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GRA 19702 Preliminary Master Thesis Report

Study Program: MSc in Business, Major in Leadership and Change

Title: How do technology and extensive use of virtuality affect psychological safety within sales teams in Denmark, Norway, and Sweden?

Supervisor: Jon Erland Lervik

1 Introduction

According to The Economist Intelligence Unit (EIU) (2020), Covid-19 has boosted the existing trends already in the direction of digitalization. Moreover, people had to increase the digital communication and virtual teamwork (EIO, 2020). Our study will combine the concept of psychological safety and team digitalization, where we seem to find a gap in the literature. Studies of psychological safety focus on teams and how it is possible to create what Amy Edmondson refers to as a Fearless Organization (Edmondson, 2018). Edmondson and Lei (2014) further incorporate the notion of psychological safety as a vital part of a team's effort, performance, and ability to share, to mention a few significant consequences of lack of psychological safety. The teams that some scholars have researched until now seems to be physical teams, not virtual. Virtual teams are defined by Townsend et al. (1998) as a group of individuals who are not physically together but are assembled through digital means to accomplish a collective goal or task. Allport (1958), and Bargal and colleagues (1992, cited in Burnes, 2004) state that it may not be possible to change group behavior without understanding the individuals' interactions, which is where we believe that psychological safety is a crucial concept.

We argue that psychological safety is an essential concept in the breaking point between understanding group dynamics and combining the extensive use of technology, creating what some scholars call virtual teams. Edmondson (2018) state that "Psychological safety is a crucial source for value creation in organizations operating in a complex, changing environment" (p. XVI). That is why we have chosen to examine the following: "How do technology and extensive use of virtuality affect psychological safety within sales teams in Denmark, Norway, and Sweden?"

We will do our research on the company, ██████████ which is an European company based in Norway, Sweden, Denmark, Finland and Netherlands. ██████████ is a HR Tech company that was established in January 2020 from four different companies and competitors into one organization. We will collect data from the three largest sales team from Norway, Denmark and Sweden. ██████████ develops and sells HR tech solutions to the private and public market. The products that they sell are all within the segment of HR, for example, recruitment, employee follow-up and other HR-related products.

The research will conduct a qualitative research strategy and a multiple case study. Further, the research method is a semi-structured interview where the unit of analysis will be groups, more accurately, sales teams in the three different countries Norway, Sweden and Denmark. We will investigate the individuals as cases of the sales teams. Due to the geographical distance the interviews have to be done online. Furthermore, in part 4, we provide information on how we plan to do the data collection and analysis. Also, we look at the ethical and legal considerations resulting applying for our project in Norsk Senter For Forskningsdata (NSD). This part includes elaboration on informed consent and other ethical considerations.

2 Literature Review

Psychological Safety

The Understanding of Psychological Safety as a Concept

The concept of psychological safety was first introduced in the 1960s and further derived by scholars as Amy Edmondson in the 1990s (Edmondson & Lei, 2014). The concept has had a renaissance from the 1990s, which can be explained by the heightened focus to understand the need for psychological safety for organizations and teams to succeed (Edmondson & Lei, 2014). Furthermore, the consequences of the lack of safety in teams can negatively affect individuals' performance and, thus, possibly organizational success (Edmondson & Lei, 2014). Amy Edmondson broadly defines psychological safety as "a climate in which people are comfortable expressing and being themselves" (Edmondson, 2018, p. xvi). Such a broad definition of the concept displays how an environment where individuals might experience a high degree of individualization and trust without fear of negativity from others to be a positive, psychologically safe climate.

Another understanding of psychological safety is elucidated by Kahn (1990) as the “sense of being able to show and employ self without fear of negative consequences to self-image, status or career” (p. 705). Edmondson’s broad definition is linked closely to Kahn’s interpretation of the concept, with a particular focus on an individual’s ability to express *oneself* without the fear of defeatism if failure is likely, which is where we find the climate that Edmondson (2018) mentions being crucial. Kahn (1990) also argues that psychological safety connects to an individual’s profession and status, which we interpreted as how one experiences one’s social status within a climate, for example, a work team. The definition of psychological safety derived by Nembhard and Edmondson (2012) focuses on how individuals perceive threats in their work climate. More accurately how individuals’ create a general belief of how comfortable they are to, for example, share, be genuine and straight forward, in the given context (Nembhard & Edmondson, 2012). A preconceived assumption of how others will respond to ideas, risks, questions, or other work-related settings that individuals face in interpersonal relations is another way of understanding psychological safety (Nembhard & Edmondson, 2012). Other scholars find that individuals can enact efficient discussions at an early stage to prevent issues and, by doing so, enable effective performance of the collective goal, it can be called a psychologically safe climate (Cameron & Spreitzer, 2011). All of these definitions have vital suppositions in common; an individual’s subjective experience of the climate, the trust and confidence to act as oneself despite the fear of failing and the belief that others in the interpersonal relationships have good intentions.

Scholars, as Amy Edmondson (2018), emphasize that psychological safety does not mean that individuals are immune to consequences or constructive feedback, but allows for honest and genuine communication between individuals in the climate. An important principle supports such understanding: when individuals in the climate are not held back by “interpersonal fear” (Edmondson, 2018, p. XV). This fundamental is vital to recognize as it opens up a greater understanding of psychological safety and connects the concept to individuals’ personal experiences. It allows for a subjective take on others’ behavior and how one experienced similar situations. Because most work performances are carried out as teams or groups, it is vital to understand psychological safety and the possible preconceived notions of

interpersonal fear. To further understand psychological safety and how it intertwines multiple aspects, trust needs to be elucidated to ensure that psychological safety is not mixed with trusting others.

The Link Between Psychological Safety and Trust

Individuals who display trust can and are willing to depend on another, and, further, have the intent to be vulnerable based on affirmative expectations (Colquitt et al., 2007). This explanation of what trust consists of can be applied to understanding of psychological safety. The willingness to believe that others are trustworthy is based on expectations on how others will react, for example, to new ideas. To further build on this clarification, trust is essential in situations where an individual experiences conflicting interests with another (Balliet & van Lange, 2013). In such situations trusting the conflicting individual's intentions does not only require trustworthiness; it also necessitates that the individual believes that the disagreeing party has good intentions. Moreover, the individual is unafraid of a discussion and possible negative or constructive feedback. If so, the individual trusts the others in the teams, and there might be a higher degree of psychological safety between the team members.

Interpersonal Relationships and Teams

Kahn's study from 1990 found that interpersonal relationships, as well as intergroup and group dynamics, have a direct influence on psychological safety. Edmondson and Lei (2014) further emphasize the influence psychological safety has on group-level dynamics and how it affects learning, performance, and problem-solving, to mention a few possible consequences of psychological safety. Kahn (1990) further implies that when individuals feel safe psychologically, they perform at a higher level. Kozlowski and Ilgen (2006) highlighted that modern life had made teams' central and indispensable to organizational progress. There are several definitions of what defines a team or a group, where we have chosen to use the following definition. "(a) Two or more individuals (b) who socially interact (face-to-face or, increasingly, virtually); (c) possess one or more common goals; (d) are brought together to perform organizationally relevant tasks; (e) exhibit interdependencies with respect to workflow, goals, and outcome; (f) have different roles and responsibilities; and (g) are together embedded in an encompassing organizational system, with boundaries and linkages to the broader system context and task

environment” (Kozlowski & Ilgen, 2006, p. 79). Such a definition culminates multiple aspects of teams, which are vital for the ongoing discussion of psychological safety and its impact on teams’ and lastly organizations’ and individuals’ performance.

Teams socially interact, as described in the definition mentioned above, to achieve a common goal. Studies find that the preconceived notions of safety in a team are essential to organizations’ and teams’ performance (Edmondson & Lei, 2014). Therefore, without psychological safety, these preconceived notions of others in a team might be harmful to the individual and team progress and might negatively affect achieving the goal. Scholars also assert that how individuals perceive psychological safety is often the same for those working closely together or in teams (Nembhard & Edmonson, 2012). Such results can be accounted for by the likelihood that members of the same teams or those working closely together are subject to the same situations and individuals. Additionally, others might propose that if the individuals are within the same homogenous group, they might have the same preconceived notions and beliefs. Such argumentation supports the predetermined notions of how psychological safety in a team can explain how a group perceives itself and the interpersonal relationships. If a team experiences that specific individuals in a team have little respect for the team’s workflow or goals and fear of speaking out about this, it signals a low degree of psychological safety within the given team.

Historically it has been argued that an essential factor to successful team performance is, among other factors, physical environments (Goodman, Devadas, & Hughston, 1988; Campion, Medsker, and Higgs, 1993; Cohen & Ledford, 1994, referred to in Edmondson, 1999), not accounting for interpersonal relationships, which is one of the critical factors in psychological safety studies (Edmondson, 1999). Uncertainty and rapid changes lead to a growing reliance on team performance and effectiveness to succeed (Edmondson, 1999), which supports why psychological safety is crucial to consider when evaluating an organization’s performance and progress. Most studies have been done on teams working in a physical environment, leading to how psychological safety is influenced when interpersonal relationships and group dynamics are forced to move to the virtual sphere and how organization performance is affected.

Consequences and Possibilities of Psychological Safety

To apprehend the necessity of psychological safety, we have to look at previous research that displays possible consequences psychological safety. For an organization to grow and perform successfully in a VUCA world (Bennett & Lemoine, 2014), it needs the capability to learn (Unnikrishnan Nair, 2001; Bennet & Lemoine, 2014). Learning is dependent on interactions between individuals, whereas trust and psychological safety between the individuals are essential to learning from each other without fear of negative repercussions (Carmeli et al., 2009). Scholars argue that behaviors that foster learning, such as asking for help or feedback on personal expertise, require interpersonal changes, and psychological safety (Carmeli et al., 2009). This is supported by other studies linking learning directly to psychological safety (Edmondson & Lei, 2014). These studies state that an organization that cannot learn due to psychological safety might experience low decision quality and performance on the individual and team level, which has potentially detrimental effects on an organization's performance (Edmondson & Lei, 2014). Some variances can be explained by a team-leaders behavior on interpersonal risk, which again can result in a high interpersonal risk for the individual in a team (Edmondson & Lei, 2014). These consequences and explanations are essential to recognize to make sure that teams and leaders understand how their behavior can influence team efforts, development, learning, and problem-solving, to mention a few.

The Use of Psychological Safety as a Variable for Understanding

Most research on psychological safety has been on physical teams and groups within workplaces, and the concept's application has varied (Edmondson & Lei, 2014). An example is the use of psychological safety as an antecedent to find historical correlations with, for example, communication and successful team performance and how psychological safety has affected such teams or as a moderator (Edmondson & Lei, 2014). Understanding how psychological safety is applied to shed light on collaboration and performance within physical formal or informal groups is crucial. The use of psychological safety as a mediator or as an antecedent might reap different results. It is vital to recognize how, when, and why psychological safety is essential to group performance and individual sense of

safety. Scholars argue that a safe climate lays the groundwork for individuals in teams to perform better.

Drives that Contribute to Psychological Safety in Teams

Scholars have found different drivers that contribute to psychological safety; team characteristics such as reflections on behavior or actions within a team, leadership behaviors, preconceived notions of interpersonal risks on the individual level, conflict frequency, communication, and social interaction (Edmondson & Lei, 2014). Such factors can play a role in contributing to openness and learning. Kahn (1990) proposes that psychological safety makes individuals more likely to benefit from the doubt in situations where they are less steady. Scholars have found various practical implications to psychological safety that we found most relevant to team efforts, enabling employee willingness to jeopardize interpersonal risk and challenge the status quo despite leaders' inherent instinct to do as they please (Edmondson & Lei, 2014). Further, the vital and possibly underestimated need for consistent communication and planned involvement to create and establish a psychologically safe climate in the teams and the organization (Edmondson & Lei, 2014). These practical implications and consequences to psychological safety have historically seemingly been researched on physical teams, not virtual, which we will research.

Virtual Teams

Defining and Understanding Virtual versus Physical Teams

According to Townsend et al. (1998), technology has formed technology has formed the new workplace to be *virtual* where possible consequences could be new levels of productivity, adaptability, and cooperation. Therefore, we question how organizations and teams might react to changes forged by the new workplace. As mentioned above, under the review of psychological safety, Kozlowski and Ilgen (2006) define teams by different features, which will be compared to *virtual teams'* literature. Bell and Kozlowski (2002, cited in Dulebohn & Hoch, 2017) explain how virtual teams combine knowledge workers together over time and separation, to link work and common goals. Bell and Kozlowski (2002, cited in Dulebohn & Hoch, 2017) explain how virtual teams combine knowledge workers together over time and separation, to link work and common goals. We find similarities to Kozlowski and Ilgens' (2006) definition; however, it may seem like there is little information

on psychological safety within virtual teams, hence supporting the application of qualitative research to emerge theories.

Gibson and Cohen (2003, cited in Martins, 2004) suggest that virtual teams are when “members use technology to interact with one another across geographic, organizational, and other boundaries are becoming commonplace in organizations” (p. 805). Other scholars, Dulebohn and Hoch (2017), explain that virtual teams have limited face-to-face contact and do individual work through electronic communication media to achieve common goals. These understandings of what a virtual team has a resemblance with the previously chosen definition of teams. The similarities are; interdependencies, the linkage between the individuals in a larger context, and the fact that both teams aim to achieve a common goal. One might argue that some of the advantages and disadvantages of physical versus virtual teams regarding psychological safety are similar. Others might state that the situations are entirely different, which leads to other advantages and disadvantages of psychological safety in such teams.

Advantages and Disadvantages to Virtual Teams

According to Dulebohn and Hoch (2017), there are many drawbacks to virtual versus physically located teams where communication and cooperation are especially troubling. The scholars also find a potentially lower level of participation by members in a virtual team. It is also harder to create trust between team members and share responsibility virtually (Dulebohn & Hoch, 2017). Such difficulties are closely linked to drivers put forward by Edmondson and Lei (2014) that contribute to creating psychologically safe team environments. As mentioned, studies on psychological safety have not been performed on virtual teams, which means that we question if such difficulties increase the risk of a lower psychological safe environment or not. We argue that to create a safe psychological environment in a virtual team-high degree of communication and collaboration between team members would likely foster trust and inclusion. Also, as high levels of data richness are troubling, virtual teams should attempt to increase such levels to achieve a psychologically safe environment.

The pioneers behind psychological safety argue that consistent communication is critical for team success (Edmondson & Lei, 2014), which supports some of the

findings on how to succeed with virtual teams by Duleboth and Hoch (2017). Studies by Bailey and colleagues (2019) propose many future possibilities, especially as technology is continuously emerging and creating new ways of communicating virtually. In the gap between psychological safety and virtual teams, we ask whether teams and organizations can fully use the possibilities present in today's technology to create the inclusiveness and trust required for a psychologically safe environment.

Virtual Teams in Organizations

Most scholars agree that virtual team management is more challenging than collocated teams (Davis & Bryant, 2003; Hick & Kozlowski, 2014, cited in Dulebohn & Hoch, 2017). In addition to the disadvantages mentioned above, the leaders tend to have less influence and less information about the status of the team and their progress toward milestones and functioning, therefore, suggesting that the leaders' team management of processes and dynamics may be harmed (Dulebohn & Hoch, 2017). Moreover, although there is growing attention toward virtual teams, there is a lack of knowledge on successfully managing virtual teams (Dulebohn & Hoch, 2017).

Factors like globalization, innovation, and improved technology may have increased to multicultural virtual teams (Dulebohn & Hoch, 2017). A recent survey conducted by RW3 CulturalWizard (2016, cited in Dulebohn & Hoch, 2017) found that out of 1372 business respondents from 80 countries, 85% of the respondents worked on virtual teams where 48% reported that over half their virtual team members were members of other cultures (RW3 CultureWizard, 2016, cited in Dulebohn & Hoch, 2017). Therefore, we believe that virtual teams and culture might relate to how individuals might experience psychological safety. It might also be necessary to elaborate on the environment or cultures mentioned in the psychological safety literature review.

As mentioned earlier, trust needs to be elucidated in the climate to ensure psychological safety. Feitosa and Salas (2020) highlight *monitoring trust* as one of five challenges virtual teams face. The managers should pay attention to how team members connect, respond, and maintain shared tasks to catch trust violations early (Feitosa & Salas, 2020). Another challenge is how organizations can foster

inclusion in a virtual environment (Feitosa & Salas, 2020). This leads us toward how one can deal with each member's local context while ensuring that everyone's voice is heard. Other challenges like isolation and detachment are infuriated by the ongoing situation. Therefore, psychological safety could bolster virtual teams (Feitosa & Salas, 2020). Another way to encourage inclusion in a virtual environment is to attempt to spot similarities between the team members, as that can open up for the feeling of belongingness (Feitosa & Salas, 2020). The feeling of belonging to a team can be a problem in every team, not just a virtual one. We believe that the proper use of technology might reap benefits, for example, allowing for getting to know one's team members on a deeper level, because one can see how he or she lives.

Possibilities with Virtual Teams and Technology

Bailey and colleagues (2019) write about possible challenges to dealing with more use of technology, mostly referring to socialization and communication, that we believe in having a vast impact on psychological safety. A positive note on the possibilities that come with technology is that some might argue that it can positively influence safety in teams if used correctly. However, this thesis will further examine this as the digitalized aspect of psychological safety seems untouched. We want to research how employees' psychological safety is affected or influenced by technology and virtuality in the context of uncertainty and complexity. The trend towards creating virtual teams has been accelerated due to Covid-19, as most teams – whether previously co-located or not – are now keeping in touch almost entirely online (The Economist Intelligence Unit (EIU), 2020). Also, Dulebohn and Hoch (2017) argue how the explosive growth of virtual teams is expected to continue in the future. Suppose organizations and teams are to move to work virtually mostly. In that case, it is necessary to examine how to tackle the crucial aspect of psychological safety in such virtual teams, especially as the concept is highly dependent on communication, trust, inclusion, and interpersonal risks to achieve success.

3 The Research Methodology/Design

Qualitative Research Strategy

Bell et al. (2019) refer to a research strategy as a general orientation to social research handling, where we will use a qualitative research strategy in this master thesis. Furthermore, Bell and her colleagues (2019) explain that “qualitative research entails generating theories inductively rather than testing theories that are specified at the outset” (p. 360). In addition, qualitative research strategy emphasizes words rather than quantification in the collection and analysis of data. It provides rich data, words, texts, and stories, where standard methods are interviews and focus groups. Also, the four features of the qualitative research strategy are; (1) the inductive approach, (2) epistemological position, (3) ontological position, (4) an emphasis on naturalism (Bell et al., 2019). An inductive approach is where the theory is generated by the research (Bell et al., 2019). Moreover, epistemology is a theory of knowledge and what should be sufficient knowledge, ontology is a theory of the nature of reality, and naturalism is that the social world remains true to what is being investigated (Bell et al., 2019).

According to Bell and her colleagues (2019), an epistemological viewpoint emphasizes understanding the social world through how participants view this world. In particular, we want to generate theories through our research by conducting qualitative research. Our study’s motive is to look at the reality from the participants’ point of view and understand how digitalization and technology, and the lack of psychical face-to-face may affect psychological safety. As this social reality may differ from person to person, we still want to reflect on the responses and perhaps apply the findings in a way that might encourage businesses to act and reflect, or at least provide meaningful information.

The master thesis will apply Bell and her colleagues’ (2019) outline of qualitative research’s main steps. When it comes to step 1, the research question was initially formulated as “how does digitalization affect psychological safety?”. We wanted to look at these aspects of the business world and see how the theories are connected in reality. Next, we found out that we needed to narrow down and make adjustments that resulted in “how does digitalization affect psychological safety within sales teams in Norway, Sweden, and Denmark?”. This brings us to the last draft of the research question, which is currently “how do technology and extensive use of

virtuality affect psychological safety within sales teams in Norway, Sweden, and Denmark?”. Step 2 is described in the section below - *Unit of Analysis*. Step 3 on the collection of relevant data will be explained in part 4 - Plan for Data collection. The following steps are limited to be explained without the collection and interpretation of data.

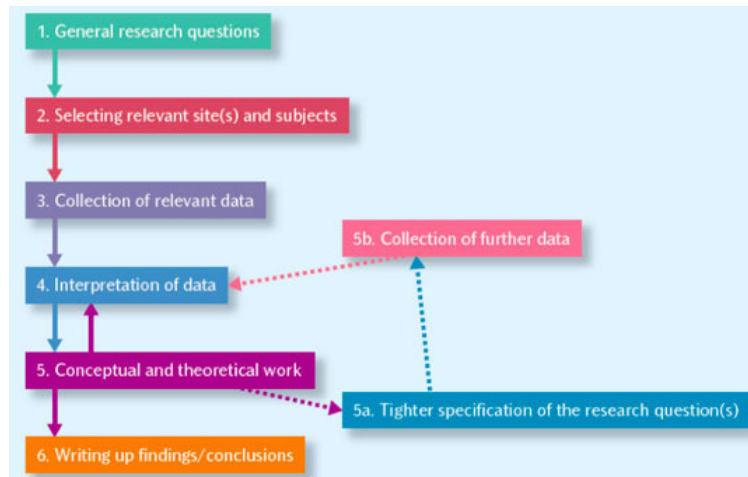


Figure 1 - An outline of the main steps of qualitative research (Bell et al., 2019)

Unit of Analysis

The second step is selecting relevant site(s) and subjects, which could be similar to van Aken’s and Berend’s *unit of analysis* (Bell et al., 2019; van Aken & Berends, 2018). The research will investigate organizational units, more accurately, groups. At the time of writing, we just received the representatives’ contact information from the three different [REDACTED] country managers. The plan now is to start the dialogue with these people and inform them about the research to prepare the groups for analysis. The main reason for choosing to investigate employees in sales teams across borders is that there are simply not enough units in the Norwegian office. The intention is to look at sales teams that are already existing to maintain an inductive approach. However, we will also keep other demographics and personal attributes in mind since the sales teams may consist of diverse individuals and goals. Moreover, it would be up to each country’s representatives to decide the groups based on feasibility, such as availability, time, and the interviewees’ motivation to participate. When it comes to the latter part, we need to consider the interviewees’ willingness to devote unpaid time (Bell et al., 2019).

In the methodological literature, selecting the *cases* to compare and analyze is called *sampling*, a subset of the population (Bell et al., 2019; van Aken & Berends, 2018). Moreover, Patton (2002, cited in van Aken & Berends, 2018) suggests how qualitative research implies generating new insights. The purposeful sampling would be to select informative cases for the inquiry (Patton, 2002, cited in van Aken & Berends, 2018). This supports how sales teams could be relevant for the investigation and research question. The reason for choosing the *sales* teams is that we want to narrow down to a group of people that seem to have the same characteristics and possibly the same needs. In other words, there will be conducted a *homogeneous sampling* as we seek to investigate similar units to get more in-depth (van Aken & Berends, 2018). Nonetheless, the assumption that such sales teams are similar in characteristics and needs can be rejected and considered throughout the investigation. Furthermore, although the samples are cases in the unit teams, we will interview the individuals, not the group. Moreover, we believe the chosen unit of analysis is appropriate since we seek to investigate virtual teams to find how technology affects psychological safety in virtual teams.

That being said, concerning sampling, qualitative research tends to emphasize purposive sampling where the goal is to sample cases/participants strategically so that they are relevant to the research question (Bell et al., 2019). In addition, purposive sampling does not allow the researcher to generalize a population. However, according to Bell and her colleagues (2019) in grounded theory, it is impossible to know how many we should interview before theoretical saturation is achieved, in other words, when no theoretical insights are being generated (Bell et al., 2019). For now, we expect to research three groups representing each country. However, there might be a need to expand or adjust the number of units and cases to achieve theoretical saturation. For instance, we do not know to what degree the different countries are represented due to theoretical saturation. If so, we have to be aware of other factors that could affect our research, such as cultural or organizational differences. This could lead us to further investigate these aspects if a more comparative approach seems to be relevant. Nonetheless, step 5a in our outline - tighter specification of the research question, will allow us to make adjustments to the research question, for example, a change in the definition of the population.

Research Method - Semi-structured Interview

According to Bell and her colleagues (2019), a research method is a technique for collecting data, where the interview is seemingly the most extensively used method in qualitative research. In other words, we are more interested in the interviewees' points of view where the approach is flexible to collect rich and detailed answers. This master thesis will use *semi-structured interviews* as it seems to be the most appropriate type of interview for our research. A semi-structured interview is more relevant than an unstructured interview as we do not want to convey a 'conversational interviewing'. We want to use an *interview guide* covering questions on the specific topics: psychological safety and virtual teams. A semi-structured interview opens up for the interviewers to follow the interview guide flexibly (Bell et al., 2019). The intention is to have a similar wording from interviewee to interviewee (Bell et al., 2019). Namely, we want to follow a script to a certain extent, depending on the interviewees' responses. In addition, Bell and her colleagues (2019) argue that since we are more than one person doing the fieldwork, and we want to ensure comparability in the interviewing style, semi-structured interviewing is preferred.

Online Interviews

According to the The Economist Intelligence Unit (EIU) (2020), the pandemic has caused people to start working remotely, increasing their digital communications and virtual collaboration. As a result, we most likely have to conduct the interview online. Semi-structured interviews allow us to have a script to follow to a certain extent, which is feasible through online interviews. The interviews will go through software applications like Zoom or Teams, where we can use virtual face-to-face interaction. It depends on the interviewees if they want to use their cameras or not, which will be elaborated in part 4 of this report. Furthermore, we will be aware of the advantages of online interviewing, such as cost and time saving due to the geographical distance, and that there is little evidence that the interviewer's capacity to report is significantly weakened (Bell et al., 2019). However, we will also be aware of the limitations of online interviews. These could be technological problems like bad wifi connection, which can result in difficulties in transcribing the interview.

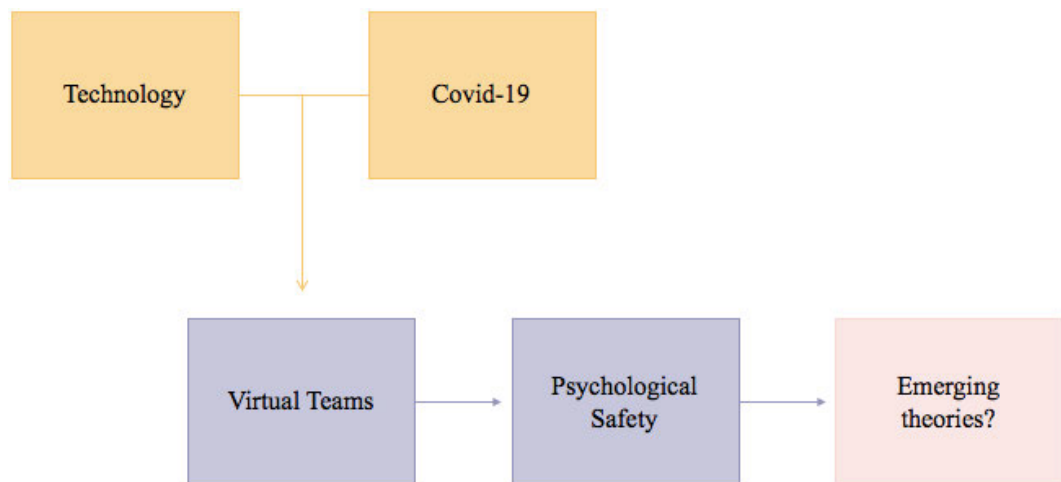


Figure 2 - Illustration of research question

This figure illustrates the relationships between the different moderators in our research question. *Technology* includes the technological trends and how the pandemic is forging the use of *virtual teams*. Further, there will be conducted a research on how the extensive use of virtuality affect the *psychological safety* in teams. The figure could be the foundation for further investigation where other relevant aspects and moderators, and emerging relationships can be added/adjusted.

Multiple-Case Study Design

Research design is a framework or structure within which the collection and analysis of data occur (Bell et al., 2020). Furthermore, Bell and her colleagues (2019) mention five research design types where a *case study design* seems more relevant for our research. What recognizes a case study is that the researcher is usually concerned with emphasizing a case study's unique feature. However, case study research does not have to be limited to a single case. As researchers, we choose to use a *multiple-case study design* in order to answer our research question. Bell and her colleagues (2019, p. 67) explain that a multiple-case study design is considered in comparative design as they are mainly undertaken to compare cases. This allows us to compare and contrast the findings deriving from each case, which encourages us to examine uniqueness and what is shared across cases while doing a theoretical reflection on the findings (Bell et al., 2019).

We will investigate the sales teams as units and their daily life in digitalization and the degree of psychological safety, arguing that this could be a typical case study (Yin, 2003, cited in Bell et al., 2019). Furthermore, according to Stake (1995, cited in Bell et al., 2019), the selection of case studies is encouraged by the opportunity

to learn. In the introduction and literature review, we believe that this research question's theory is limited, indicating the most significant learning. Our case could also be perceived as an *instrumental case* and/or *collective case* where we investigate to understand a broader issue and explore a general phenomenon (Stake, 1995, cited in Bell et al., 2019). We perceive the importance of a broader issue; hence, our research question is to explore a general phenomenon.

4 Plan for Data Collection and Analyses, and Legal and Ethical Regulations (NSD)

Plan for Data Collection and Analyses

Our paper's data collection will be supported by a descriptive analysis of weekly and historical employee surveys. This quantitative data will provide insights on how employees experience their workplace in general and the status of their well-being. By using such supporting documentation, we believe that we have a starting point for further qualitative research. This might affect the research strategy to be mixed - quantitative and qualitative. However, we intend to use quantitative data as statistics, while the interviews will be our primary source of information to investigate our research question. Surveys as a sort of *documentation* is often a more reliable source of information than the opinion of an organization member (van Aken & Berends, 2018). We are open to adjust and elaborate more on the research strategy, depending on this report's feedback.

At present, we have had some informal meetings to start the dialogue to get to know the company and inform the company of our research. One of us currently works at [REDACTED] which is why we get access to the company that we will study. That being said, the one who does not work at [REDACTED] has interviewed the CPO of the group company alone in order to maintain objectivity. The next step for our data collection is to contact the units we are interviewing - sales teams in Norway, Sweden, and Denmark. The plan for data collection will include a temporary schedule and practical preparations that have to be done before the pilot interview and the remaining interviews that will be scheduled. Although it depends on when we get the surveys' data, we assume that this data would be the first step in our plan for data collection. The figure below illustrates our temporary schedule for data collection and analyses.

Activities	Year	2021																													
	Months	January					February					March					April					May					June				
	Weeks:	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26				
7 Developing interview design/collection/survey - Dependent on RQ and Method					7																										
8 Supervision - Preliminary Report go-through						8																									
9 Notify NSD about collection of Data - Either qualitative or quantitative						9																									
10 Data collection																															
11 Supervision - Go through the collected data and analysis method																															
12 Analysis of data (iterate process)																															
13 Supervision - Go through the findings of the data analysis																															
14 Writing paper and wrapping up																															
15 Hand in - Deadline 01 July 2021																															

Table 1 - Schedule for data collection and analysis

Legal and Ethical Regulations

Since the methodology requires collecting personal information, there is a need to send an application to the Norsk Senter for Forskningsdata (NSD). Before sending this application, we will take the following considerations. Firstly, the company has not stated that it wishes to be anonymized. Therefore, we will treat the company's name openly and declare this matter with the company before handing in the research. Secondly is handling the information collected through interviews. The interviews on [REDACTED] employees will be done on sales teams in Norway, Sweden, and Denmark. These teams seem to be similar, and the data collection and questions will therefore be alike.

In our collection, we will ensure that the information that we gather will be untraceable to the interviewee and get *informed consent* (Bell et al., 2019, p. 592) from each of the interviewees. The anonymizing of the individual interviewees will be done by not collecting any pictures, e-mail, name, or other information to trace the interview back to the interviewee. Furthermore, in our study, we will not collect sensitive personal data, which means that we do not need to consider such ethical concerns. Before holding the interview, we will inform the participants that the interview will be recorded and transcribed. After this, the recorded interview will be deleted. However, as the interviewees are from different countries and on the sales team level in [REDACTED] complete anonymization will be difficult. Therefore, we have to apply for consent at NSD. When doing so, we will follow the guide below.

Initiation	Planning	Execution	Closure
<p>Familiarize yourself with BIS policy and guidelines regarding writing thesis https://portal.bi.no/en/examination/assignment-thesis/personal-information/</p> <p>You must not start collecting personal information before the project is evaluated</p>	<p>Plan personal information to be collected</p> <p>Keyword: Minimize data. What is necessary?</p> <p>Overview of personal information</p> <p>Is the personal information considered sensitive?</p> <p>Use the template from NSD for consent</p> <p>Register the student project at NSD through the Notification form</p> <p>Feedback from the evaluation can take up to 30 days</p>	<p>Collection and processing</p> <p>Establish master key for deidentification</p> <p>Answer questions from the respondents regarding their rights (right to access, right to be forgotten etc)</p> <p>Report deviations to personvernombud@bi.no</p>	<p>Anonymize data</p> <p>Provide feedback to NSD that the project is finished and done</p>

Figure 3 - Guide NSD

Such an application will include an interview guide. It is essential to keep in mind that there are two data collections - the surveys and the interviews. Both need to be considered and evaluated by NSD. Since we do not currently hold the survey data, we need to ask [REDACTED] to let us know whether the data is anonymized. At the time of writing, the company has already confirmed that we can access the survey data, so we are awaiting this information.

Other Ethical Considerations and Reflections

As Bell and her colleagues (2019) mention, researchers must be aware of the ethical issues that may appear at different points throughout the research process. We need to insure our study's integrity and business research reputation more generally (Bell et al., 2019). Moreover, business research ethics revolve around discussions about how we should treat the individuals in the teams we research and if there are unethical activities. We will further elaborate on the first aspect below. That being said, it is vital for researchers to continuously revisit ethical considerations throughout our study (Bell et al., 2019).

Ethical considerations - various stakeholders in research

Ethical obligations towards society

It is essential to consider the ethical obligations we, as researchers, have towards society. Our study aims to look at a general phenomenon to explore a potential broader issue. In such a case, we have to recognize that our findings might not reflect society as a whole, but it might indicate a potential general phenomenon in society. Such a general phenomenon could be the link between psychological safety

and virtuality, and how changes or possible consequences can negatively affect society. Ethically, there should be further examination of the phenomenon to ensure that society can be aware of the potential harm.

Ethical considerations and respect for individuals

Our study will be conducted on a team-level, but the interviews will be on individuals in the sales teams. Regarding the ethical considerations and respect for the individuals in such teams, we have to be aware of potentially sensitive issues. That is because the concept of psychological safety might open up for vulnerability; for example, if the interviewee is afraid of being honest or repercussions about a sensitive issue (Bell et al., 2019). Ethically we as researchers must be clear about how we will intend to protect and fully anonymize the interviewees. To ensure that there is no blowback for potentially sensitive issues or other concerns the individuals might have.

As previously mentioned, we will make sure to inform the individuals fully and adequately about the project so that they will have the possibility to decline to take part or to withdraw without consequences, also known as informed consent. Some scholars argue that informed consent might have unintended negative consequences on the quality of the data; this is a matter that we have to be aware of because if we antagonize or alienate the participants of the study, we might get incorrect data (Crow et al., 2006).

Respect for the interests of firms/institutions

Ethically we have to do what is right for the study and respect the company, [REDACTED] Suppose there are findings that might prove harmful for the company; we have to respectfully inform the company while not changing or covering up potential negativity, thus maintaining objectivity. We have already discussed such a situation with the company and informed that we as researchers would not change anything to favor [REDACTED] but be honest, objective, and respectful. If we do not behave with respect and honesty, the company will not benefit from the study in terms of learning and development.

Interacting with the research community

In our research, we will behave ethically and correctly when interacting with the research community by always citing and referring to previous studies to explain or describe findings or research.

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