final point, research questions in exploratory studies are moreover likely to start with “How” or “What” which also can be seen in this study (Saunders et al., 2019).
A research can moreover be conducted using different reasonings such as deductive or inductive. These reasonings determine in what way the research is utilized and they are often connected to the different purposes. Explanatory studies are usually conducted with deductive reasoning while exploratory studies likely are conducted with inductive reasoning (Myers, 2013). As this study has an exploratory purpose, it will also have inductive reasoning. To elaborate, inductive reasoning is used when the purpose is to understand a phenomenon, and which is best done without preconceptions. Because when exploring and understanding a certain phenomenon, the aim is often to build a theory based on the empirical findings and not compare it to already existing theories (Saunders et al., 2019). For these reasons, inductive reasoning is best suited for this study. However, one can argue whether it is possible to conduct research without any preconceptions at all and thereby exclusively adopt an inductive approach. This, because assumptions and pre knowledge are constantly influencing our choices and approaches in one way or another and as researchers and authors of this study, our preconceptions are most likely influencing the direction of this study. In conclusion, the study cannot exclusively adopt an inductive approach, but it will still be the main approach that forms the conduction of it.

To elaborate on the methodology further, the research design of this thesis is of a qualitative approach. Myers (2013) says that qualitative research methods are used when the purpose is to understand cultural and social contexts within which people work and live. He explains that peoples’ actions and decisions can only be understood in their contexts and that the qualitative design allows researchers to access this information. The intention with this study is to gain a deeper understanding of the topic in hand and we aim to do so by collecting rather elaborated stories and assumptions of a smaller sample of people. Moreover, in order to answer the research question, focus must be on the meanings and senses of the people which is done through qualitative research in which one can interpret feelings and assumptions of the people (Bryman,
2018). Myers as well, argues that contexts are best understood through conversations with the people involved and this reason simply explains why a qualitative design is chosen for this study. The qualitative design will moreover align with the inductive approach in order to fulfill its exploratory purpose.

To summarize, this study has an exploratory purpose and is conducted with an inductive approach. The study is moreover of a qualitative design which is a suitable choice for studies in which one wants to achieve active participation from the participants. Qualitative research is therefore often associated with semi-structured or open interviews which also has been used in this study (Fisher, 2010). To expand on the interviews and the participants’ role in the study, the data collection will now be discussed in the following section.

3.2 Data Collection

3.2.1 Tools to Collect Data

In order to collect qualitative data for this study, semi-structured interviews with open-ended questions were held. As the purpose is to explore experiences and emotions of people, people’s interpretations and stories are essential aspects of the study and they are more likely to come forward in interviews with more room for elaboration. Fisher (2010) says that by giving the participants space to elaborate on their answers, the outcome often results in a deeper insight to the research subject. Interviews of this kind are also for instance suitable for studies with exploratory approaches. This, because exploratory studies often have an approach of no pre-existing assumptions, and to ask open questions will thereby not affect the participants’ answers and thus give them more room to elaborate on their answers (Saunders et al., 2019).

To create a semi-structured interview, the researcher strategically starts from the research topic and design interviews questions that seem able to answer the research question (Saunders et al., 2019). The interview guide that was
created for this study started with a few demographic questions about the participant, then some general questions followed by the main questions. The structure is influenced by David and Sutton’s (2016) description of semi-structured interviews in which the general questions are to warm up the participant and immediately create a comfortable and safe atmosphere in order to gain trust from the participants. This trust would furthermore make the participants likely to open up and give more detailed responses when the main questions later are processed. The main questions elaborated on the relationship and communication between leaders and followers and the emotional aspects were intentionally somewhat hidden in the questions in order to avoid impacting the participants answers. For example, instead of using words such as emotional intelligence and feelings, we rather asked questions about motivation, meaningfulness and appreciated competencies. In addition to this, room for follow-up questions was an important part of the interview guide so that the interviewer could direct the participants to elaborate on the research topic even further. These questions were to guide the participants to develop their answers but in a context of the digital transformation and current remote work state in mind. The interview guide is to be found in the appendix of this thesis.

Before using the interview guide for the research, we wanted it to be tested in order to see if the material would work for the study. A pilot study of this sort can be crucial for the final outcomes and changes may have to be done if it is assessed necessary (David & Sutton, 2016). David and Sutton advocate for pilot studies and argue that the interview questions are the primary tool to reach the participants in a study and improper questions could lead to false information and thus misleading results. The first step, however, was to introduce and discuss the interview guide with our supervisor in order to get a first evaluation of it. In this sense we could get a third party’s point of view and spot deficits that we ourselves missed when we created it. Thereafter, an interview (i.e., pilot study) was held with a person that could represent the
intended sample of participants for the study. A simplified transcription and analysis were then made in order to gain the useful feedback for developing the interview guide further. The pilot study generated favorable result both in terms of fruitful answers but also confirmation of that the timeframe was held and the questions were clear, understandable and ethical correct. David and Sutton argue for that these are important factors in order for an interview to feel comfortable for all parts.

3.2.2 Sampling
Sampling lets you collect and consider data from a smaller sub-group rather than every possible case (Saunders et al., 2019). For this reason, it is important to have the research question in mind when selecting a sample so that it will fit the purpose and provide a credible result. The purpose of this study is to explore how emotional value can be created between leaders and followers. From this purpose, both leaders and followers, i.e., employers and employees, are involved and therefore a subject for this study. Interviewing both leaders and followers would thus provide two perspectives of the issue in hand and the outcome would less likely be biased. For this reason, the participants of this study constituted both leaders and followers. The sample of participants furthermore had to be a smaller number of people as the research was to be conducted by interviews and as the timeframe would not allow too many of them. However, David and Sutton (2016) claims that smaller samplings but with more precise and carefully executed techniques still can be more representable than larger samplings in which quantity has superseded quality. The sample size was therefore decided to be eight participants and the limited timeframe for the study was a main reason for that decision. Yet, from David and Sutton’s claims that data from smaller samples but with high quality can be enough, and with the two perspectives of both leaders and followers that our sample would generate, we assessed eight participants to still be enough to generate a credible study.
In order to select participants, a strategic sampling was made. David and Sutton (2016) explain that the strategically sampling belongs to the category non-probability sample which is often used when restrictions or other makes it inappropriate to make other kinds of samplings. The selection type is moreover often used in research aimed to seek knowledge in which the purpose is to gain deeper understanding of a topic and the strategy is simply that the researchers themself, handpick participants for the study (David & Sutton, 2016). The strategic sample is thereby not randomly picked, and the result can thus not be generalized to the population. In this study, the strategic sampling was made in order to get a wide spread of participants but also from a convenience perspective. A probability sampling would unlikely enable us to reach the same divergence of participants and the choice of sampling was also convenient due to the timeframe and size of the study.

Companies were thereby handpicked and the criterion for this selection was companies in which digital communication and virtual meetings was a primary communication tool today. For this reason, we narrowed our sampling to companies with office workers or academics rather than companies focusing on more practical work tasks. This, because we from a general understanding thought that office workers, rather than construction workers, nurses and others with more practical work tasks, were more likely to work from home on a daily basis and thus obtain their daily contact through digital communication tools. Apart from the communication criterion, there is no relevance in who the companies are, and they are for that reason not named in the study. An additional reason to not name any companies in the study is to avoid biases and to obtain objectivity in areas that do not contribute to the result.

In the chart below, the sample of participants in this study is presented. The chart is intended to inform about the variety of the sample and to ease the understanding of the findings presented in the following chapter. The position
of the participant plays a role in the study in terms of whether the participant is a leader or a follower and the gender is included as it could contribute to interesting findings or discussions of the readers’ own choice. Other than these reasons, the chart has no decisive relevance for the study.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Position</th>
<th>Gender</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Leader 1</td>
<td>Operations Manager</td>
<td>Male</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leader 2</td>
<td>Regional Sector Director</td>
<td>Male</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leader 3</td>
<td>Head of Business Development</td>
<td>Male</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leader 4</td>
<td>Global HR Manager</td>
<td>Female</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Follower 1</td>
<td>Programmer</td>
<td>Male</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Follower 2</td>
<td>Economist</td>
<td>Male</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Follower 3</td>
<td>Administrator</td>
<td>Female</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Follower 4</td>
<td>Consultant</td>
<td>Female</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 1 Overview of the participants in the study

3.2.3 Conduction

As the interview is a social interaction in which the appearance of the interviewer as well as the surrounding environment impacts the participants’ responses, it is important to make sure that the participants are comfortable with the situation before starting the interview (David & Sutton, 2016). Elements such as time, location, and equipment were therefore well considered by the time the participants were contacted. The choice of location was limited to video- or phone calls due to the current pandemic and social restrictions. However, the participants were already used to working remotely so to hold the interviews through the communication tool Teams, was a convenient choice for everyone as we were all familiar with the program. Teams which is a video-call tool allowed us to see our participants which furthermore eased the communication as well as increased the quality of the data as we to some extent could interpret facial expressions and body language. Teams also allowed us to easily record the interviews which was essential for further analysis of the collected material. The time aspect was an important factor to consider and for instance, to make sure that the interview could be conducted.
without interruptions. David and Sutton say that interruptions are important to
avoid in order to keep a comfortable atmosphere throughout the entire
interview. For this reason, the participants were given a wide time-range in
which they could pick a time for the interview that would be convenient for
them. We also limited the time to 45-60 minutes so that we could avoid
interruptions that are more likely to happen during longer interviews.

The interviews were consequently held by video-calls and due to the limited
time, we chose to split up and hold four interviews each. By doing so, we could
more efficiently use the time for the data collection and thus get more time for
other parts of the study. We also assessed this choice to not affect the outcomes
significantly. The interviews started with a brief presentation of us as well as
of the study. The presentation of the study was intentionally held brief as we
wanted to avoid giving the participants too much information about the study
that potentially could impact their answers. After the short presentation the
participants were asked to share some basic information such as name and
position just so that we could easily keep track of their answers in a later
analysis. Inspired by David and Sutton (2016), the interviews continued with
a few warm-up questions to make the participants comfortable in the situation
but also to make them start thinking about the topic we aimed to go deeper
into. Further on the interviews proceeded with the main questions that were
designed as open-ended questions. This allowed us to add follow-up questions
whenever we felt that we could guide the participants to elaborate on their
answers (David & Sutton, 2016). By doing so, we could access deeper
understandings of the participants and more developed answers on areas that
we thought could be fruitful for the study. When all questions were asked and
we thought that no further elaboration was needed, we ended the interview.
Before ending the interview however, we asked the participants if we could
get back to them by email or by phone call if we during the analysis found that
further information or explanations were needed.
3.3 Data Analysis

Qualitative studies often result in massive textual material from transcribed interviews and observations, and the effort is thus to interpret and make sense of the content of this empirical material. In the data analysis phase, findings of the study are thereby sorted out and one can in this stage get a first glance of what the result could look like. Before starting the analysis however, the collected data must first be transcribed. Bryman (2018) stresses the relevance of transcribing the data and especially doing it close to when it is collected. He highlights the importance of avoiding interrupted transcriptions in order to minimize the risk of inaccuracy of the material. For these reasons, the transcriptions were made parallelly throughout the process, shortly after each interview in order to obtain good conditions for keeping a good quality of the collected material. The transcribed material constituted video recordings as primary data but also audio files in order to secure the quality by having a backup to every interview. Even if some of the recorded material could be used without transcribing it, we decided to transcribe everything to give ourselves the best pre-requisite for the following analysis.

When the transcribing of all eight interviews was done, the textual material constituted a document of 50 pages. This material was now to be analyzed and for this, we chose to use thematic analysis technique. Saunders et al. (2019) says that thematic analysis is a common technique when analyzing qualitative data and for the reason that we were already familiar with this method, we chose to use it for this study. The technique involves studying the empirical material carefully and repeatedly in order to identify patterns and themes in the text which in turn will ease sorting out main points and meanings. Saunders et al. moreover describes that thematic analysis is used when aiming for explanation and rich description of the material which also are our aims with this study. This is furthermore achieved by identifying common expressions and meanings in the data that further can be categorized into themes, and from
which explanations finally will come through and make sense of the empirical material.

The transcribed material was thereby read several times while this type of coding was made. At the first stage, we used different colors to highlight sentences and words that were repeatedly found throughout the transcribed material and thus constituted some sort of pattern. Each color represented a specific topic area that we found several of the participants touching upon or empathizing during the interviews. These topic areas were for example: response and body language, teamwork and functionality, personal need and humanely and digital development and convenience. When all material was well reviewed and essential meanings were highlighted into different colors, we had produced a draft of the overall findings of the study. At this time, we entered a second phase of the analysis in which these colored patterns were compared to the research question and purpose in order to label purposive themes to present the findings in. The draft of the findings was analyzed once again, and the six different colors were divided into four themes that would present the findings in a purposeful way due to the research topic. The themes will be found in the 5th chapter of this thesis in which the findings of the study are presented.

Our aim during this analysis was not only to understand what the participants said but why they were saying it as well. In order to do so, extensive discussions between us researchers were consistently held during the analysis process regarding interpretations of the participants' attitudes and emotions towards the topics that were discussed during the interviews. In conclusion, these discussions allowed us to elaborate on the findings and likely gain a deeper understanding of the underlying emotions among the participants. Moreover, by elaborating on the findings we could also make sure that the empirical data was well worked-through and that we obtained a clear and common view of the findings before presenting the result.
3.4 Ethical Considerations

When research involves in-person interviews and human participants, the ethical concerns are greatest (Saunders et al., 2019). Ethical concerns are therefore not to be overlooked and limitations of research access must be considered and respected. This study is based on a collection of empirical data in terms of interviews and attention was therefore paid to how the ethical aspect could affect our result. According to Fisher (2010), ethical concerns are often crucial in business and management studies as they involve human participants and research ethics often regards accessibility of information. In a study of this kind, a potential issue could be the access of traditional data which includes face-to-face meetings, zoom meetings or telephone interviews. Moreover, when conducting research with employees’ as informants, the process of negotiations in order to access the participants can be extensive and it is at this stage important to show our concerns about the ethical aspects. To this end, we, throughout the study, took the four ethical guidelines of Vetenskapsrådet (2002) into account and moreover informed the participants that we did so.

The four guidelines constitute the requirement of information, approval, confidentiality and usage. The requirement of information aims to inform the participants about their role in the study and the terms and conditions of it. In order to fulfill the requirement, the participants were provided with a letter of information before the study in which they were informed about the purpose of the study as well as that their participation was fully voluntary and that they could stop their participation at any point of the process. The participants were then asked to respond to the letter of information with their approval of participation and in that sense, the requirements of approval were also fulfilled. The letter of information can be found in the appendix of this thesis.

Other requirements of this guideline are that the participants are assigned the right to decide the terms of their own participation, that there are ensured no consequences or pressure if deciding to stop their participation and that no
interdependence occurs between researcher and participants. These requirements were also considered throughout the entire study. The requirement of confidentiality regards the secrets of information about the participants and requires all participants to be ensured the best confidentially as possible for the research. For this reason, no other information but name, position and age were collected from the participants, and a paragraph in the letter of information moreover ensured them in beforehand that no other information than this would be presented in the study nor in any other context.

All collected empirical data was furthermore stored on the researchers’ private computers as they were considered the most secure place in order to protect it from public exposure. The participants were furthermore ensured, in accordance with the requirements of usage, that the collected data would not be used for anything else than the study. They were moreover informed that the final project of the study would be published at the database Digital vetenskapliga arkivet (DIVA) later on. In conclusion, these actions have consequently ensured both us and the participants that ethical aspects have been considered and acted upon and we could thereby carry out the study with confidence.

3.5 Research Credibility, Dependability and Limitations

When assessing the quality of a study, different criteria are important depending on the study’s philosophy, design and general approach. Saunders et al. (2019) discuss these differences and explains that the criteria when assessing qualitative research are called dependability and credibility. In order to understand why these criteria are used to assess the quality of research, they are commonly explained as aspects revolving around trust and legitimacy. For example, dependability in qualitative studies refers to trustworthiness, reliability and consistency of the study. Saunders et al. explain it as if participants or researchers can be assumed as biased, or if other external factors could have impacted the study, the study will not be considered
trustworthy and thus not reliable or dependable. Bryman (2018) similarly argues that dependability revolves around the ability to strengthen and confirm which is accomplished by holding objectivity. He explains that theory as well as personal opinions of researcher’s cannot influence the study’s process or result in order for the study to be considered dependable. By sticking with the participants' stories and not letting personal values or opinions influence the result, the demands of this criterion have been met. The difference in qualitative studies however, which is important in this study, is that qualitative studies often are modified during the process (Saunders et al., 2019). This means that the critical aspects regarding the dependability in such studies also regards whether these changes will affect the focus of the study or not. In this study, the design and strategy are both of somewhat standard type for qualitative studies, and they were above all well considered to match the research topic. For that reason, larger changes have not been made in the study and the dependability can thus be assessed as strong.

The second criterion in qualitative studies is credibility (Saunders et al., 2019). This criterion regards the quality of match between the participants statements and their actual intentions and can be explained as how well the participants are understood. Saunders et al. says that this criterion aims to assess the appropriateness of tools used and how the analysis is carried out. Bryman (2018) says that this criterion also regards aspects such as how well the research is conducted in accordance with requirements in force and how it is credible presented to external parts. To demonstrate the credibility of this study, a comprehensive presentation of the research process is presented in the methodology chapter and the responses from the participants are written out in detail. The interview guide is moreover to be found in the appendix of this thesis. The intentions as authors are with this to be as transparent as possible in order to give everyone who takes part of the research material, the opportunity to self-assess whether the study is applicable on other social situations or not. Lastly, the choice to have a variety of participants in terms
of, age, position and gender is also intentional from our side as an attempt to strengthen the transferability and thus the credibility of the study.

To understand the whole of this project, the overall methodological choices as well as the considerations and assessment of the study’s quality has now been presented. However, some practical implications have also had a great impact on the study and this chapter will therefore finish up with the most impacting limitations of the study. To begin with, the timeframe is the most impacting factor regarding its limitations. The time aspect was the most decisive factor in choices and those decisions that were made during the process. A limited timeline and the fact that the research was conducted by no more than two researchers contributed to several limitations such as number of participants, scope of theoretical framework and previous research. The timeframe was also a decisive factor regarding the analysis and to what dept the empirical data could be analyzed.

Furthermore, Saunders et al. (2019) says that common limitations in research also could regard geographical aspects. This could be if the research would require face-to-face interviews and factors such as travel costs and timeframes must be considered. Another geographical aspect that could limit the research is if the participants would have to belong to a specific society, country or population. In that case, the scope of possible participants would decrease and the search for participants would thus take longer time. In this study, the research topic directs the focus to possible participants who daily use digital communication channels. For that reason, interviews could easily be held through these channels and the geographical aspects would thus not matter in that sense. Moreover, the sampling for this study has no requirements regarding specific geographical areas or cultural background of the participants and the research does thus not have limitations of that sort either.

A last limitation that should be assessed is the limitation of language used in the study. English could on one hand be convenient to use exclusively in the
study as it is a common language among both researchers and participants and because of the fact that the study is written in English. On the other hand, all participants have Swedish as a first language and to conduct the interviews in a second language could likely affect the participants ability to answer questions in detail and thus limit the result of the study. In this sense, detailed stories of the participants conquered the convenience of using a common language and the interviews were therefore held in Swedish and translated into English in a second phase by the researchers. However, translations are likely to affect the findings in terms of translation error or expressions that are impossible to translate into another language (Saunders et al., 2019). Still, these aspects were considered inferior to the value of a comfortable interview experience for the participants as well as the elaborated answers a first language would bring.

4 Findings

In the following chapter, the study’s findings are presented in the four themes that were developed in the analysis phase of the study. The themes were localized from the participants' answers and aims to ease the interpretation of the findings. The themes are named in accordance with the research question: How can emotional value be created between leaders and followers in today’s digitalized world? and are: Human touch and individual need, Social skills and individual adaptation, Work satisfaction and motivation and Future strategies.

4.1 Human Touch and Individual Need

During the interviews, differences between digital and physical meetings were repeatedly empathized and the social aspects were seen to be a center point in that. Leader 1 said that because humans were pack animals back in the history, we have a certain need to meet physically. He said that digital meetings are therefore not to compare with the physical but that having the camera on during video calls can help. Moreover, leader 1 has a policy to always have
the camera on if there are less than twenty people in the meeting. In that sense, they keep the human touch and even if they cannot meet physically, seeing each other through the camera still brings a lot. As stated in the quote below, leader 1 said that it feels more “human” and that it contributes to another climate. Follower 1 is of similar opinions and said that we are lacking the human connection from not going to the office during the pandemic. He continued by saying that this connection can however be kept by talking about other things than work only during the digital meetings and explained that his new boss is good at keeping this human touch by smiling, asking questions and making side jokes when they meet through digital tools. He explains this as the boss being interested “a little bit more”.

Leader 1: It feels human in a certain way and it doesn’t feel like I’m talking to a computer, but I talk to a coworker, another human being so yes… it doesn’t feel AI, it feels human and that makes the meeting more real… And apart from the work related it also feels human to speak to people that you can see, it contributes to a whole other climate… the meeting gets less sterile.

Follower 1 continued by talking about how many people, not only in his company but around the world, have become depressed during this pandemic because of the lack of human connection. He gave an example of how many in his company are experts from all over the world and when not having their family close, going to the office was a great way to socialize and meet friends for them. Now however when we are stuck in our homes every day, the human touch is lost, and a lot of people get into a depressed mode. Follower 1 said that people in his company repeatedly reported this as a problem but when the new boss came in, he made it easier for these people to cope with the stay home situation.

Follower 1: Now it feels like a more human contact, before it was only about work but now it is about you as well… I think it makes it less alleviate, for a lot of people of the kind of… to have a person that you can chat with not only about work, but you can chat about other stuff, I think it helps a little bit.
The majority of the participants mentioned that in their organizations, they try to adapt this human touch by having virtual breakfasts and coffee meetings just like they used to before the pandemic. Both Leader 3 and Leader 4 highlighted that those meetings were a way for everyone to connect with each other and talk about their daily life and increase the social relationship within the teams. Leader 3 said that corporations need to be aware that everyone in their organization needs to have the social connection in some way in their daily work to be seen and heard as an employee but also to be seen as an individual. He also mentioned that this is highly important if some people are living by themselves and do not have access to social interactions in their personal lives. As seen in the quote below, he said that with this awareness and by including everyone in social interactions with breakfast/coffee meetings etc., it can have a preventing effect on depression for individuals who may suffer from loneliness in their homes.

**Leader 3:** One thing is those virtual central team coffee rooms, so that everyone that wants to join can have the chance to talk and chat with each other in our big team. That is also important, to make sure that everyone is feeling seen and heard, and also that they have the chance for this social interaction in this distance, to prevent loneliness and further depression.

Some of the participants mentioned that the new digital environment also has positive contributions as it allows us to know the individual better. Leader 2 said that they normally share offices with coworkers and that the individual meeting under normal circumstances does not exist in the same manner as now during the pandemic. He explained that the social distance and the demand of contacting employees individually allows him to obtain closer relationships to his employees which he thinks makes the employees feel more valuable and important. Follower 2 shared some thoughts of his experiences regarding the social distance and said that the current pandemic in a way seems to have a good impact on the relationships among coworkers. He experiences that people today have an extended need to talk and share things during meetings.
when they finally get to talk to people and that they are more open and personal because of this high need of socializing.

Follower 3 said that this openness that allows her to talk about personal things with her colleagues makes her comfortable in the team and she feels that she gets an outflow of her social spirit. As stated in the quote below, she also highlighted that it is important to have the openness in the team and to make jokes and have fun in their work. Leader 3 had similar opinions about the importance of openness in the communication within the team and in order to make people feel comfortable, respect and trust must exist between team members. As the quote below tells, she also said that this openness brings more personal topics into the conversations and this in turn brings a feeling of belongingness and inclusion in a more “team family” environment.

**Follower 3:** I think social contact makes a lot. That we have fun, invent things, it can motivate me on a tired Monday, for sure.

**Leader 3:** We are almost like a big family here, almost closer to friendship than colleagues actually.

The value of knowing a bit more about each other is stressed by several of the participants and they argue that these personal aspects that contribute to the human touch does something to the overall work engagement. Follower 1 said that knowing your supervisor a little bit on an individual level for instance impacts your approach to work. He explained that if you know more about your supervisor and if you can talk about hobbies and chat like friends also, you feel that you are working together with someone rather than for someone. This for instance lightens up the mood and allows you to share ideas that you possibly would not do when the corporate environment is too heavy.

**Follower 1:** It should be a little bit professional obviously because he is still your boss, but then I think it’s nice if they keep this little human touch. I mean they are not gonna be your best friend but it’s nice, you know, if you know a little more about their hobbies. You can discuss if they like football or music or you know like that, you get to know more about the person.
Follower 1: Boss means that it’s corporate, it’s us against them, it’s someone who makes more money than you. It’s not personal. But when you get to know that person more, it becomes easier to communicate to them what you think. Your ideas and so on.

Follower 2 is of similar opinion and said that a personal relationship between coworkers, regardless of position, brings a mutual trust that will allow people to do more for each other than what a completely professional relationship would. He continued by saying that the personal is important also because that the private life is such a big part of someone’s life and that when someone shares personal experience, this mutual trust between them both increases and allows them to build a stronger relationship and thus becoming an even stronger team.

Follower 2: We are really there for each other; I mean both in a work-related context but also in a private setting. Say that someone has screwed up and needs help, there is no doubt that the others would jump in and fix it without even questioning it or complaining.

At the same time, some of the participants stressed the importance of keeping it professional and not being too private in order to avoid ethical problems. Leader 1 said that a supervisor must have an understanding of peoples’ private life but that is enough, there is no need for a deeper relationship. Follower 1 said that even if the human touch is important, they are still your supervisors which means that you must respect their decisions. Follower 2 explained that if you are afraid to hurt a friendship in tough situations at work, it can have negative impacts on the work results.

4.2 Social Skills and Individual Adaptation

The human touch is also stressed in other contexts as well and the participants return to the communication between the supervisor and the employee and how the private life and the personal relationship is important. Leader 2 said that the pandemic has eliminated the opportunities for the spontaneous meetings that occur at the office and that he as a supervisor therefore experiences high demand on contacting his employees in an irregularity that
can cover up for them. He explained that he calls them on video calls every now and then just to chat and ask how they are, and he says that these spontaneous chats bring this certain “feeling” and these “soft values” that are so important for the job. As these quotes down below shows, Leader 2 elaborated on this by saying that it is about present leadership and to see your employees in order to make them feel that their life, and not just work, is important.

**Leader 2:** This spontaneous meeting is totally absent now… this when you chat about football and the weather and whatever… To show that you see the employees and what they are doing during the days… at work but also to show that you actually care about how life is in general… To make them aware of that, that I am interested and that I care.

Several of the leaders mentioned the importance of seeing every individual in order to tailor the leadership to them but how the absence of these daily meetings in the hallway or by the coffee machine makes it harder to do so. They argued that the digital work environment does not allow us to interpret important signals in the same way that tells how people are and feel and this in turn makes it harder to know what they need to be satisfied. On the other hand, several of the leaders have noticed that the digital environment fits better for some of their employees and they conclude that it has a lot to do with the personality of the individual. Leader 2 said that he gained a better relationship with some of his employees during this pandemic just because they prefer the one-by-one meetings while others are harder to reach. He believes that it is very individual and states the challenge with leading these personalities from a distance.

Follower 2 says that they have even recruited a new coworker during the pandemic and that it went well to integrate her into the team. However, he believes that it has more to do with the personality of the individual than the circumstances. Leader 1 said that he believes in a leadership in which you cannot be general but wants to meet every individual on their own level. In
this sense, it is essential to know your followers and what drives them and
Leader 1 said that daily communication including encouragement and
appreciation from his side but also room for the employees to have things out
if any irritations exist, are crucial leadership elements especially in today’s
times of mutual social distance and digital work environment.

Leader 4 said that it is important to know which personalities there are within
the team and then focus on creating a good group dynamic. This is also
something that she mentioned is more difficult to achieve in digital work
environment in order to really get to know everybody’s personality. She
evaluated that in her role as a leader, there is also a responsibility of good
leadership in order to see everyone's potential and strengths, and from that
have the ability to create suitable positions and tasks for their own personal
development. If her employees or followers may not have the awareness of
their own strength, she said that it is her role as a leader to help them find it.
Leader 3 had a similar opinion when it comes to seeing everyone's potential in
the team and that it is a leadership task to address it well. As seen in the quote
below, leader 3 said that this will further require a great mindset for the whole
understanding and to see the whole picture in the business.

**Leader 3:** The mindset is for sure important for the role in the leadership, it’s a
clarity and to make sure that every function has a clear purpose, and this is
hard work you know, it’s a bit of soft skills etc... but it has to be clear of what
we as a team and organization is working on.

Leader 4 and follower 3 also mentioned that this awareness of their team
members personalities, potentials and strengths is something that will require
good leadership in a strategic way. Follower 3 elaborates on this by saying that
good leadership does not only means to speak about visions and goals, but it
also includes knowing the team members and seeing their strengths and
potentials to make the best outcomes of it.

**Leader 4:** It is important that people have a clue about their strength and that
they speak about them. As a leader, I would help to find a place where the
person can work in their best, building on their own strength. And if the person is not aware of their own strengths, then it’s my role as a leader to help them identify and define it.

**Follower 3:** A leadership where you see me as a person, that you see my qualities, what is that person good at and what motivates that particular person? See the strengths and how to use it at work. That is good leadership for me.

Several of the participants are of the idea that the digital meetings do not have the same effect when they cannot be held physically and that they lack important elements. Many of them talked about the importance of seeing each other’s face during digital meetings in order to know the other person's responses. They argued that this response helps to know how the messages are interpreted or how the messages should be delivered in order to speak to every individual in the best possible way. However, the digital environment and absence of meeting face to face are making this interaction hard in many aspects. As the following quotes shows, leader 1 and 2 said that the feedback from their employees in terms of facial expressions or nodding is highly important in how they tailor their messages and that having the camera on is essential at digital meetings in that sense, which their quotes below elaborates. Leader 1 explained that digital communication does not allow the same interaction with his employees and that the meetings unfortunately become more of a monolog than a dialog.

**Leader 2:** I think it’s important that the cameras are always on because you get so much from… If the cameras aren’t on, it’s like talking out to cyberspace. You have no idea how it is received.

**Leader 1:** You want to see their body language and how they react, but you don’t do that in the digital environment. It makes it hard to sense the feeling among them and form the meeting out of the situation.

On the question if they prefer video calls or emails, follower 2 said video calls every time. He explained that body language and non-verbal reactions are very important in communication and the awareness of peoples’ mood and well-being is a big part of that. Leader 3 elaborated on seeing each other in virtual
meetings and said that this can have benefits as well when it comes to having efficient and structured meetings. As seen in the quote below, he said that this for instance can be good for the dynamics in the meetings as this disarming environment without superficial and visible hierarchical structures lets everyone be on the same level in virtual meetings.

**Follower 2:** The body language, small things that people do. You can see how someone is doing just by looking into their eyes. You can pick up so much more, you can hear the tone of their voice etc.

**Leader 3:** It’s more valuable in a physical meeting, because you have the body language and have the opportunity to participate in another way in the discussions, but virtual meetings are more efficient and structured meetings, and put everyone on the same level of base and same conditions, without visible hierarchical structure.

### 4.3 Work Satisfaction and Motivation

When it comes to work satisfaction, the participants were united in the idea that it involves motivation, work-will and appreciation. Follower 2 said that the connection to others and the feeling of being a part of something bigger contributes to happiness and well-being which in turn engender a work-will and an urge to stay in the company. He pointed out, however, that these signals of someone’s state of mind were much easier to notice under normal circumstances but that they easily can be missed today when not seeing each other on a daily basis. Leader 1 is of similar opinions and thinks that the employees need to be “seen” and appreciated. He says that peoples’ drive to work often is something more than just money and that it is therefore important to compliment and appreciate their work. Leader 1 distinguishes the value in verbal and physical appreciation and says that today, he mostly appreciates his employees verbally through phone calls and mail communication but if someone does something extraordinary, you can do something more such as sending flowers. As the quote below shows, this is what makes good leadership according to leader 1.
Leader 1: And when you feel that you’ve found that balance of appreciating them so that they can assimilate the critique and become more motivated, then I can feel that I’ve done my job.

Follower 1 was also stressing the importance of appreciation in order to feel motivated and said that sending physical gifts are a good way to show appreciation in today’s stay home-situation. He gave examples of how his company sent him candy during holidays or expense lunches sometimes in order to keep him motivated and engaged. He also told how they play virtual games together with both employees and supervisors and how these relaxed activities bring something more to the job outside the normally so serious corporate environment.

Follower 1: They try to motivate us, they send you some candy and stuff like that at home, so they keep reminding you that you know, “we care” and that they want you to be comfortable and stuff like that… To keep you engaged and motivated and to remind you that this is not just about work it’s more than that.

Leader 2 argued that the level of motivation among the employees is partly a product of his leadership as a supervisor. He said that seeing the employees and showing that what they do is valuable, increases their level of motivation. He elaborated on this and said that it is for instance important to communicate the functions and goals of the company to the employees but also to find the employees’ part in it and instill a will to work towards these goals. On the question if the pandemic and the social distance has made this harder, he is certain that it has. Follower 1 was also talking about the supervisor’s role in motivating the employees and argues that the supervisor sometimes knows what the employees need before they even know it themselves. He says that we all have different things that drive us, sometimes we do not even know ourselves what motivates us but that is where the supervisors’ job comes in, they can ask questions and try to figure it out. The quotes below from leader 2 demonstrably highlights these points of that emotions and soft values play important roles in leadership.
Leader 2: It is about me as a supervisor to create a will among the employees to reach the goals and in order to do that, I must find the employee in it… It is for instance two things that are difficult with distance work and one is to conduct change management… it is even harder to have strategic talks, to gather the teams and discuss visions and goals. That is for instance where I find issues.

Leader 2: It is about what employees you have. When I ask my employees what is important, they say fact-based decisions. But we know that is not correct because there are so many emotions but of course I start there… and when I see that the factual information is there, that is when I involve the emotions.

Another thing that many of the participants mentioned is the difficulty to check up on things. They mean that to coordinate or to share ideas with your coworkers has become much harder with the social distance. The office work allowed us to simply step by someone’s desk to share a thought or ask a question and you could easily see if the coworkers were onboard with your ideas. Now, the limitation to digital communication makes these actions much harder and the participants argued that creativity is one aspect that gets hit hard by that. As seen in the quote below, leader 1 said that when he meets his employees physically, everyone tends to have inputs and wants to contribute to the discussion but in digital communication, it often becomes very quiet. He elaborated by expressing his concerns about the difficultness to instill the same engagement in the discussions through digital communication and he thinks that a cause is the absence of physical connection which makes it easier to ask questions and talk more spontaneously.

Leader 1: You want an engaged audience or engaged coworkers of course because otherwise you feel that you don’t lead them well enough or that you get all the way through. So, it’s highly important to get this communication back from them as well.

Leader 4 mentioned similar points regarding the difficulty to create creativity in digitized meetings compared to physical meetings in which everyone can sit in one room together and emotions and vibes can take place more naturally. As quoted below, he also mentioned that it is more important to begin with a
little “check-in” to ask spontaneous questions in order to create more engagement and also to allow a mindset of thinking about other things besides the current topic as well, just to make it more natural as in a office environment.

**Leader 4:** To see everybody's faces, a little check in with spontaneous questions, this really makes a difference in the engagement in the team.

Leader 2 and Follower 1 talked about the value of spontaneous chats and check-ups that usually occur in the office when people are gathered at the same place, but which now is absent when working from home. Leader 2 called it an “arena” or a natural place to meet people other than who are in your closest team. Follower 1 said that this distance causes delays in the work process and things that could take one minute to solve in the office can now take hours or days. He explained that the process to reach someone through digital communication often causes shifts in contexts as you usually have to do something else before you get a reply, and this reduces productivity and thus work satisfaction, which is elaborated in the quote down below. In conclusion, the general assumption among the participants is that the difficulty to quickly reach someone for a small question and the absence of an inviting environment for creativity and socialization when working from home, reduces work satisfaction as well as creativity and motivation. This was for instance empathized by both follower 1 and 2 which can be seen in the quotes below. Moreover, follower 2 discussed how you also create a mutual language, or jargon, in the office when seeing each other every day and how important that is for the organizational culture and the feeling of belonging but how that also is lost now in the digitized work environment.

**Follower 1:** If I have a question, I can just poke you it’s gonna take like five seconds but now I have to write something and you don’t know when you’re gonna get the answer… so you need to do something else during that time and by the time they get back to you, you have no idea what they are talking about… This whole like back and force, it can… or I assume it might reduce productivity.
Follower 2: The ten seconds check-ups that you have with your coworker right next to you…the creativity that can occur from starting to talk about something, they aren’t there anymore. These unplanned processes so to say.

Follower 4 talked about the team spirit and the feeling of belonging to the team and organization. She stressed the importance of having an open environment within her team to make opportunities to find what interested her most. She said that this openness within the team allowed more people to speak up about what they found interesting in order to develop creativity and engagement in their organization. Furthermore, as stated in the quote below, this openness developed a new motivational project within the team in which everyone could have their own topic to work on and strive for more creativity in their team.

Follower 4: To increase motivation, we started looking at different group meetings, etc., where you can work with different motivational things, such as competitions, social and skills development. So, as we should have a lunch where we can talk about a certain topic, you learn a little all the time and people also feel engaged in topics that they are passionate about. I think it is a factor that can motivate a lot of people.

4.4 Future Strategies

All the participants have clearly experienced a change in the everyday work life due to the current pandemic and both advantages and disadvantages have been brought up during the interviews. The time-demanding emailing and calling back and force are highlighted as prominent practical issues in the digital environment as it increases productivity and prevents creativity. Moreover, the lack of physical meetings is also said to aggravate communication and prevent participation and inputs from everyone and several of the participants are concerned about the meetings becoming a monolog of the supervisor rather than a common dialog. However, several of the participants have also noticed no difference in some of the work tasks and that mainly revolves around the daily operative work that can be conducted with no interaction with others. This is for instance demonstrated in the quote of Leader 2 and follower 2 below. Leader 1 and Follower 1 said that a hybrid
solution could be to prefer in the future in which people can be at the office a few days a week and work from home during the rest. Follower 1 suggested having one or two specific days a week when everyone must be at the office so that they can have important meetings which everyone needs to attend those days but that the individual work then can be operated from home.

**Follower 2:** The administrative tasks work well. I can as well work on that from home. But in projects, with teammates, that’s where we need to be more available and that is harder.

**Leader 2:** These operative questions are actually no problem at all, it works very well in the distance work… But the follow-up is harder… and this community… the fuzzy feeling.

Moreover, as this change from regular office hours to every day working from home has made a radical change for many and thus made people think about what the future could look like, many of the participants have already started to elaborate on future requirements and changes that most likely will occur in the working life. Many of them said that we can expect to see a totally different flexibility in the business world in the future and that we must be open to that. Follower 2 said that the competition on the labor market will require companies to offer flexibility on a whole other level in order to compete for the best work force. Leader 2 is of the same opinion and said that the biggest challenge is the cross-boundary and the change management work in the digital environment. He said that he unfortunately does not have the tools to successfully carry out that kind of work at this moment but that they need to find strategies because the distance work is here to stay.

Leader 4 mentioned the importance of preparatory work when teams hold virtual meetings which is demonstrated in one quote at the end of this paragraph. She mentioned that in some meetings, they could almost feel how the person who arranged the agenda was thinking and what types of experiences they were aiming for. Some meetings are just information meetings with PowerPoints and structured agendas while other meetings had
the ability to capture human presence and creativity thinking. As seen in the quote below, leader 3 highlighted the importance of how people tend to begin their meetings and mentioned that they have a tendency to start with the results and details instead of talking about the awareness of why they are here together and what their purpose is.

Leader 4: I think this is so important, when we create our meetings that we really take our time and think through this how we want the experiences, so it really makes sense.

Leader 3: I see very very often, the first minutes they always discuss the details and work and, in my view, that is completely wrong! I think we have to understand why we are here together, what is our responsibility, what is our common goal, what do we want to reach in a short period of time and long-term perspective. Don’t drown in the details, we have to swim with our vision and to the horizon.

Follower 4 said that virtual meetings should have space for more short discussion regarding the topics so that everyone in the meeting can feel engaged. This was also something that made her more engaged and present in meetings which is shown in the quotes below. Majority of the participants mentioned the importance of feeling involved in the topics and meetings in order to create work satisfaction. Related to the human touch, Follower 4 mentioned that they wanted to feel as human as possible in their meetings in order to create the same feeling they would have had in a physical meeting with trust and support. Leader 3 said that engagement and trust is the key for a sustainable collaboration within teams and in external relationships. He explained that we can see organizations in a systematic way and that everyone in the organization is connected to this bigger system. In this sense, the system is how people interact with each other and create results together in the form of profit. He also said that from a leadership perspective, this requires a mindset that thinks two steps higher in the system and acts one step ahead in order to increase that organizational system will flourish. The quotes below demonstrate these statements.
Leader 3 said that the social part is totally missing in today’s exclusively digital work environment and which is something that has to be considered in an active way in order to develop a solution. As the quote down below shows he also mentioned that this has to be compensated for in the virtual world which also would be a high priority in corporations from now. Leader 4 mentioned that in physical meetings, people can feel their colleagues' vibes and whether they feel happy, stressed or tired about any situation. She continued that this is maybe the hardest part in virtual meetings, the ability to understand the virtual team’s emotional state. She mentioned that it also could be hard to build virtual teams and put together a great group of people with the right dynamic, because of that it is harder to read how people are in certain situations over a virtual meeting or digital communication. Leader 3 said that leaders have to think one step ahead about those questions because this is about how people will interact with each other on a daily basis in their future work. He also said that to be one step ahead, organizations and teams need to develop trust, openness, engagement and authenticity into a virtual culture.

Leader 3: The social part is missing. And you have to be active about it, you have to do something about it to make sure that it’s room for improvement in this virtual meeting and social interactions. Because you miss the creativity in those virtual meetings, because you are not able to stand up and write your ideas on a whiteboard etc. The engagement you get out of the group when you meet physically is not possible to have in those virtual meetings. And you need room for that improvement.

Leader 4: If you are sitting in a meeting, in a room together, you can always observe people. You can get all the vibes. In the virtual environment you can’t
feel those vibes in the same amount and in the same way, I mean sometimes you can feel it but I think it’s more harder to observe on just a screen of how a person is and how they think, because you just see a small part of the body and of their faces.

Leader 4 mentioned that if this is the new way of working, there needs to be guidance in how to lead by digital communication tools. As the quote below demonstrates, she also said that this guidance requires a lot from leaders regarding how to develop more emotional parts in their leadership style which further will show off in the communication with their followers in this virtual communication. Follower 3 highlighted the importance of open and transparent communication with her colleagues and her leader. She also mentioned that this will be more important to think about in a digitalized work environment in order to feel appreciated as a colleague and to get a feeling of belonging to the team and to the organization.

**Leader 4:** The difference in the communication, is that somehow to include all of the emotional parts, you need to efficiently involve all those emotional parts into the virtual world.

**Follower 3:** It’s important that my leader is responsive, really listens to what I say and listens between the lines. Adjust so you have a realistic workload, so you do not have too much or too little. To make employees dare to share their tasks and challenges both in their work but in a relieved way in their personal life as well, increase the feeling of belonging to the team.
5 Result and Discussion

The purpose of this study was to gain a deeper understanding of how the digital transformation in business impacts the relationship between leaders and followers in terms of emotional value. The study is based on one research question which has been used to fulfill the study's purpose. In this chapter, the result of the study is presented and discussed in order to make sense of what has been found.

5.1 Human Touch and Individual Need

During the interviews with both leaders and employees in this study, the majority of the participants highlighted the importance of having the camera on during virtual meetings. They said that by seeing everyone's faces and by having the ability to read people’s body language, the communication feels more natural. However, they still expressed concerns about the lack of “human touch” in the meetings. This human touch is something that Makransky and Lilleholt (2018) also highlights when talking about today’s challenges in creating meaning and value in the social interaction by virtual meetings. He says that our social interaction in physical meetings allows people to feel emotions, gain new social impressions and that it further can have positive outcomes for individuals in groups when it comes to creativity and engagement (Makransky & Lilleholt, 2018). The findings of this study consequently confirms that the participants experienced lack of this social interaction but at the same time, they numbered some solutions that could better the situation. For instance, the participants appreciated when the cameras were on during virtual meetings because it allowed them to in a way have a more open communication. They explained that in an environment in which they could see their peers, they felt more comfortable asking questions and sharing their opinions.

The findings of this study shows that a digitalized work environment likely makes people hold more meetings than when working together at the same
office and some of the participants mentioned this as time-demanding and meaningless. Many times, the meetings were not important for them in particular, but they had to attend as it was better to invite everyone rather than risking that information was lost. The lack of value for the participants in these meetings and the ease to do something else when attending a virtual meeting rather than a physical, let the participants not be present. Makransky and Lilleholt (2018) says that from a psychological standpoint, people need to be present in the situation in order to feel emotional value. Volkova and Panchenko (2020) addresses this issue by saying that adding positive emotions in the social interaction impacts people to be more present in the conversation but also curious about the individuals they are communicating with. As a tool for this, Cameron & Green (2020) highlights sensemaking as a way to tease out curiosity among followers and they explain that sensemaking is something that is achieved when people feel both emotional and cognitive connection. Several of the participants explained how they felt this in terms of interest and enthusiasm when more emotional elements were included in the general communication during the meetings. For example, some of the followers mentioned that side jokes from the supervisor and a more relaxed communication during the meetings contributed to the human touch which furthermore brought value to the meetings. In conclusion, it can be seen that when social interaction awakens positive emotion to people, it also awakens their interest and furthermore makes them be present and engaged. At the same time, making sense of the content is equally important in order for people to stay present and especially in a digitalized work environment in which it is easier to hide behind the camera and do something else instead.

The mandatory remote work state during this Covid-19 pandemic has not only caused business related changes, many of the participants also mention a sense of fear of feeling alone and excluded from social occasions. Some of the participants even talked about a general anxiety of getting into depression mode as a result of the absence of socialization that this working-from-home
state brings. Makransky and Lilleholt (2018) explain in psychological terms that fear of social exclusion can appear when people feel disconnected from each other which demonstrably could be seen in this case. To avoid this feeling of isolation and social exclusion however, the participants argued for maintaining the social interaction by having virtual meetings on a daily or weekly basis with activities such as having coffee or breakfast together with their teams. Some of the leaders also mentioned this as a way to reach out to their teams by creating space for them to socialize with each other and at the same time, see how everybody is doing. In conclusion, a majority of the participants of this study mentioned the social and emotional exchange as meaningful and that it for instance had a positive emotional impact on them.

A majority of the participants mentioned that they appreciate an uncomplicated communication and openness in the work environment within their teams. A culture that allows conversations not only about work but about personal life and interests as well, makes them feel a more human connection to their coworkers and this is something that can be instilled just as well in the virtual as in the physical meetings. This human connection was furthermore something that the participants said gave them energy and motivation in their work which in turn made them share emotional value back to their coworkers in terms of happiness, empathy, and support. What the participants in this study describes is furthermore what Makransky and Lilleholt (2018) addresses when they talk about what happens when emotional value is created. They say that when people feel emotional value, their energy levels increase, and they tend to feel a higher passion and purpose to what they are doing which in turn impacts their levels of motivation and strives to achieve goals. In summary, a more personal relationship to coworkers is argued to increase the human connection at work. This human connection can furthermore be addressed as a component of emotional value which in turn is confirmed by research to contribute to successful work outcomes.
5.2 Social Skills and Individual Adaptation
Every one of the participants mentioned that the current pandemic and social restrictions have limited their possibilities to socialize in many ways, both in private and in their work. Many of them said that they have found solutions to interact virtually but that they still feel limited in their communication as the digital communication channels do not offer the same human contact as physical meetings. To weigh up this loss, some of the leaders said that they have intentionally increased the number of spontaneous calls and situations to chat with their followers to maintain the positive and relaxed feeling in their relationships even in the virtual environment. What is brilliant about these chats and spontaneous calls however, and what these leaders most likely have understood as well, is that beside maintaining a positive and somewhat relaxed atmosphere, they also bring an authenticity to the relationship which furthermore instills a sense of trust. Gerpott et al. (2020) explains that authenticity is a basis in social interactions when building trust in relationships and what is widely known about trust is that it strengthens and maintains fruitful relationships. The authenticity moreover let the relationships of the followers be more human when social skills such as empathy, humor, caring and interest in their private life were practiced and this is something that could be referred to as creating emotional value for the followers.

From a relational perspective of teams, leaders and followers, leadership is first of all a social construction that includes social interactions. By that, to maintain and keep the good spirit in these interactions, the relationship between those who are involved must be nurtured. One of the leaders that was interviewed mentioned that trust strengthens the relationship between leaders and followers, but that trust must be actively maintained. To instill and maintain trust can moreover be time-demanding while it at the same time can take a second to erase and then often hard to ever get back. From this relational perspective, Cameron and Green (2020) mentioned that leaders that lead with authenticity to their followers often use social skills such as leading with
qualities as awareness of others, acting with care, use active listening, show empathy, growing employee’s through their potential, inspiring with trust and acting respectfully.

During the interviews, it emerged that the participants who are followers appreciate a leader who respects them and sees their value, strengths and abilities. At the same time, these followers expressed that a leader who is receptive, allows open communication, is supportive and a good listener, positively impacts the environment and thus increases their willingness to work. These social skills of leaders numbered by the participants are more or less the same skills that Goleman (1998) says constitutes emotional intelligence. Goleman explains that emotional intelligence is about being aware of the feelings of others as well as of one’s own. It is furthermore to be able to understand them and see individual needs and potentials from them and by doing so as a leader, one can challenge and appreciate your followers in a way that instills work will and motivation. To conclude, as these social skills and emotional characteristics were empathized as highly appreciated by the followers of this study, these followers feel that emotional intelligent leaders, rather than leaders who lack these traits, create a higher value for them in their work. The findings of this study however shows that the digitalized work environment and social distance makes this emotional intelligence hard to get use of. The leaders repeatedly highlighted the difficulty to meet their followers on the right level when they cannot interpret important signals and facial expressions in the digital work environment as they used to do in the office. The occasional meetings by the coffee-machine allowed them to interpret moods and attitudes in order to know how to meet with them professionally later but this is no longer possible.

During these interviews, the participants mentioned that it was important to have a broader understanding of each other's differences, potentials and strengths. By that, we could assume that they could use this awareness and understanding as a strength for advantage in their teams in order to create
commitment and a harmonious environment. To our mind, if there is a basis of social skills and knowledge about the subject, the hardship of how to deal and handle different personalities in teams and organizations is facilitated if there is an emotional and cognitive understanding of each other and context. Ugoani et al.’s (2015) way of seeing this, is furthermore that emotional intelligence is a wide array of social competencies and skills which is something that is really appreciated in social interactions but also something that drives leadership performance and can be classified as a successful leadership skill when it comes to dealing with similarities and differences in environmental demands.

Several of the leaders in this study mentioned the difficulty to sense their followers’ mentality and personality during virtual communication. They explained that the lack of physical interaction made it difficult to tailor their leadership to each employee in order to support them and this was something that they stressed as a big challenge with a digitalized work environment. To our mind, a difficulty to sense each personality could make it hard to know everyone's social skills which is important when creating suitable support for them. Moreover, a sense of people’s social skills and awareness of emotional traits could also be important when putting together new teams with balanced group dynamics. One of the participants said that they have successfully recruited and integrated a new employee in their team during this year of remote work. However, he also admitted that most of this success probably lies in the new employee’s personality and that they had activities after work when they met and socialized physically in the team. Several of the followers mentioned this mental support as highly appreciated in order for them to perform in their best way. In theory, the emotional and social skills that are used to create support for others are argued to be a product of emotional intelligence and Yadav and Lata (2019) for instance explains that these skills are appreciated in leadership support.
According to the Yadav and Lata (2019), emotional intelligence is used to understand peoples’ emotions in order to support them and guide them in their thinking and acting. To our mind, this is a big part of what leadership is about and the findings of this study demonstrably tells the same. One leader says that you cannot generalize in leadership and another says that leadership is about knowing your team to benefit from everyone’s strengths and potentials. To our mind, this is a big part of what leadership is about and the findings of this study demonstrably tell the same. One leader said that you cannot generalize in leadership and another said that leadership is about knowing your team to benefit from everyone’s strengths and potentials. However, this part of leadership could also be the most threatened if digitalization evolves and remote work becomes a new normal. A general concern among the participants regarded the ability to put together high-performance teams with favorable group dynamics in a digital work environment. It is possible that the inaccessibility of social interaction during virtual communication could complicate the interpretation of people’s personalities and attitudes which furthermore would make it hard to bring out the full potential of peoples’ social skills. The lack of social skills would furthermore hamper the creation of successful teams and the mutual work-will in companies. At the same time, research shows that we have tools to work on these areas and that those who understand this will adapt to the digital workplace faster and thus be more successful in digital communication (Solberg et al., 2020). For instance, if we find it hard to interpret people’s emotions and attitudes in virtual communication, increasing the engagement could solve or at least better these situations. This, because engagement makes us interact more and thereby share more emotional traits (Solberg et al., 2020).

5.3 Work Satisfaction and Motivation

Wolf et al. (2020) say that engagement and development are important components when creating a value for others. This, because we as humans are motivated by feeling a belongingness and to feel that we are a part of
something bigger. Maslow (1943) was of the same opinion when he decades ago developed his theory of human motivation and he argues that love, affirmation and belongingness are the most important human needs next after our vital physiological and safety needs. This shows that social affirmation is highly important for us humans in order to feel motivated and satisfied. Similarly, the findings of this study shows that the participants are united in the idea that some sort of value must be added to the work situation in order for them to feel motivated and satisfied in their work. Many of them mention appreciation and engagement as examples of this value and which applies to both leaders and followers. The followers need appreciation in order to feel good about their work and to feel that they have contributed to the common goal which furthermore makes them stay engaged. At the same time, leaders also need engagement and appreciation from their followers in order to know that they are doing a good job with leading their followers. In this sense, this is mostly communicated in terms of facial expressions, interactions and responses to what is being said as well as an overall engagement during meetings. What can be understood from this is that the requested value among the participants regards behavior, social interactions and attitudes which demonstrably refers to emotional traits. Wolf et al. are similarly describing emotional value as a product of attitudes, social interactions and behavior and Cameron and Green (2020) say that an emotional approach in leadership likely increases motivation among followers. What the participants express however is that the limitation to digital communication only has made it difficult to both receive and send this type of signals and the emotional value that plays a big role for the overall work satisfaction and motivation consequently falls victim to the digitalization.

However, several of the participants mention that appreciation is something that can be communicated in terms of verbal compliments and physical gifts sent to their home and many say that it works almost as well in remote work situations as in physical meetings. Engagement on the other hand seems to be
harder to instill in a digitalized work environment which in turn has shown to affect the motivation and overall work satisfaction of both leaders and followers. The participants highlight the lack of spontaneous chats that contributes to creativity and inspiration and many of the leaders have noticed a disquieting decrease of engagement during virtual meetings, especially when the cameras are off. Makransky and Lilleholt (2018) similarly highlight the importance of engagement and say that individuals need to be present in the moment in order to experience emotional value and that presence is thereby an entrance to feeling motivation, happiness and enjoyment. In this sense, the findings of this study confirm the theory about engagement as a crucial component for emotional value. However, engagement in this study is also stressed as one of the most troubled areas during the Covid-19 pandemic and many of the participants are truly concerned about its consequences. This furthermore indicates that emotional value is not created as well in a digitalized and remote work environment as in the office and leaders could thus face a big challenge in this area in the future.

Several of the participants mention how the work satisfaction is affected by the absence of an inspiring atmosphere and common vibes that comes with physical meetings. This satisfaction can be hard to instill in a digitalized work environment as it does not allow the same socialization with many people at the same time. In digital communication, one-by-one talks are more convenient, but it can be hard to point out what every individual need in order to feel satisfied, and this put a high demand on these personal meetings in terms of emotional and social skills of the individual. Rankin (2013) says that all individuals have different personal values and frame of references depending on their previous experiences and this consequently determines what they need in terms of sensemaking of the context. Moreover, Rankin says that what constitutes emotional value for people also differs depending on the individual’s personal values and frame of references. This can be confirmed
by the leaders’ statements of how they experience difficulty to reach out to some followers through individual calls while others are easier to motivate. The individuals that are easier to motivate probably have personal values that connect well with the message that the leader communicates but the people who are harder to reach out to, most likely need something else to be motivated. In the physical meetings with several people on the other hand, the large mix of impressions, connections, attitudes and emotions that constantly are flourishing are more likely to address these people’s values without larger effort. In conclusion, the exchange that comes with the digitalization, of larger physical meetings to individual calls, puts a higher demand on people’s social skills in terms of understanding what intrigues them. This understanding is furthermore important in order to create the emotional value that every individual needs to feel satisfied and motivated in their work.

5.4 Future Strategies
Regarding the current Covid-19 pandemic, all participants mentioned that they had been affected by the digitalized way of working and the lack of social interactions in some way. When some of the participants mentioned that this remote work and digitalization could be seen through a positive lens with having productive and efficient communication and meetings, some others also said that it truly felt like a forced situation of digitalization. We are experiencing this pandemic to have an accelerating effect on the future vision of going online and working remotely and it appears at a faster speed than we probably expected a few years ago. As Solberg et al. (2020) said about the situation, digitalized work is something that drives innovation and competitive advantages for business and contributes to that people have jobs all over the world. Furthermore, even if many people were critical to this way of working, we have also now seen that it’s possible to maintain and create results in business life.
On another hand, even if the results increase within being effective and productive, our interpretation is that there is always a leverage effect which in this case is seen in the human emotional factor. In the way Makransky and Lilleholt (2018) stresses the importance of social interactions as it lets people feel emotions, gain social impressions and learn from each other, we can understand that social behavior is important for increasing engagement, creativity, enjoyment and it can furthermore develop motivation for individuals. By that, we can see how important it is to involve emotional parts in our virtual and social communication to increase the human touch and well-being. This is something that Wang et al. (2020) mention should be a prioritized topic in the business world. They say that regarding the digital transformation, we need to consider psychological factors such as motivations, emotions and social interactions as well as the background of this rapid digitalized and humanity environment transformation. Some of the participants mentioned that remote work and digitalized communication is here to stay. If that is true, it will require more flexibility from organizations and corporations regarding what they can offer their employees in the terms of a flexible work environment.

The digitalized work environment has also made the social environment even more complex and this is something that Wang et al. (2020) highlights as well. They talk about the complexity of social interactions in digital environments when it comes to transmitting emotional parts such as feelings, engagement, creativity and motivation in virtual interactions. One of the leaders highlighted the complexity of transmitting emotions such as feeling and engagement and said that this could bring difficulties in cross-boundary and change management work. He continues by saying that he unfortunately does not have the tools to address this issue yet, but again stresses that it is important to find a strategy for this because it will be required in a digitized future. To our mind, the issue here is about what organizations and businesses can do to maintain sustainability in the social interaction and communication through this digital
transformation and still have the employees’ active effort and feelings in their interactions through the digitalization. As Solberg et al., (2020) explain, this digital transformation has evolved in a rapid way but if it is something that we humans are good at, that would be to create solutions.

From our point of view, we must also be aware that the fast-paced digital transformation can have an impact on our humanity when it comes to transmitting our own natural instincts into this new normal. To elaborate on this, it seems essential to find strategies to involve more of a human touch in those virtual and digitized environments. By transmitting emotions while favor cognitive development, we can better make sense of the context and thus instill an engagement. This sort of value from emotions and cognitive experiences is something that Cameron and Green (2020) explain as sensemaking when we humans feel a logical understanding and emotional value to what we are doing. When leaders and followers come to align with the feeling of cognitive and emotional value, sensemaking appears which in turn can increase emotional value for the individual in terms of engagement, creativity, developing learning and positive affirmations.

6 Conclusion

In this final chapter, a conclusion of the study’s results is declared and in which ideas, thoughts and concerns of the authors are included. The chapter starts with the key research findings of the study followed by theoretical, practical and societal implications that have been raised by the authors during the project. As a final part, limitations together with authors’ contributions and thereafter thoughts for future research are lastly discussed.

6.1 Key Research Findings

The purpose of this thesis was to explore the interaction between leaders and followers during the time of a global pandemic and understand how the
accompanying social distance may impact the emotional aspects and characteristics in leadership. To fulfill this purpose, the following research question has been used: *How can emotional value be created in the interaction between leaders and followers in today's digitalized world?*

To begin, the findings show that emotional value indeed can be created through digital communication but that it has to be created in a quite different way than in the physical interaction. Still, the findings indicate that the emotional value that is requested in a digitalized work environment are feelings, engagement, behaviors and communication which generally are experienced in and associated with physical connection. To explain, one of the most empathized comments during the interviews was the request of a human touch which is naturally present in physical meetings, but which seem to be more absent in the digital work environment. Basically, this constitutes the small chats, exchange of smiles and laughs; the soft attributes that fulfill the human needs of social affirmation. However, even if this human touch may be naturally missing in a digital environment, the findings indicate that it can yet be instilled with effort and in particular, social skills. To this end, if the digital interactions contain enough social skills and humanity, emotional value is most likely created. Still, the findings also indicate that the digitalized workplace could not entirely live up to the physical meetings in that sense.

From Goleman’s (1998) theory about emotional intelligence, one can assume that the level of people’s social skills is a result of their emotional intelligence. In this sense, as social skills are repeatedly empathized in the findings as important traits of the individual in order to maintain a human touch in the digital interactions, it is likely that the level of people’s emotional intelligence will impact the sense of human touch in digital interactions. The findings moreover bring the question whether emotional intelligence could be even more important in digital interaction than physical. This, because the digital environment does not allow us to interpret body language, facial expressions
and attitudes in the same way which puts a higher demand on people’s ability to actively listen and read through the lines to what is being said. In conclusion, the findings show that people’s emotional intelligence has a significant impact on the level of emotional value that is created in social interactions through digital communication.

The findings moreover shows that engagement is a big part of emotional value. Engagement comes with the feeling of belongingness to the team and organization as well as the feeling of doing something important that contributes to the overall purpose and goals. From the findings, this engagement is instilled when one is provided clear purposes and agendas, when the work processes and routines are efficient and above all, when one feels affirmation and a belongingness. The clear purposes and agendas do not seem to be more difficult to provide in a digitalized work environment, yet more important in as people likely are working more alone. The inefficiency however was empathized among the participants as a big issue as they many times are experiencing communication in remote work to be significantly time demanding. This for instance regarded too many meetings in which the whole team had to be present even if the addressed issue only applied to a few people. It also regarded the long wait to get back on an email about just a small question and the inaccessibility to share a quick thought with a coworker. To conclude, inefficient communication reduces the overall engagement of the work and people seem to find less emotional value in such interactions. Given this, it is possible to assume that a common communication channel such as Zoom or Teams, which is constantly open and through which coworkers and teams spontaneously can chat during the day, could address this issue and thereby increase the engagement and emotional value.

Moreover, affirmation and belongingness are in the findings referred to as when we feel that we are a part of something bigger and that we contribute to the bigger purposes and goals. The findings show that people find it important
to in particular understand why we do things in order to feel a belongingness and a reason to contribute, and a tool for that is sensemaking. Moreover, it is possible that sensemaking in this sense is even more important in a digitalized work environment. This, because a digitalized work environment more or less deprives us of the organizational culture that we create in a common workplace and when we cannot take part of this culture, we likely need an even clearer sense of our job in order to keep the feeling of belongingness to the organization. In conclusion, sensemaking is an important part of keeping people engaged and engagement in turn, is a key to creating emotional value in a digitalized work environment.

6.2 Theoretical Implications
In the theoretical framework, we have chosen to focus on the relational perspective of leadership. Uhl-Bien (2006) describes how relational leadership rather focuses on the interaction between people which in its extreme means that the distinction between leaders and followers could be somewhat impossible in some cases. This may be a more modern view of leadership than many are used to, but it likely aligns with the innovative and evolving approach we can see in today’s society and for instance, in the digital transformation that occurs in the business world. In the digital and remote workplace, in which we meet in a virtual meeting room using a computer or smart device, everyone meets on the same conditions and has the same possibility to speak which means that we suddenly are, more or less, on the same level. One leader elaborated on this during the interviews and argued that the digitalization likely will contribute to a diminishing of hierarchical statuses in organizations as we do not register people’s professions and statuses in the same way during a virtual meeting. To this end, findings of this study indicates that a relational perspective of leadership, with less distinction between labels such as leaders and followers, could be favorable in a digitalized environment.
Moreover, findings of this study shows that soft attributes such as attitudes, behaviors and emotional vibes occur more in physical meetings but are often missing in digital communication. This absence of human touch was thereby repeatedly empathized by the participants as a negative aspect of the digital workplace and which moreover contributed to a lower emotional value. In this matter however, the absence of attitudes and vibes could also possibly contribute to a more equal culture within organizations. To explain, research shows that we tend to be highly influenced by people’s soft attributes such as attitudes and behavior (Cameron & Green, 2020) but as the findings shows, we are more apt to sense this in physical meetings. Given this, it is likely that hierarchical statuses are reinforced in physical meetings as they allow us to sense people’s behavior and attitudes more which in turn often aligns with how people identify themselves. This means that if one has a higher hierarchical position than everyone else in the room, people will likely pay more attention to this in a physical meeting than in a digital and thus treat this person differently. To this end, the digital environment opens up for people to step forward and speak up in a way that they might be uncomfortable doing in the physical. Moreover, if we previously argued that the digital environment reduces team spirit and feelings of belongingness, this implication may refute those arguments and rather argue that the digital environment strengthens these feelings as relationships can be more equal. Furthermore, when people sense that they can come forward and take more place in the group, their pride in the job and the overall engagement will most likely increase which in turn, brings emotional value to the individual.

6.3 Practical Implications
The vital human needs of social affirmation that Maslow (1943) talks about seem to play a big role in what is requested in our daily work life and for instance, in remote work. Moreover, as the findings of this study indicate that emotional value in social interactions is a key component to fulfilling these needs, emotional value has to be transferred in digital communication as well.
Though, the findings also show that emotional value is better created in social interactions in which people can share attitudes, laugh, small talk and feel a belongingness and closeness to others. This means that a digital work environment is unlikely the best environment for sharing emotional value and we can thus expect a natural decrease in this area. However, as in many other situations when we lack in one area, we can compensate for that by increasing the activity in other areas. To explain, as the emotional value does not occur in the same obvious way in digital communication, leaders can for example create more space for extra small talk in the beginning and the end of meetings or implement more meetings in order to make room for spontaneous chats to happen. They could also normalize video calls so that people feel comfortable always having the camera on during meetings and thereby get to see their coworkers on a daily basis. The findings show that the closed cameras seem to be a challenge for leaders when trying to reach out to their followers. Also, to have the cameras on would likely contribute to a more relaxed atmosphere which in turn would invite more interaction and thus an increased engagement among the followers.

The findings moreover indicate that engagement has a close connection to people’s work satisfaction, motivation and feeling of belongingness. However, the absence of physical connection to coworkers could likely instill a feeling of isolation and loneliness in a digitalized work environment and the feelings of belongingness and motivation would thus decrease. Again, to balance up the decrease in one area, another must increase, and, in this sense, it could be important to better the self-leadership of the individuals. To explain, remote work demonstrably requires a high sense of responsibility and self-motivation in order to produce in a lonelier environment. Moreover, the findings show that productivity is a must in order to feel work satisfaction. To this end, an implication that could benefit a digitalized future in which remote work is the new normal, would be to develop a leadership that focuses on strengthening and improving self-leadership on a broader level. By doing so, individuals
could feel more satisfied in their work from home as they would be more confident in being on their own.

Moreover, the findings show that remote work as opposed to a common workplace requires better structures and clearer purposes and goals in order to provide a good view of the individual’s place and contribution to the organization. This, indeed, regards the individuals’ wish to have productivity in their work in order to be motivated and thereby satisfied, but it also has to do with belonging to something bigger and to know one’s part of it. To elaborate, the findings show that being reminded of one’s belongingness to a group and to know that you contribute to the organizational goals brings an emotional value and the overall engagement to the job increases. This means that if leaders can provide clear views of common goals and expectations of the individuals, followers are likely to feel more emotional value to their job and this is something that cannot be stressed enough in today’s digitalized business world.

6.4 Societal Implications
From a societal point of view, it could be important to empathize that the issue addressed in this study could not only be a changing state of our work environment, but it will likely affect our living standards as well. The remote work that comes with the digital transformation in business life is such a big change in our daily routines and life that it likely will have societal impacts as well. As Maslow (1943) describes, humans have needs that we strive to fulfill and some of the most essential are the needs of love, affection and belongingness. These needs are in the nature of humans and regardless how we do it, we will strive to fulfill them. When the digital transformation lets us work remotely, many people will lose their natural way of socializing. The short-term effects of this may not show any significant change in people’s emotional status or behavior but in the long term, people will likely feel a lack
of social affirmation and thus start looking for other ways to fulfill these needs. This would possibly create new behavioral patterns in the society in which people may seek to groups based on other preferences than before.

Yet, if we are aware and prepared for this change, we could understand the need for alternative ways of socialization and thereby be open for a changing society as a whole. On the other hand, if we ignore the fact that the evolving digitalization will impact more than just practical implications in our work life, there is a chance that we will see a big gap between people's needs and societal solutions to fulfill these needs. Moreover, possible consequences of this would likely be similar to what is found in research about social exclusion and social isolation which are effects of depression, anxiety and a decrease of our mental health to mention some.

These possible consequences should however not just be expected as long-term implications but also something that should be addressed right now already. The findings of this study shows that people already are concerned about social exclusion and getting into depression mode. This indicates that many already feel a decrease in these social needs and we cannot predict how long it will take until we can see an effect on the general population as well. To this end, the urge of this matter might actually be larger than we are aware of today and for that reason, we would recommend looking into this issue any time soon.

6.5 Limitations and Authors Contribution
When evaluating the limitations of this study, it is reasonable to first look back on the limitations presented in the methodology chapter regarding the empirical study. These limitations probably had the greatest impact of this entire process and regards the accessibility of the participants. The limitations for instance regarded the current social restrictions due to the pandemic which did not allow us to meet and interview in person, the language barrier when
interviewing in a second language or in other cases, transcribing into our second language and the time frame that limited the scope of the project in whole. These limitations however did not cause any bigger changes to our original plan and we were overall spared from larger obstacles and issues throughout the whole process.

Another limitation that is worth mentioning regards the theoretical framework. Considering that the research topic regards the current pandemic but also a possible future stand which are both more or less new situations, the theoretical data consisting only of previous research could possibly not cover the entire research area. To this end, the possibility to more precisely predict future outcomes with help from our theoretical framework could be assessed as limited. At the same time, our findings indicate some strategies for future work in a digitalized environment which likely can be used in today's situation and further on. In this sense, this study could in turn work as a framework for future exploration of the topic.

A last limitation of this study could be that we as authors have conducted this degree project remotely and have not met physically at all during the process. This has limited us in our communication and the faith in the digital tools has been crucial. Physical meetings would likely also have allowed better discussion and outcomes of brainstorming in that sense. However, aligning with our interest in the topic of this thesis, we are both aware of the importance of and critical aspects in communication and interactions and for that reason, the remote cooperation has still gone smoothly. Moreover, it can also be seen as an advantage to experience a similar situation as the participants in the study, as the study regards working and communicating in a distance environment.

As authors of this thesis, we have gained several new insights and experiences conducting a degree project of this kind and we also have a lot of things to be
grateful for. We both had a passion for the research topic already before we started and our interest in learning more about it made many important decisions easy to make. Our passion lies in emotional intelligence and how one can create emotional value in social interactions in order to help people to improve. Moreover, this felt even more important to explore and elaborate on in today's digitized environment. Our biggest gratefulness definitely lies in the participants' commitment and interest in our project. This is something that facilitated the collection of empirical data and further led to fruitful insights and reflections that constitutes the interesting result. These great commitments of our participants as well as the insights and reflections that they contributed to has moreover increased our interest and eagerness to continue investigating this topic area even on a deeper level for potential future research. Lastly, the cooperation which is a center point in a project of this kind has gained us further understanding about ourselves and for instance, our strengths and weaknesses when working in pairs and teams. This has taught us more about our own position and contribution in such contexts which hopefully can benefit us in similar situations in the future.

6.6 Future Research
As the research area of this study is touching upon a future stand, and because of that the current pandemic that put the world in a completely new situation which most likely will have big effects on our future work environment, it would be both interesting and intriguing to discover what the next step in this area would be. For example, it would be interesting to explore the technological development in this area regarding tools that could increase and transmit more of the emotional aspects in virtual interactions. Is it possible to find tools that can transmit these emotional aspects and how are businesses working preemptively to close a potential gap in this area?

Moreover, we found that it seemed to be a difference between leaders in different hierarchical positions regarding the awareness of emotional value
and what impact it would have in a long-term perspective of a digitalized work environment. Some of the participants were more aware and updated about this importance and how to keep in touch with each other in their teams and striving for this sense of human touch during their social interactions and communication in a virtual environment while others did not have the same idea of improving awareness about this topic. For this reason, it could be interesting to explore the mindset and awareness of this topic among leaders from different hierarchical positions and thereby see if the mindset has any connection to the position. This would possibly be carried out by selecting participants from different organizations but in similar hierarchical positions and look at how they are working for improvement in this area.

Lastly, it could be interesting to explore people’s attitudes towards digital transformation in business in a few years from now and above all, study their well-being and satisfaction in that sense. To elaborate, this study is conducted in a situation of a global pandemic which over a night changed the work environment for many. Most people are therefore not familiar with the situation and it can for that reason be difficult to get a true picture of opinions and feelings about the research topic. At the same time, as the pandemic rather is seen as temporary, it might be possible that our attitudes towards a digitalized work environment today are not the same as it would be if we knew that the situation would last. For that reason, a suggestion for future research would be to explore people’s experiences of the creation and transfer of emotional value in a digitalized work in a few years from now in order to see if one could spot any significant attitudinal changes from today.
7 References


Appendix I

Letter to Participants
Hi!
We are two students from the master’s degree program Leadership and Management in International Contexts at Linnaeus University Kalmar. We are currently on our last semester of the program and are consequently conducting a degree project which is also why we are reaching out to you. The project’s purpose is to look into how today’s digital communication in business life impacts the interaction between leaders and coworkers. The main focus of the study is emotional intelligence and the creation of emotional value that appears in the interaction between leaders and coworkers. Our aim is thus to gain a deeper understanding of how today’s digitalization and social distance affects this emotional value creation.

The study will use the perspectives of both leaders and coworkers, and we are thereby reaching out to you as we would like you to be one of the participants in the study. The study is of a qualitative design in which four leaders and four coworkers from a variety of organizations will be interviewed regarding digital meetings, motivation factors and leadership behavior. Your answers do not have to regard your current workplace or employer and you do not have to possess any pre-knowledge about the topic in hand. The interview will consequently regard your feelings and experiences and the questions does not have any right or wrong answers for that reason.

The estimated time for the interview is 30-45 minutes, it will be held by video- or phone call depending on your preferences and we also wish to record it. The study is conducted in accordance with Vetenskapsrådets ethical principles which means that the interview is voluntary and that you as a participant have the right to stop your participation at any time throughout the entire process. You as participant will moreover be anonymous throughout the entire process and the material is handled confidentially which means that it is only us (Sara and Carolina) that will share name, places, eventual names of companies or other sensitive data that is mentioned during the interview. No data that could possibly identify you will be mentioned in the study. The final product will later be published in the database Digitala Vetenskapliga Arkivet (DIVA).

Please get back to us if you are interested in being a participant of the study and do not hesitate to hit us up if you have any questions or concerns regarding the study or your participation, you will find contact details below. Your contribution is highly appreciated and our aim with this project is to contribute to future research with valuable insights about the topic.

We look forward to your participation!

Sincerely,

Sara Alexandersson
Carolina Jansson
Tel.nr.
Tel.nr.
Email
Email
Appendix II

Interview guide

Name:
Age:
Profession:

Warm up/general questions:

1. How is your work situation today compared to before the pandemic? Regarding working from a distance and digital and virtual meetings?

2. For how long have you been working from a distance?

3. Does your work and communication look different today compared to in the beginning of the pandemic? If so, in what way?

4. How would you describe the communication to your supervisor/employee today?

Main questions:

5. What kind of qualities and competencies do you value extra in a supervisor/leader? How do they impact you in your work? What kind of leader do you want to be? What do you think your employees need from you in order to perform at their best in their work?

6. Describe how you think the relationship between a supervisor and an employee should be like? Personal? Professional? - Do you think it is harder/easier to maintain such relationships when working from a distance?

7. What kind of leadership do you need in order to feel motivated in your work? Elaborate? Examples? When do you experience that you successfully motivate your employees, how do the communication and your leadership look in these situations? Examples?

8. Do you experience it harder/easier or similar getting motivated when working from a distance compared to being in the office? What are the biggest challenges in leading remotely compared to in the office?
9. Have you experienced that some digital/virtual meetings have been more meaningful than others?
   - In what way? What has distinguished these meetings?

10. What do you need in a meeting in order to find it meaningful?

11. Can you describe a desired state in terms of working from a distance?
    How could a dream scenario look in the future?