

Working at Home in Relation to Institutionalised Individualism

- A Critical Master's Dissertation

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Abstract:

Globalisation, internet and digitalisation has given cause to vast changes in society, where the individual is to an ever greater extent extradited to oneself through individualisation, flexibilisation and informatisation. Taken together this known as *institutional individualisation*. Globalisation, internet and digitalisation has facilitated a plethora of possibilities for remote work, i.e. white collar work that is not confined to a dedicated office area, but rather being undertaken on the go, at home or in a hotel lobby. As the global spread of Covid-19, office work has taken on new dimensions forcing employees to conduct their work within the context of the private sphere, thus altering working *from* home (WFH) into working *at* home (WAH). This is here researched, using a combination of critical theory and social critical realism.

In this master's dissertation, WAH full time due to Covid-19, has therefore been set in relation to institutional individualisation and its incusing on contemporary society. Thus, against the background of individualisation, flexibilisation and informatisation, and how they together comprise our everyday working lives in the organisations where we, by means of making a living, every day partake, the changed nature of the relation between the private and the professional sphere has here been investigated. Eleven semi structured in-depth interviews, in addition to four confirmatory interviews, have served to give new insights on the social implications of WAH. These are presented in six verified hypotheses, with subordinate clauses. Taken together, these in turn serve to illustrate a catalysed institutionalised individualism, and a usurpation of the private sphere, by the professional sphere, while simultaneously instigating a perceived free will, making the transformation a choice of the employee him- or herself.

Key words: Institutional individualism, work, Covid-19, critical theory, critical social realism.

Abstrakt:

Globalisering, internet och digitalisering har givit upphov till stora samhälleliga förändringar, där individen i allt större utsträckning utlämnas till sig själv genom individualisering, flexibilisering och informatisering. Sammantaget kallas detta för institutionaliserad individualism. Globalisering, internet och digitalisering har också faciliterat en pletora av möjligheter till distansarbete, dvs tjänstearbete som inte är begränsat till den dedikerade kontorsytan, utan snarare utförs på språng, i hemmet eller i en hotelllobby, alltså på distans. Med den globala spridningen av Covid-19, har kontorsarbete tagit nya dimensioner och tvingat de anställda att utföra sitt arbete i kontext av den privata sfären, och därmed förändrat arbete *från* hemmet (WFH) till arbete *i* hemmet (WAH). Detta har här beforskats medelst en kombination av kritisk teori och social kritisk realism.

I denna magisteruppsatsen har heltidsarbete i hemmet, med anledning av Covid-19, därför satts i relation till institutionaliserad individualism och dess prägling av det samtida samhället. Mot bakgrund av individualisering, flexibilisering och informalisering, och hur de tillsammans utgör våra vardagliga arbetsliv i de organisationer där vi, genom förtjänandet av vårt levebröd, varje dag deltar, har förändringar i relationen mellan privat och professionell sfär således undersökts. Elva semistrukturerade djupintervjuer, har tillsammans med fyra bekräftande intervjuer, tjänat nya insikter om sociala implikationer av arbete i hemmet. Dessa presenteras genom sex verifierade hypoteser, med tillhörande underklausuler. Sammantaget tjänar

dessas i sin en illustration av katalyserad institutionaliserad individualism och den professionella sfärens usurpering av den privata sfären, samtidigt som en uppfattad egen vilja konstituerar transformationen som självvald.

Nyckelord: Institutionell individualism, arbete, Covid-19, kritisk teori, kritisk social realism.

Populärvetenskaplig sammanfattning

Globalisering, internet och digitalisering har givit upphov till stora samhälleliga förändringar, där individen i allt större utsträckning utlämnas till sig själv i vad som sammantaget kallas för institutionaliserad individualism. Globalisering, internet och digitalisering har faciliterat en pletora av möjligheter till distansarbete, dvs tjänstearbete som inte är begränsat till den dedikerade kontorsytan, utan snarare utförs på språng, i hemmet eller i en hotellobby, alltså på distans. Med den globala spridningen av Covid-19, har kontorsarbete tagit nya dimensioner och tvingat de anställda att utföra sitt arbete i kontext av den privata sfären, och därmed förändrat arbete *från* hemmet (WFH) till arbete *i* hemmet (WAH). Detta har här beforskats medelst en kombination av kritisk teori och social kritisk realism.

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Adorno: The idea of freedom from labour is replaced by the possibility of choosing one's own work. Self-determination means that within the division of labour already laid down I can slip into the sector that promises me the greatest rewards.

Horkheimer: The idea that freedom consists in self-determination is really rather pathetic, if all it means is that the work my master formerly ordered me to do is the same as the work I now seek to carry out of my free will; the master did not determine his own actions.¹

¹ T. Adorno and M. Horkheimer discussing work, spare-time and freedom (Adorno et al., [1956] 2010 p. 16).

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1. Introduction

Globalisation, internet and digitalisation has given cause to vast changes in society, where the individual is to an ever greater extent extradited to oneself through individualisation, flexibilisation and informatisation (Gillberg 2018). Taken together these is known as *institutional individualisation* (Beck & Beck-Gernsheim, 2002). Globalisation, internet and digitalisation has also facilitated a plethora of possibilities for *remote work*, i.e. white collar work that is not confined to a dedicated office area, but rather being undertaken on the go, at home or in a hotel lobby. Daily office work is to a large extent comprised by communication through email, chat, text messages and various platforms facilitating instant connection with the surrounding world (Gillberg, 2018). With a Swedish rate of internet connectivity close to total (Internetstiftelsen, 2019), where 98% of all Swedes have access to the internet, work can be carried out both from home and on the go. A phenomena which is known as limitless work (Allvin, 2006). A vast majority of Swedes also carry a smartphone, always making them available and able to respond to work related tasks. Basically, it can be concluded that from a technical point of view there is little need for a white collar worker to be in a physical office. Also, the possibility to work remotely is in many ways a privilege, offering freedom and flexibility. Thus, offices over the last thirty years have been transformed into open areas, co-working spaces, at the same time enabling smaller office areas and lower costs (since not everybody is expected to be present at the same time, there is no need for an individual space for each and every employee). Further, this has given rise to the concept of *working from home*.

However, a vast and rapid spread of the virus SARS-CoV-2, causing the disease commonly known as Covid-19, radically changed the game (WHO, 2020). Due to the spread of Covid-19, a ban of public gatherings has been implemented in many countries, a substantial decrease in travel both locally and internationally, along with closed offices, has made remote work no longer optional. Hence, as from spring 2020, a majority of the Swedish people employed in offices are currently, in line with recommendations issued by the Swedish Health Authority (Folkhälsomyndigheten), working *at home* (WAH), or rather than Working *from* Home (WFH). Allow me to elaborate.

Work from home implicitly indicates a spatial separation between home and work, given that the preposition 'from' indicates origin, and tacitly direction. Implicitly, this also defines work, or rather the office as the destination. However, when the office ceased to be a legitimate space for conducting work, the term working 'from' home no longer applies. Since office work has been compulsory destined to be conducted within the private sphere, commonly referred to as home, the correct term is no longer working *from* home, but rather working *at* home.

1.2 Focus, purpose and research question

The focus of this study is the white collar worker synonymous with an office context, be it private or public or private sector, enabling the possibility of remote work. Having emphasised that, we now precede to the purpose of the master's dissertation.

From a business point of view, questions have been raised as a result of WAH being mandatory to an increasing extent, regarding the necessity and costs of office spaces. Will expensive offices be justified in the future? Can business be run on a permanent remote basis?

On, the other hand, the cost for living in urban areas has steadily increased over several decades, however, not in a parallel increase to average wages, which have not been subject to the same increase (Peterson, 2020).

One can clearly see that the rapid change from business as usual, with commuting, an office and more or less clear boundaries between the professional and private sphere, to a comprised existence where a majority of actors, contexts, and mechanisms have been condemned to either the virtual world online and/or the private sphere, raises several issues. As a permanent state of WAH may require a designated working area within the living habitat, it implicitly becomes a question of personal finance and means to possess the required space.

When an individual, by choice or involuntarily, starts working at home full time the option of 'going home' is automatically forsaken. In the same sense it also erases the possibility, and perhaps the justification of leaving home on a regular basis as 'going to work' implies. It is plausible to believe that the increase of time spent at home will alter social relations, both to a presumptive family, and to co-workers as well as other social life.

Thus, this raises several questions, e.g. regarding the nature of the organisational functions when employees only meet online, rather than face to face; does WAH alter either the real workload or the perceived workload or both; what happens when WAH erases boundaries between the private and the professional sphere? Also, the nature of the working environment needs to be addressed; e.g. does WAH alter the psychosocial working environment? If not all, then at least the most urgent of them may be answered by the overarching research question:

- Which are the social implications of working at home full time?

This has been researched through eleven in depth interviews with a respondent living in different parts of southern Sweden offering a diverse empirical material. Having said that the conclusions being made are to be considered general, not in the sense that they may apply to each and every reader in the exact way they are formulated, but rather more as an invitation offering understanding of the concepts of working at home per se.

1.3. Disposition

The disposition of the master's dissertation is as follows. Introduction, purpose and research question (above). In chapter 2. *Background*, I give a broad perspective contextualisation of institutionally individualised society. Concluding the chapter, there is a brief section on the recent turns of events in relation to Covid-19.

Following, chapter 3. *Previous research* describes a meagre corpus of existing research in relation to WAH, and thus highlights the need for additional research, predominantly with a qualitative method.

Chapter 4. *Theory* elaborates on the combination of critical theory and realist social theory. Concluding this chapter our stratified ontological perspective narrows, leaving the concept of societal structures in benefit for a closer look on contexts, mechanisms, and outcomes.

Chapter 5. *Method* deals with realist social evaluation, described along with the qualitative research that has been undertaken.

In chapter 6. *Analysed Results* contexts, agents, interventions, mechanisms, and outcomes are presented. Further, these are analysed and in conclusion offer an elaborated answer to the research question above.

By concluding the master's dissertation, chapter 7. *Conclusion and further research* we once more zoom out and elaboration on the findings in a larger ontological perspective leaving us with need for future research.

However, to follow the forthcoming argument, we first need to turn to next chapter; 2. *Background*.

2. Background

In this chapter I will outline a brief background of institutional individualisation in relation to Covid-19 and working at home (WAH). In a wide perspective I will describe what the German sociologists Beck and Beck-Gernsheim (2002), coined as institutionalised individualisation and how it incuses contemporary society. Further, I offer a description of the three concepts of individualisation, flexibilisation and informatisation, together comprising our everyday working lives, and the organisations where we, by means of making a living, partake. Next, I turn to individualisation of the housing market, and by that showing how the individual is imposed full responsibility for his or her housing. Concluding this chapter, I will briefly outline the recent turn of events in relation to the pandemic spread of Covid-19, and its implications on our everyday lives in terms of social distancing and mandatory work at home (WAH). Hence, we next turn to institutional individualisation.

2.1 Institutional individualisation

The term *institutional individualisation* is closely connected to Ulrich Beck (Beck & Beck-Gernsheim, 2002), third generation Frankfurt School. The concept of individualisation, coined by Beck, was hence hardly meant in a neoliberal type of way, where choices and opportunity are guiding words for the liberated man, but rather in an institutional kind of way, where societal structures are leaving the individual extradited to him- or herself (Beck & Beck-Gernsheim, 2002). Extradited to pursue, not only a living, but also prosperity and wellbeing.

Institutional individualisation is synonymous with life outside the traditional family, in a secular society where class is no longer a factor for a sense of belonging. Nevertheless, man is conformed within the institutional frames of society, leaving him alone to comply with the larger context of labour, toil, economy, and market. In a sense, Beck & Beck-Gernsheim are through their concept of institutionalised individualisation offering the other side of the Sartrean existential coin, where man, in Sartre's words, is condemned to freedom (Sartre et al., 2007). While Sartre claims existentialism as making the individual the sole responsible agent, Beck & Beck-Gernsheim on the other hand claim society's constitutional eradication of the individual to him- or herself.

The right to control both private capital and personal time, and freedom, is being both demanded, and where so already possible, also exercised. Demands for such freedom in contemporary society date back to the civil labour movement, the civil rights movements and

the women's liberation movement, just to mention a few of many strives for emancipation (Beauvoir, [1949] 2011; Ekelöf, 1970; Lundh, 2010). Today it is considered an obvious right to be able to choose childcare, flexible working conditions, means of savings, and not least means of housing. In practice, institutional individualisation has, as stated above, by individual freedom diminished class belonging, both in relation to oneself and to other groups of society. Different types of Culture attract people from all parts of society, ceasing the Bourdieu ([1984] 2010) prophesies of Cultural preference to be a thing related to social class. Nevertheless, differences between social class has by no means diminished. Rather it is implying that the strife for a better living, or perhaps a strife towards a pay check at the end of the month, no longer is synonymous with a class belonging. Instead, the strife is an individual strife concerning success or failure, responsibility, guilt, and mental health. Taken together, everyday strife opens for more or less brief coalitions among individuals due to political belonging, social movements and actions. This in turn may cause polarisation of social groups in terms of ethnicity, religion, gender and sexual orientation leaving man, not in a meaningful context, but rather increasingly individualised (Beck & Beck-Gernsheim, 2002). This has also become a significant feature of the the labour market, where social skills out-trump competence, making individualisation the predominant characteristic (Gillberg, 2018).

2.2 Change in working conditions

As mankind, somewhere throughout the evolution started using tools, the foundation for what we know as utilitarianism was laid down. The word utility, being synonymous with tool, is also synonymous with a philosophy of purpose of action, i.e. telos (Gr. τέλος), where the means justify the ends. Since all types of utility serves a purpose, the producing man, who Hannah Arendt dubbed *Homo faber*, can no longer be defined useful in himself (Arendt, [1958] 1998, p. 154).

The ideal of usefulness itself, like the ideals of other societies, can no longer be conceived as something else: it simply defies questioning about its own use [...] the perplexity of utilitarianism is that it gets caught up in an unending chain of means and ends without ever arriving at some principle which could justify the category of means and end, that is of utility itself.

As hand craft has been replaced by manufacturing industry, and manufacturing industry in turn has been replaced by an industry of services, the producing man, *Homo faber*, has in an ever larger extent become a utility and a mean in himself; *Homo utilis*, or as Heidegger calls it; *Standing reserve* (Heidegger, [1954] 1993), always ready to serve his ends. This has become particularly clear through the institutional individualisation signifying our contemporary society in general and the labour market in particular, as can be seen in terms of staffing and hiring (Almega, 2018). A new way of organising work, largely due to globalisation and digitalisation can be summarised by the three concepts of *individualisation*, *flexibilisation* and *informatisation* (Gillberg, 2018). It should be noted that, even though, I choose to describe them one by one, they are by no means separated from one another, but rather closely entangled.

Individualisation is here synonymous with an increased demand for personal traits, social skills, and the right attitude rather than aptitude. Possession of relevant social networks

are also considered equally imperative and valuable (Rivera, 2012). An attractive presence in digital channels, such as social media, has proven if not more important, then, at least equally important, to actual skill and competence in performing the tasks of job in question (Gillberg, 2018). The process of applying for a job today is at times similar to the hiring process in the entertainment industry, where auditions are a part of the process of selection. Applicants are asked to mingle and present themselves in best possible manner. Recruitment is now referred to as *talent management*, and the candidate is expected to be youthful, hungry, driven, prestigeless, and have a taste for high tempo, team play and work efficiency, both on his or her own terms, and according to colleagues and management (Fleming & Sturdy, 2009). In the name of individualisation there is also a, sometimes unspoken but equally prevalent, demand for the employee to enjoy his or her work (Fleming & Sturdy, 2009). (A demand quite paradoxical to a hundred years of labour movement and demands for better working conditions.) Further, the nature of employment has shifted from job security to job ability, i.e. being attractive on the job market. The individual is hence to an ever-increasing extent responsible for his or her own wellbeing, e.g. happiness is what you make it, in a world characterised by a diminishing limit between the professional and private sphere.

This leads us further towards *flexibilisation* (Allvin, 2006; Gillberg, 2018; Røvik, 2008), a term referring precisely to that diminishing line marking the difference between the professional and private sphere in everyday life. The concept of flexibilisation is a Janus-faced concept comprising two very different perspectives. From the point of view of the employee, the concept of flexibilisation is synonymous with adaption to external spatial and temporal demands. Internet connectivity, smart phones and an in general rapidly progressing working climate demanding availability, adaptability and acceptance, and even liking, for perpetual changes and new demands. On the other hand, organisations of today are for the same reasons also more flexible, more prone to reorganisation and also to competence shifting, i.e., as stated above, offering less job security (Thompson, 2003). In conclusion this means that the employee is asked to give more of him or herself, while in exchange of less security.

Naturally, both individualisation and flexibilisation, walk hand in hand with digitalisation, altering both spatial and temporal conditions. Employee's availability outside the traditional working domain has proven to be synonymous with both stress, agony and other forms of mental illness (Derks & Bakker, 2014). However, it should be stressed that digitalisation, without a doubt, has also offered many benefits for both employees and organisation. Digitalisation, as any other technique, is hence by no means a bad thing it is self. It is rather, a *Pharmakon*, both good and bad (Derrida, [1972] 2016). As a certain fact, however, digitalisation has created a greater need for documentation, and by that, also bureaucracy. This leads us to the third term informatisation.

Informatisation is a concept comprising the increase of information in a digital society (Gillberg, 2018; Iveroth et al., 2018). As digitalisation offers an increase in measurability, it implicitly also offers an increase in documentation. Also, a large proportion of the working hours are comprised by communication by means of chat, email, and digital portals. Nearly half of the total of working hours is spent with cell phones, video meetings, emails and other such communications mediums (Gillberg, 2018). As a paradox, where digital intentions have been to facilitate work, it has on the contrary increased the workload, by an increasing demand for

documentation and bureaucracy. This has become particularly clear in the Public sector, where a social secretary can spend as much as six hours per day on administrative tasks, leaving only two hours left for value creating for the citizens in need of help (Hartman, 2018). Informatisation has also given rise to a new type of digital Panopticon, enabling surveillance of employees through the digital footprints that any use of any digital device generates, eo ipso. Surveillance can be linked to both alteration of motivation, autonomy, resistance and even cynicism (Bain & Taylor, 2000; Spånt Enbuske, 2019; Zuboff, 2019).

Despite all, obtaining a job is crucial in being a part of the production apparatus and hence global society as we know it. Not least, is it a prerequisite for having a place to live, a place to call home and a place to recuperate. In addition, the housing market, as the rest of society, has also been subject to institutionalised individualisation. To this we turn next.

2.3 Changes in housing

The two decades, 1950-ies and 1960-ies, in Sweden commonly known as *The Golden Years*, due to a both fast and vast economic growth, created need for new type of housing. In turn this gave rise to *The Million Programme* (TMP), i.e. the projects. Even though the nuclear family and the People's Home (Sw. Folkhemmet) was still being very much a theme for society in general, the post-modern urban housings in terms of TMP gave rise to an increase of one person households (OPH) (Höjer, 2014). A phenomenon, that also can be explained by women's emancipation, where marital demands no longer controlled the life of the everyday woman, while at the same time a growing labour market offered employment, and in turn economic self-sufficiency. Needless to say, the new housings were urban, with promises of a both social and modern life. Improvement of the system for social security and pension during The Golden Years also facilitated living alone. Between 1950 and 1960 the number of singles households doubled. Today, Sweden has the most OPH per capita in the world (SCB, 2020a). It should be noted, however, that people don't spend their whole lives living as singles. Rather it is an ever-changing scenery depending on different phases throughout our various lifespans. Lifespans becoming increasingly longer in parallel to an increased standard of living.

Without any intention of proclaiming how people should live their lives, I do want to stress the point that an increase of OPH is, not only an indication of institutional individualisation, but also that it may leave the person without a fixed point, a significant someone, and hence extradite man and woman to him- or herself. OPH have in the western world been made possible by economic growth and an increase in wealth. Wealth has, however, accumulated and those, once given the opportunity to live alone, are now in risk of poverty. Since the middle of the 1980's levels of income for people in OPH have decreased, particularly in relation to couples where both are working full time. The most radical decrease can be found among single parents (Alm et al., 2020). This is particularly clear in Sweden where 7 out of 10 women are working full time, in comparison to 9 out of 10 men working full time. A third of the working population in Sweden are singles, that is, both men and women. In turn, this means that the number of OPH are increasing in contrast to an ever-poorer social security, where the responsibility for financial security has been imposed on the individual him- or herself. This has become clear when poverty can't be connected to level of education, but rather to lack of work (Alm et al., 2020). The growing risk of poverty among singles is hence simply due to the

lack of security that the partner's additional income offers. In a worst-case scenario, the single person cannot provide for rent, either due to lack of income or due to an increase in rent in relation to a sustained level of income. The untouchable right to possess a home of one's one is hence not what it once was. A larger proportion of the responsibility for finding and managing housing is now cast on the individual.

In conclusion, the numbers speak for themselves. Over the last decade real wages have increased by 14% (Carlgren, 2020). Despite an inconsistency in benefit of white collar workers, the increase in real wages are still significantly lower in comparison to an increase of average rent equal to 33% (SCB, 2020b), and a 72% increase of real estate prices (Svensk Mäklarstatistik, 2020). Taken all together, an institutionally individualised society, comprised of an individualised labour market and housing market (both in terms of the actual market and in terms of living conditions) it becomes clear that the solitary man and woman is facing responsibility and strife to voluntarily or involuntarily participate in the production apparatus comprising our society.

2.4 Covid-19 and the turn to working at home

During the spring of 2020 the disease Covid-19, spread across the world giving cause for WHO to call it a pandemic. The virus severely damages lung capacity and has proven particularly deadly among elders. In January, WHO published guiding lines for handling of an outburst and called for international measures to be taken (WHO, 2020). The spread through the world was still on a moderate level. By the beginning of March, the number of infected people exceeds 50.000 cases per day. In April, WHO announced that more than one million people have been infected. By mid-May, the daily number of infected people is close to a 100.000. By mid-July 2020, the death toll is close to 700.000 people worldwide, with southern Europe being an epicentre.

All travel was banned, borders closed down and global trade reached almost a standstill, only later to regress. Public gatherings were banned, In Germany any gathering of more than two people was prohibited. The Swedish limit was set to 50 people. Most public events were rapidly called off. Italy, Spain and UK enforced a lockdown, closing local businesses. Economies around the world was and still are, at the time of writing, struck by recession. Swedish authorities encouraged people to keep distance, stay at home and if possible also work from home, an encouragement that continued during autumn 2020 (Folkhälsomyndigheten, 2020). While autumn of 2020, despite restrictions, saw a moderate return to normal living, an increase of Covid-19 was reported in mid-October (Jönsson, 2020).

At the same time, offices are gaping empty, costing companies monthly rent while no longer serving their previous purpose. At the time of writing, autumn 2020, large organisations encourage employees to work from home the remainder of the year. Working from home, in line with authority recommendations proclaimed through national epidemiologist Anders Tegnell, became the new normal (Folkhälsomyndigheten, 2020). A new fang, considered both privileged and convenient by many office workers, now not having to deal with commuting. On the other hand, in July 2020, the Swedish Work Environment Authority (Arbetsmiljöverket, 2020, p. 9) released new regulations stipulating that

[t]he employer does not rule over the workplace, if the employer does not own, nor possess rental contract for the workplace, or for any other reason do not have the possibility to alter conditions of the workplace. Examples of workplaces the employer does not rule over include when work is conducted within someone else's private home (my transl.).

Therefore, this raises concerns both regarding the working environment and employer's disclaimer of responsibility. Additionally, previous studies has shown an increase in productivity by letting staff work from home, e.g. Bloom et al. (2015), nurturing the question of the future role of office space. However, there can be no doubt that an employee's prime purpose is generating profit for the employer, i.e. in the words of Marx, selling one's labour. In turn, questions regarding the social implications of having to work *at* home, questions regarding the financing of the space required for performing work-related tasks located to residential areas, and not least health and working environment related questions regarding outcome, responsibility and integrity as public production apparatus, to a never seen before, extent embark the private sphere, calls for address. These have been investigated using critical theory and realist social theory and they be further explained in due chapter. But, first, let us turn to previous research.

3. Previous research

Compulsory work at home (WAH), to such a vast extent as prevalent at the time of writing, hasn't been seen before in contemporary times. Therefore, the corpus of previous research can best be described as meagre. Having said that, the radical changes in working conditions implied by Covid-19, are without a doubt, a global phenomenon giving cause to research being undertaken worldwide. Research related to WAH is therefore being both conducted and published as we speak.

As for now, we have to settle with what previous research can be offered. To this we shall confine ourselves, and hence turn to next, by first addressing research related to the nature of the professional sphere, e.g. work. Following that, a regretfully shorter section, on research related to the private sphere follows. Last, I will briefly discuss the nature of the combined research, and its call for further qualitative research using critical theory and critical realism.

3.1 Impact on the professional sphere

The importance of information systems (IS) in relation to both an understanding of the pandemic context and work context cannot be understated. IS provides means both for fuelling and facilitating peoples response to Covid-19 pandemic, thus affecting a wide range of stakeholders (Ågerfalk et al., 2020), and has turned the general public into amateur data scientists, consuming endless analyses, summaries and graphs. Despite IS offering many benefits, there is also a vast spread of misinformation and fake news through social media. This has given cause for WHO to call Covid-19 both an infodemic, as much as an epidemic (Ågerfalk et al., 2020). Misinformation, depending on social and cultural networks, gravely alters the perception of risk, and in turn both behaviour, and perception of wellbeing along with decisions concerning policy making (Leitner, 2020).

Without a doubt, neither working remote or working at home, would be possible without IS, nor without work being digital, i.e. digital work, (Orlikowski, 2016). IS has not only shaped different types of organisations, but also the nature of a vast body of research on organisational studies, following the post bureaucratic organisation (Barley & Kunda, 2001). Barley and Kunda (2001) highlights the concepts of emotional labour building on the work of Arlie Hochschild ([1983] 2012), and careers of achievement being synonymous with hierarchical advancement, much in line with the *HR Value Proposition* by Ulrich and Brockbank (2007). Against this backdrop, Caligiuri et al. (2020) emphasise the relevance for international business research and a need for strategic international HRM-management, due to recent turn of events in relation to Covid-19. Further, Caligiuri et al. (2020) argues that flexible work arrangements have been proven beneficial for employees' health, this being of particular importance to managing challenges of working across temporal and spatial boundaries. However, current crisis sheds light on challenges of virtual collaboration where strong working relationships have not previously been built. Therefore, challenges in building a shared perception of strong social ties, common expectations including norms, tasks and goals have been proven particularly difficult. Bersin et al. (2020) highlights the benefits of providing a stipend for the employees, to buy new home-office equipment or sending a company work-from-home kit, as one time investments as help transforming into remote work. Further, frequent two-ways communication between management and employee, transparency, consistency, and resources easy to navigate have proven to be most useful in managing and maintaining a distributed workforce. Employees value emotional support, especially from senior leaders (Bersin et al., 2020).

Within studies on virtual teams, Newman et al. (2020) emphasis the difference in communicating to virtual teams vs. communicating face to face. Beyond technical barriers offering difficulties, there are also significant differences in communication per se. In virtual communication, nonverbal communication cues are mostly absent, as are the possibility to use informal means of communication. This, in turn, leads to misunderstandings, and delays in information dissemination between leaders and team members. Also, lower levels of team engagement, sense of coherence and engagement and so a reduction of cooperation can be derived from virtual communication. Findings of Newman et al. (2020) show that leaders having effective combinations of communication tools and technique, in turn, increase the team member's perception of the team as being effective, leading to both increase in performance and trust. Interestingly, they also find a misalignment between managements perception of performance, and the team's perception of performance. The greater the team members perceive leader's communication to be, the higher the team perceives its performance output.

Research concerning productivity in relation to remote work has proven a positive correlation between working from home and productivity by Bloom et al. (2015). It should, however, be stressed that research by Bloom et al. (2015) is based on WFH as voluntarily. This gravely alters the relevance of the research, nevertheless, its findings have been used in favour of remote work, whether voluntarily or not. Equally, Beckman and Rupietta (2018) argues that WFH allows employees to choose if and when it is necessary to communicate with co-workers, thus providing a more quiet working atmosphere, among other benefits of WFH. The empirical analysis of Beckman and Rupietta (2018) indicates a lower level of weekly work effort, while WFH. On the other hand, women have the responsibility [*sic..!*] to take care of children, and

hence less time to provide extra work effort. Also, tenure and age have a negative influence on work effort. Overall, the research shows a significant impact on employees work effort in relation to WFH. Particularly in trade, banking and insurance. Again, this conditions an intrinsic volition to remote work. Reduced social interaction, personal and professional isolation are identified as potential drawbacks. The need for regular face to face meetings with supervisors and colleagues are considered needed to share important information and creating a feeling of integration. Social isolation might also be a serious drawback, as employees working from (or at) home may suffer from lower visibility and therefor be ignored in promotion decisions.

On that note, Waizenegger et al. (2020) investigates an affordance perspective of team collaboration in relation to enforced WAH. Due to a radical change in workplace affordances, knowledge workers no longer naturally encounter one another, and engage in ad-hoc conversations. This increases the importance of virtual platforms such as Skype, Zoom and Microsoft Teams. Absence of ad-hoc has called for a more orchestrated collaboration, with communication being good but less frequent. Further absence of spontaneity has also impeded exchange of knowledge and coordination. This is particularly affecting new employees, lacking the opportunity to ask questions without having to send a message. This, therefore, refrains them from the social affordance that chat functions provide, and in turn affecting both the learning curve and the on-boarding process of new employees. Daily morning meetings has proven particularly important in both creating and maintaining the feeling of being part of a team. On the other hand, some find virtual meeting and video cameras overwhelming and testifies to virtual meeting-fatigue. Interestingly, enforced remote work has benefitted previous remote workers in terms of now creating a more equal working environment, and hence, including everybody on equal terms, benefitting socialising processes for those previously remotely outcast.

Ipsen et al. (2020) offers insight on experiences of working at home through an international survey conducted March - May 2020. As the authors at the time of writing, were in an early stage of analysing the empirical data, little certainty could be offered. An almost equal proportion (38% vs.42%) of the respondents claim that they work more during WAH, while other strongly disagree. A similar split (38% vs. 36%) is offered regarding the perception of work being more demanding than usual. Among Danish respondents 55% claim to get more work done during WAH, compared to being physically at the office. Taken together the Ipsen et al. (2020) study offers little affirmative insight on the actual implications of WAH. If anything, it shows the urgency both for research, and for the research being conducted and published.

3.2 Impact on the private sphere

As has been shown above, a somewhat substantial corpus of research is related to work and productivity. Shifting focus, we now turn to research concerning the impact on the private sphere caused by working at home.

A significant correlation between extensive telework, i.e. remote work, between work family conflict (WFC), i.e. where work interferes with family life, and job exhaustion is found by Golden (2012). On the contrary, family work conflict (FWC), i.e. where family life interferes with work, proved no significant correlation. Telework outside traditional office hours was also

proven to have a significant correlation to both WFC and job exhaustion. Further, Golden (2012) suggest that telework during traditional working hours may moderate time-based and strain-based WFC. However, it is also recognized that lack of physical separation and associated cognitive reprieve, offered by more separated domains may cause energy drain. Given the quantitative nature of the research no causal relations between, for example extensive work outside office hours and WFC could be proven.

Researching European differences in work life balance, Polkowska (2016) a significant correlation between temporarily employment and lack of family-friendly work practices were found. Additionally, she finds that the *option* (my emphasis) of working from home may aid employees in fulfilling their work and family commitment. A flexible form allows independence in organising the working day in relation to other commitments. The data presented by Polkowska (2016) also shows a close correlation between child care and work life balance. Concluding, a work life balance is dependent on both the labour market, e.g. Poland has a high rate of temporary working contracts making work life balance difficult, and state provided child care, e.g. Sweden has extensive state subsidised childcare facilitating work life balance.

However, bringing work into the same physical space, using both time and resources otherwise dedicated to life in the private sphere may, as shown above, intensify WFC. Against the backdrop of a commonly accepted fact, of negative correlation between WFC and satisfaction with family life, relationships and equity in household responsibilities, Dockery and Bawa (2018) aims at offering insight on the private and professional sphere colluding in Australia. They conclude, however, that little evidence can be found to support any correlation between WFH and relationship satisfaction. Positive effects are mainly found in relation to WFH and perceived share of childcare, implying that parents perceive themselves as doing *less than their fair share*, rather than a more traditional *more than their fair share*. Women are more satisfied with their partner when he is working full time, and she is not in the labour force. On the other hand, in terms of household tasks, women are more satisfied when she is working full time and he is working part time. A better family functioning is evident when the male is more successful and testifies to a higher self-assessed health. Children seem to lessen the satisfaction of the other partner for both partners concerned. Further, Dockery and Bawa (2018) found a negative effect on family functioning in relation to the number of hours the male worked from home (WFH). Concluding, the findings are very ambiguous and seem to be much dependent on the volition of working from home, rather than an enforced WAH.

At the time of writing, only one paper, provided by Boca et al. (2020), could be found offering insight on work life balance in relation to Covid-19. Surveying Italian households, they find additional childcare and housework associated to Covid-19 falls on the women's lot. No correlation could be seen between women's housework and changes in the male's working arrangements. On the other hand, men are more likely to increase their work on domestic chores when their partners are working. This does not hold true for partners of older women (presumably also older), who are less likely to increase the amount of housework. The Covid-19 crisis increased the workload for women, a workload resulting from both occupation and housework. This is crucially linked to both the Italian absence of childcare in addition to home schooling. In home schooling, a significant positive correlation between parent's education and

time spent educating the children was shown. Last, but not least, mothers of children age 0-5 years, are the most vulnerable to the difficulties of managing work life balance.

3.3 Need for further research

The academic purpose of presenting previous research is twofold. For one, it serves to frame the research question offering additional background and insight on related research. Secondly, presenting previous research also serves to highlight a gap in the existing corpus of knowledge, in relation to the topic in question. However, the fact that the turn of events related to Covid-19 not only are very recent, but actually happening at the time of writing, current research should not be described as having a gap, but rather as slowly starting to claim a minuscule corner of an already existing tabula rasa yet to be covered. Additionally it should be said that Covid-19 without a doubt catalysed the need for further research.

As far as the majority of exciting research concerning either WFH or WAH, presented both above, and elsewhere, it can be summarised as materialistic, grown out of a science tradition offering little room for metaphysics nor dialectics. In the words of Stanley Aronowitz (Horkheimer, 1972, p. xiv) introducing Horkheimer, and so typically describing the scenario:

The subordination of reason to industry, beginning in the eighteenth century (its transformation from metaphysics to instrumental rationality) was both a condition for social progress insofar a knowledge became a productive force, and the means by which critical reason was suppressed.

A quick look at the proportions of research on work in relation to the professional sphere driven by interest in business, compared to the proportion of research in relation to the private sphere driven by interest of emancipation, shows a not insignificant distribution in favour of research related to commercial interests.

This brings us closer to critical theory and critical realism, offering by the core, awareness of one's own partiality, and in its recognition of human world perception as a product of human activity, and equally the essence of dialectics. To this we turn next.

4. Theory

In this chapter I elaborate on two theories *critical theory* and *realist social theory*, both serving the research question. While the first serves to frame the master's dissertation in a macro sociological purpose, the latter offers crucial understanding for the phenomena being studied, i.e. working at home in relation to institutionalised individualism.

4.1 Critical theory

Critical theory takes its origin in in the 1920's and 1930's Germany and is in many ways attributed to the German sociologists Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno. In order to fully grasp critical theory (if such a thing is ever possible) we briefly need to say something about its contemporary political and philosophical climate.

The turn of the last century saw a vast array of scientific progress leading to a strong belief in natural science, and a measurable and equally deterministic convincement growing out of British empiricism. This was particularly pronounced by the Vienna circle including prominent names such as Moritz Schlick, Otto Neurath and Rudolf Carnap among others.

Logics were held high and the early Wittgenstein even higher. Metaphysics and the philosophical tradition of Kant and Hegel was resented (Sigmund, 2017). Politically, Enlightenment and liberalism gave birth to ordoliberalism (Bonefeld, 2013). Hence, fascism gained ground throughout a turbulent Europe and in Spain, Italy and Germany in particular, where recession and political fragmentation flourished (Heidegger, 1976). It was very much a time of dichotomy between a German Kantian tradition of ontology, and metaphysics on the one hand, and a British Humean tradition of epistemology, materialism (Horkheimer, 1972) and empiricism on the other hand, where the latter heavily influenced, and was mutually influenced by the contemporary political climate (Sigmund, 2017).

This is where Horkheimer's Critical theory intermediates, recognizing that society consist of both ontological structures and agents giving cause to empiricism. Critical theory hence shoulders the role of defining problems for research, while at the same time offering a privileged role in organising the empirical results into a united whole (Bohman, 2019). In the words of Horkheimer (1972, p. 226):

Thus, the critical theory of society begins with the idea of the simple exchange of commodities and defines the idea with the help of relatively universal concepts. It then moves further, using all knowledge available and taking suitable material from the research of others as well as from specialized research. Without denying its own principles as established by the special discipline of political economy, the theory shows how an exchange economy, given the condition of men (which, of course, changes under the very influence of such an economy), must necessarily lead to a heightening of those social tensions which in the present historical era lead in turn to wars and revolutions.

To take critical theory of society into sociology as a whole, and by that juxtaposing structure, system, class, dependency and agency, and so seeking to understand how they all fit in an historical context, is however an undertaking beset with serious difficulties (Horkheimer, 1972). That said, it can, if not completely, then at least partially be done. Though, only by building on a Hegelian dialectical tradition, and so, willingly examining both sides of the sociological coin, pursuing two desiderata at the same time. Firstly, by maintaining normativity of both philosophical and practical concepts, such as private and professional sphere in addition to concepts as work, office, home and family. Secondly, by at the same time investigating the contexts out of, and in which, these normative philosophical concepts origin, develop, and hence must practically be promoted (Bohman, 2019). To this we will return in the following chapters.

Critical theory therefore, offers a mean of studying the Moebius strip tying structure and action to one another (fig. 4.1). It is, however, crucial to emphasise that structures, nor society as a whole neither may or can be seen as a closed system, but must always be studied as an open system consisting of people and their in alienable emergent properties (Archer, 1995; Bhaskar, [1975] 2008).

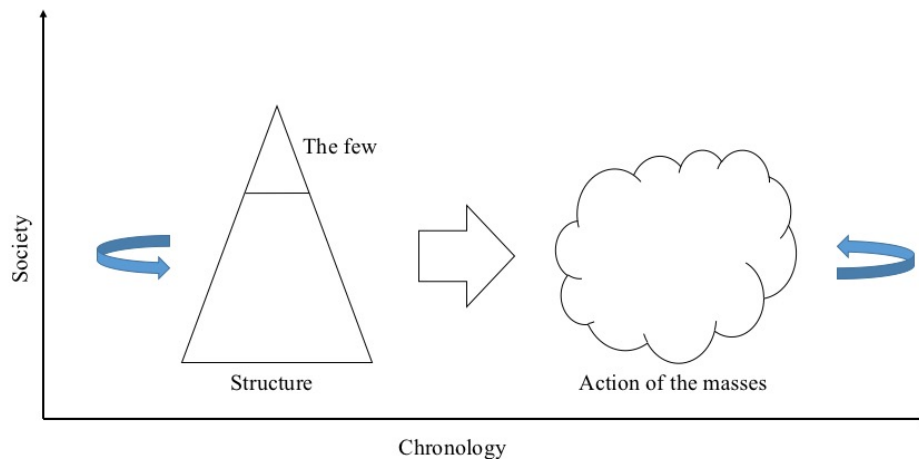


Figure 4.1. Structure and Action.

In critical theory, as in critical realism (see below), it is widely recognised that structure temporally precedes agents and their agency constituting action (Archer, 1995). Social structures are, however, maintained by the few, while being sustained by the masses, in what is commonly known as class struggle. As structure precedes agency, critical theory must always serve to emancipate man. To that extent

[t]he critical theory is the heir not only of German idealism but of philosophy as such. It is not just a research hypothesis which shows its value in the ongoing business of men: it is an essential element of in the historical effort to create a world which satisfies the needs and powers of men. However extensive the interaction between the critical theory and the special sciences whose progress the theory must respect and on which it has for decades exercised a liberating and stimulating influence, the theory never aims at an increase in knowledge as such. Its goal is man's emancipation from slavery (Horkheimer, 1972, p. 246).

Surprisingly, it may seem, there are no references to Horkheimer, nor to Adorno in Bhaskar's ([1975] 2008) *A Realist Theory of Science*. Nor are there any in Archer's (1995) *Realist Social Theory*. Arguably, this is due to Bhaskar's natural science approach and Archer building upon this, in parallel to the Frankfurt sociological approach. This does not however, in my opinion, mean that they cannot be merged. Rather on the contrary, they complement each other very well. Thus, having laid out the origins of critical theory, we now turn to the later 'realist social theory', and the central concepts as developed and understood by Archer (1995) and Sayer (2000) among others.

4.2 Realist social theory

Equal to critical theory, a realist social theory offers a third way between empiricism of epistemology and the positivism of ontology. By doing this, realist social theory simultaneously challenges common conception of both natural and social sciences, particularly in regards to causation (Sayer, 2000). A key to understanding the concepts of realist social theory is the distinction between the real, the actual and the empirical (Table 4.1).

Table 4.1			
	The real	The actual	The empirical
Mechanisms	✓		
Events	✓	✓	
Experiences	✓	✓	✓

(Bhaskar ([1975] 2008))

It is noteworthy though, that these are not naturally in phase, but rather a product of the social activity of science (Bhaskar, 2008, p. 47). The real refers to structures and powers of objects, while the actual refers to what happens if and when any of these powers are activated, i.e. the outcome of bureaucracy being activated. The experiences comprise the two previous and gives us the notion of the empirical. In distinguishing the real, the actual and the empirical, critical theory proposes a stratified ontology (Sayer, 2000).

This could easily be confused with macro and micro levels of society, which would be a dangerous error leading to misconceptions. To the social realist, it is not a matter of the larger in relation to the smaller, but the systemic in relation to the social. That said, the systemic properties are always the macro being confronted by social interaction, i.e. micro (Archer, 1995). This happens over various stretch of time, but not synchronously, since structure necessarily pre-dates the action(s) which transform it and structural elaboration necessarily post-dates those actions (Archer, 1995). Further, this implies that critical theory is matter of linking qualitatively different aspects of society (rather than to link quantitative aspects to one another), and by that, their mutual but not necessarily reciprocal import and impact through *emergence*, i.e. a phenomenon that cannot be derived to its constituents.

4.3 Practical implications of realist social theory

Concluding this chapter, it is in due place to address a common misconception of criticism as being a negative expression of disapproving opinions. This is not the case. Rather, criticism in philosophy (and sociology),

[u]nlike [in] business and politics, criticism does not mean the condemnation of a thing, grumbling about some measure or other, or mere negation and repudiation. Under certain conditions criticism may certainly take this destructive turn [...] By criticism we mean that

intellectual, and eventually practical, effort which is not satisfied to accept the prevailing ideas, actions, and social conditions unthinkingly and from mere habit (Horkheimer, 1972, p. 270).

That said, criticism in sociology serving to gain an understanding of society does not involve an option of stepping outside social science. Nay, criticism is rather social science *eo ipso*. Much like examining the forest one is standing in, while, as the Swedish expression goes, not seeing it for all the trees. In critical philosophy, to which we must include any critical theory *sine qua non*, this can only be done by abstraction,

[f]or nobody really thinks who does not abstract from that which is given, who does not relate the facts to the factors which have made them, who does not – in his mind – undo the facts. Abstractness is the very life of thought, the token of its authenticity (Marcuse, 1964, p. 134).

True as this may be, there are however, also practical ways of finding one's way into the abstract glades of enlightenment by, what in philosophy is referred to as reconstruction (Sayer 2000), i.e.;

1. Identifying problems, such as unmet needs, injustice, false beliefs and suffering.
2. Identifying the source or cause of such problems
3. Assuming a negative judgement and evaluation on the identified source.
4. Favouring actions (*ceteris paribus*) which may alter or remove these sources, and thus the problem previously identified.

In reconstruction of critical social realism, one is able to seek explanations helping to analyse, judge and so enabling a decision of what standpoint to take. This way, both the difficulty and contestability of a normative judging is limited and even downplayed.

In practice, this implies identifying also means and ends, not only of actions in relation to structures of society, but in our own phrasing of investigating questions seeking explanation and understanding. Therefore, do we ask ourselves if fatigue is a product of lack of work life balance, or do we ask if its work itself being the problem? Is having a job to be considered a privilege offering liberty through wages, or a necessary burden imposed on humans in order for us to be a functional part of society (Horkheimer, 1972)?

Questions like these can only be answered by studying the levels where the specific events take place (Archer, 1995, p. 294).

Since what eventually transpires at the level of events is a combination of tendential and contingent, the aim cannot be to furnish predicative formulae but rather an explanatory methodology for the researcher to employ.

Hence, this is where we zoom in to a more specific ontological stratum, and therefore narrow our perspective in search of answers in the strata relevant to our respondents. Likewise, we therefore, temporarily, leave the concept of structures in benefit of the concept of social contexts (See also 5.2 *Coding and analysis*) comprising the structures. In chapter 6. *Analysed results*, the empirical result is, in search of social implications of WAH, analysed and

summarised. In chapter 7. *Conclusion* the findings render us cause to once more zoom out and resume the use of the structural concepts. But first, we turn to the next chapter; 5. *Method*.

5. Method

For any researcher within social science, and arguably other sciences as well, there is the perpetual choice between qualitative (such as for example interviews, case studies, observations and text analysis) and quantitative (statistics) methods. Depending on the nature of the research they both offer valuable means to insights on subject matter being studied (Scott, 2007). Traditionally these have been advocated and often put in opposition to one another or bridged by combining the two, and sometimes even observation or shadowing, in what is referred to as triangulation (Bryman, 2018; Czarniawska, 2014). As a combination of methods may serve the research, it may also be time consuming, and above all difficult to undertake given the nature of the research.

Therefore, I argue that a successful critical realist research, within the timeframe at hand, could if not only, but most likely best be done by using only a qualitative approach and with a critical onset. The method of choice, thus, were in-depth interviews, as means of conceiving personal stories, real life illustrations and above all an understanding for both the everyday and the long term social impacts of working at home (WAH), put in relation to institutional individualism. Hence, a heterogeneous cohort of respondents was preferable, offering a wider range of experiences of WAH to the table.

Hence, using social media (LinkedIn and Facebook), respondents were invited to participate, through an hour-long interview. An introductory/invitation letter posted once on Facebook and twice on LinkedIn resulted in eleven interviews. In total, thirteen respondents agreed to participate, though one of them failed to make an appointment and another failed to show up at the appointment been made. Thus, the remaining respondents, accumulating to 9,5 hours of interview time, consisted of six women and five men ranging of age ranging from 32 to 65 years of age. The respondents are resident in the southern half of Sweden. They inhabit houses and apartments being both tenancies and condominiums. Given the fact that respondents were invited through social media, the selection could best be described as a semi convenient selection given its dependence on the social network offered.

The eleven respondents represent both the public and the private sector ranging from health sector to telecom industry. As no interviews were conducted face to face, but rather through video meetings, the respondents were asked to take photos using their mobile camera and submit those to help visualise the working conditions at home. As photographs illustrate the actual, they offer a valuable addition to the empirical material. It could be said that they offer emergence in a double sense. For one, they add value by the sheer illustration, secondly the show the real as it emerges. Combining interviews with illustration thus adds up to emergent properties of value, larger than the constituents could offer by themselves (Árni et al., 2004).

5.1 First round of interviews

As a researcher, one cannot disregard having an agenda in benefit of the research question at task, nor in a realist's evaluation. Hence, a semi structured questionnaire (See appendix 1) was used. In order to refine and improve the semi structured questionnaire, a pilot interview was first conducted and evaluated, leading to minor changes of the questionnaire.

The interviews, regardless of media being used, were sound recorded and transcribed. These were conducted over a time period of three weeks in autumn of 2020 (Oct. 19th – Nov. 6th); the transcriptions were made continuously in order not to accumulate an unsurmountable workload. Not only did this benefit the work progress, but it also offered valuable insights on the interviews being conducted continuously enabling refinement of probing questions and dialogue, offering a wider range of possibilities for deeper insight (Pawson, 1996). Transcriptions were made as accurate as possible, in relation to research progress, and included bracketed remarks such as [emphasis] and the arrow ↑ indicating a raise of pitch of the voice, commonly synonymous with something positive. Equally, the arrow ↓ was transcribed as commonly synonymous with something negative. The word(s) subject to change of tone are underlined.

As stated above, questions were asked in a probing manner, leaving room for the respondent to elaborate from his/her perspective. All interviews lasted approximately one hour and were conducted by using media interface such as Zoom, FaceTime and Microsoft Teams. The first half of the interview were concerned with questions regarding the professional sphere, and nature of work within WAH. This offered an establishment of a relation between researcher and respondent, and in turn, a willingness for the respondents to open up, thus, facilitating the second half of the interview concerned with questions regarding the private sphere including relations to other family members, private finance, wellbeing and so forth. Concluding the interview, a series of general questions were asked. These served a double purpose. For one, they offered an opportunity to return to previous questions, altering and/or filling in gaps while elaborating further. Second, the more general questions also offered an ending of the interview on a lighter, and more superficial modus, and so, avoiding any bitter aftertaste for the respondents. Last but not least, the respondents were also offered the opportunity to participate in a second, shorter round of theory testing interviews (see below).

5.2 Coding and analysis

The method of realist social theory, i.e. realist evaluation, differs from most other, more traditional theory, in the sense that it does not search for either an ontological, nor an epistemological interpretative explanation to the subject matter of research. Rather, it is a theory driven method in search to confirm, or falsify, and above all refine the theory (Pawson, 1996). This is done by identifying the three key elements of a realist explanation. These are context (C), mechanisms (M) and outcome (O). The three elements are woven together, and by that forming an explanatory strategy. Thus,

[s]ociological inquiry is to explain interesting, puzzling, socially significant outcome patterns (O) between events or happenings or social properties. Explanation takes the form of some underlying mechanism (M) which generates these outcomes and thus consists of propositions about how the interplay between agency and structure has constituted these outcomes. Explanatory closure requires that, within the same investigation, there is also an examination of how the workings of such mechanisms is contingent and conditional, and thus are only fired in particular historical or institutional contexts (C) (Pawson, 1996, p. 301).

Now, contextual conditions influencing events are difficult, if not impossible, to control for. Also, social entities, and their causal properties are prone to change (Sorrell, 2018). This has fertilized a plethora of understandings of the relation between structure, mechanisms, and agency. Even within critical realism, (social) mechanisms has by various sociologist been understood to have different causal properties, and hence also different locations in theoretical models. While accounting for all perspectives is beyond this master's dissertation, I however, seize the opportunity to emphasise my explorative approach, thus giving the mechanisms a minor role and likewise allowing my self some liberty in the interpretation of them. That said, the identification of mechanisms in this master's dissertation serves the purpose of a mean rather than an end in itself. (Obviously these mechanisms may be elaborated on in future research.) Further, the most significant mechanism must arguably be understood as Covid-19 itself, giving the master's dissertation its *raison d'être*.

Having said that, we precede to outcomes, which can be defined as both an immediate outcome, an intermediate outcome (IO), and a long-term outcome the parameter of (O) is therefore divided in three. Given that the subject matter of the research conducted was happening continuously, identifying a long-term outcome (LO) would at times be a prophesying anachronism. Therefore, *possible* long-term Outcomes (*pLO*) were also identified. The CMO-configuration offers a heuristic analytical tool for understanding the basics of WAH. However, since the phenomenon of WAH must be considered recent, not least due to the rapid spread of Covid-19, there has also been cause to new solutions and interventions. As these also should be analysed, the variables of intervention (I) and actors (A) are added to our critical model. All transcripts were read through back to back, serving the purpose of a general overview.

Following that a general coding was made, and then a more specific additional coding was conducted. The several iterative turns reading and coding the transcripts served an important coding saturation of the empirical material, while simultaneously opting for retroduction, i.e. enabling findings of new ideas and theories. In conclusion, following a modified version of the Mukumbang et al. (2020) example, the five parameters were coded for as illustrated in table 5.1.

Table 5.1 CAIMO-Coding scheme

<i>Category</i>	<i>Definition</i>	<i>Coding Rules</i>
(C) Context	Contexts are salient conditions likely to enable or constrain activation of mechanisms.	Components of social, physical and digital environment that may favour or disfavour outcome.
(A) Actor	Actors can be individuals, groups and institutions playing a role in the outcome of an intervention.	Actions and actual practises of individual, group or institution.
(I) Intervention	Interventions are initiated elements and/ or strategies	Deliberate actions serving to sustain or change context, e.g.

		serving the purpose of triggering mechanism, behavioural change or on the other sustaining behaviour.	implementation of morning video meetings
(M) Mechanism		Mechanisms are underlying determinants or social behaviours generated in certain contexts.	An explanation linking an actor in a specific context to a particular outcome.
(O) Outcome	Immediate outcome	Immediate outcome describes immediate effects of interventions or mechanisms.	Typically refers to changes in knowledge, awareness skills and attitudes etc.
(IO)	Intermediate outcome	Intermediate outcome can be behavioural changes following new contexts.	Typically refers to indirect impacts of mechanisms and immediate outcomes.
(LO/pLO)	Long-term or possible long-term outcome	Long-term or possible long-term outcome refers to structural changes persistent over time.	Changes that may be more or less permanent, or possible outcomes not yet seen.

The following exemplifies how the empirical material was coded (table 5.2). As showcased below, a lack of socialising may cause both an intermediate outcome (e.g. a feeling of isolation), however it may also have long term outcome (e.g. loss of productivity).

Table 5.2 Example of an explanatory interview

Participant	Contribution	CAIMO themes
Interviewer:	What would you say is the biggest difference between working at home and going to the office?	
Participant:	Er... now if you're sitting in the office you can overhear... if someone is discussing something that may border what you yourself are doing. Then you can get some things for free. When you sit at home... then... well, then you hear nothing. Well if you're not included in some meeting where it is discussed. So the that's the biggest difference I'd say... and... well, I guess you don't have the same time to be social with stuff that don't relate to work [...] So I guess some social contact is going missing.	Context Mechanism Actor Outcome Intervention Intermediate outcome Long term outcome

In analysing the coded empirical material from the first round of interviews, a series of six hypotheses were constructed.

5.3 Second round of interviews

The hypotheses were then tested, evaluated and refined through dialogue in a second round of interviews. This time including four respondents of the previous eleven participating in the first round, adding up to an additional two hours of interview. The four respondents were chosen based on the relevance of their previous answers, and an anticipation of their ability to elaborate on their testimonies. As the second round of interviews served to verify or alter the already existing hypotheses, the interviews were recorded but not transcribe, nor analysed as above.

The method of research within both critical theory and realist theory is well captured by the Pawson (1996) 'I'll show-you-my-theory-if-you-show-me-yours' strategy. As all theories are complex, building on deep structures, a researcher will basically have to learn the meaning of any individual concepts therein. In practice, this implies assuming a teacher-learner relation with the respondent, and by that also an almost naïve position as a researcher. This benefits an openness to both different perspectives, contingencies, and theories.

Thus, while asking questions about mechanism in relation to context and actor, collateral information may implicitly submerge. The role play of teacher learner relation offers, through paying attention to 'linking' and 'sectional' narratives, a more overall conceptual understanding of the phenomenon being studied (Pawson, 1996). This critical realist evaluation of theory testing may also avoid traditional pitfalls of respondents pondering answers in silence. Further, the theory driven method of realist evaluation offers a scaffold maintaining theoretical awareness throughout evaluation. This is valuable when navigating in and out of emic (actor) and etic (researcher) perspectives (Bloch, 2012), while also confirming the iterative nature of realist evaluation.

Given the utmost contemporary nature of WAH, changes may readily occur from day to day, and week to week, implying that some days may be good days, and other days not so good. Further, the rapid spread of Covid-19 also alters parameters constituted by both public and private opinions, and not least by the authorities, as stipulations may change from day to day. This was taken into account, while testing the empirical material and theories derived thereof, from the first round of interviews, into second round of interviews. Due to chronologic discrepancy, a different set of social conditions were offered. In conclusion, this may be considered as both a strength and a weakness which be addressed in the next section.

5.4 Limitations and ethical considerations

Speaking of method and video as a medium, I feel it is here in due place to make a few reflections of my own. Naturally, given the circumstances of Covid-19 I was unable to meet physically, let alone to travel to other parts of the country. Thus, the video medium offered a feasible compromise. Wise from previous trials I choosed to record the sound by making a regular phone call, which proved valuable as the connection at one point stalled, rendering a frozen picture of a grimace looking down on me. On another occasion the whole interview was conducted in a psychedelic haze altering from purple to green and back to purple. At some points I lost the attention of the respondents, due to messages popping up on their screens.

Another video call was much characterised by a well-lit white ceiling captured by the respondent's cell phone camera. In conclusion I find it fair to say that video meetings both convenient and practical as they may be, are not the real deal. In general, this may in many ways be considered as gravely limiting the research. However, I feel on the contrary that this benefitted my understanding of the forum, and therefore adding crucial value. It offered me the essence of critical realist evaluation; being in the situation studied, doing what is studied and meanwhile experiencing the nature of it.

All research is faced with the crossroad of volume vs. depth. In qualitative research, focus is, as the term insinuates, a search for reliable in-depth understanding of a particular phenomena, while at the same time offering validity in term of representation for a greater context. By the use of a disperse selection of respondents this is considered possible, and therefore offers a strength to the research. Meanwhile, it should be recognised that the testimonies given represents the respondents individual experience. Thus, it may be said that while offering a sense of recognition to many readers, the testimonies does not necessarily tell the full truth. That said, there may be additional sides of the phenomena yet to be investigated. Further it should also be recognised that, despite a hearty confident interview lasting a little less than an hour, there may be personal hardships that wasn't shared, as opening up to another person may take time, sometimes several years. Therefore, this needs to be recognised as an inevitable weakness to the research. Nevertheless, I feel confident that the research conducted offers valuable insights on the social impact of working at home.

Having said that, the research was conducted in accordance with regulations postulated with the Swedish Research Council (Vetenskapsrådet, 2002), taking the four main principals of ethic research in regard; principle of information, principle of consent, principle confidentiality, and principle of terms of use. Further, respondents were informed and given the chance to approve or disapprove of sound recording, and storage of recordings in accordance with GDPR.

In the interest of the respondents remaining anonymous, all names have been altered to fictional names. Since the first round of interviews all served the purpose of creating theories, some private information has been, so to say, lost in translation while still serving a more general understanding. This implies that quotes, however illustrative, have been omitted in respect of integrity. Further, as interviews were conducted, transcribed, analysed and coded in Swedish, while presented, and where appropriate also quoted, in English, I feel, that an extra layer of anonymization has been added. Hence, I see no ethical aspects that in any way could contradict the Swedish Research Council's (2002) stipulations of ethic research.

6. Analysed result

By acknowledging a system as being open, the application of a definite law is eo ipso forsaken. Nevertheless, a clear pattern started emerging even as early as during the transcription of the interviews. A pattern that eventually evolved into six verified hypotheses conceptualising the social impacts of WAH. These are presented below. Each hypothesis is first presented, then given an explanatory background. As each hypothesis has been tested and evaluated through secondary interviews, these additional findings are incorporated and presented in due place.

Concluding this chapter, the findings are analysed in relation to critical theory and hence put in relation to the initial research question, i.e.

- Which are the social implications of working at home full time?

And, thus, at the same time also connecting empirical findings to institutionalised individualism, showing how man and women of our contemporary society are extradited to oneself to an ever-increasing extent.

6.1 Six hypotheses in relation to critical realism

Before turning to the six hypotheses, a short explanatory reminder is in due place. Each hypothesis is marked H, e.g. H1, and may have one more subordinate clause attached to them, e.g. H1a. Where the explanatory text has a specific reference to the hypothesis, this is indicated within a parenthesis, e.g. (H1a).

As the empirical material was coded for Context (C), Actor (A), Intervention (I), Mechanisms (M), Immediate outcome (O), intermediate outcome (IO), long-term outcome (LO), and possible long-term outcome (pLO). Where possible, the terms have been spelt out to facilitate the reading. On other occasions they have only been marked in parenthesis, as shown above.

H1: The less social noise in communication, the more clinic. Thus;

(a) may cause an increase productivity; (b) may cause a decrease creativity; (c) may weaken the social safety net.

A common finding, prevalent throughout the eleven interviews was the alteration of social noise in communication and interaction, confirming the findings of Newman et al. (2020). Social noise is here to be understood as small talk, exchange of polite greetings, spontaneity, and general chatter etc. When asked about the biggest perceived difference between working in the office and working at home, a unanimous answer referred to social interaction. Hence, what we see is social structures, synonymous to an office context (C), facilitating mechanisms of social interaction while working side by side in an office, or within the nature of an everyday meeting for that matter, with all its actors (A) and their interaction. These have now, due to Covid-19, been put in a different spatial context. In order to maintain business as usual (as possible), interaction through video calls and video meetings are here to be considered as an intervention (I).

However, as the medium video in most cases only enables one participant to speak at the time, there is automatically less chatter, i.e. less social noise (O). Some respondents found

that meetings through video are hence more effective and benefitting productivity (H1a). Rachel, a woman in the public sector who despite being accustomed to working remote, sees big differences between real-life conferences and video conferences:

“It is quite different from before. For good and bad. But it is not only bad. It is actually a lot more efficient. Particularly internationally, it is more efficient to sit like this. And then it can be a lot [emphasis] of people. We can be two hundred people online”

On the other hand, also confirming findings of Newman et al. (2020), video meetings also limit the possibility of both verbal and non-verbal interaction (IO). James, a manager in the public health sector, who in his professional role often address large auditoriums:

“Err, also if one is talking to a large group... its hard to... I find it very difficult to feel, when I’m talking like this, that I get any response. [...] Does it look like people are well acquainted with what I’m saying, then you can speed up a little, or do they have a birdhouse expression on their faces, then you have to be a bit more...”

Further, spontaneity is gravely limited without physical interaction. What could previously be dealt with simply by leaning over and asking a quick question, is now subject to an apparatus of either chat, email or even a video call. Hence, confirming the findings of Waizenegger et al. (2020), this may limit the creativity and lessen productivity (LO) (H1b). George, who works in middle management dealing with certifications, feels an increase of stress:

“The downside is I experience an increase in distance and stress about not being able to make corridor decisions and make these agile [emphasis] fast decisions that become much more complex.”

Also, a video meeting, contrary to a physical meeting, sets a very firm temporal structure and offers no possibility for an exchange of ideas annexed to the actual meeting itself, e.g. corridor talk, water cooler talk etc. Interestingly enough, Lucy who previously worked remote now report feeling more included, as communication has been made on equal terms (IO).

This leads us on to a long-term outcome of significant interest. Not only has the lack of social noise proved to alter productivity, but even more interestingly a decrease in social interaction and thus also in social noise, causing a decrease of what should best be described as a social safety net (H1c). In the second round of interviews, the manager George reflects on the fact that alcohol abuse is now more easily hidden, giving cause for concern regarding an increase (*p*LO) of abuse (In Sweden, alcoholism is considered a disease, and subject to the employer’s responsibility for the employee’s wellbeing, thus also cause for concern of the management). This has become particularly clear where members of co-working teams have been struck by the news of a colleague’s personal tragedy, be it due to abuse, divorce or terminal disease. The equivalence of the compassion expressed through sheer physical presence has proven impossible online.

Additionally, a decrease of interaction has also proven to alter the perception of oneself (IO). Alice, who describes herself as outgoing and social, while currently really missing the collegial context, explains:

“- It is very social. We are a very tight group having a very good comradery, a very good comradery [emphasis]. So that I miss a lot, you don’t get together that much. You... err... I think I’ve become somewhat different towards them.

- How so?

- Err... I don’t know what space I can claim. I’m quite and withdrawn, so I can actually ↑ be quiet through a whole morning meeting, and not say a thing. Don’t even say hello, I just log in and yeah yeah... mm...”

The lack of interaction has also proven to alter the workload, thus leading us to the next hypothesis.

**H2: Spatial dispersion increases the overall workload. Thus;
(a) excessive video meetings may cause fatigue; (b) leadership is more demanding.**

Contrary to the findings of Beckmann and Rupietta (2018), a majority of respondents confirm an increase of workload. This however calls for a clarification. The context (C) of video meetings, with their mechanism (M) of impaired social interaction require more effort (O) from the participants, hence causing an increase of fatigue (IO), while still operating with in the same number of hours (H2a).

In addition, various respondents report of both an increase in clock hours where meetings are prevalent, e.g. early morning, lunch, and late afternoon are now time legitimate to dedicate to meetings (LO). Rachel again:

“I’m in even more meetings now than before, which means that the other things that I should have time to do, when I wasn’t in meetings, needs to be done [...] this means then that the days are longer, cause that I’ve noticed, that I’m working more hours than I did before... ↓mm”

The manager James, testifies to an all-time high of the week, reaching seventeen meetings in one day, and at one point participating in tree meetings simultaneously through video and chat. What used to be a rather free and independent work, is now reported to be excessively controlled through meetings (LO).

An increase in workload has been particularly prevalent in management (H2b). Not least due to an inherent concern for the colleagues wellbeing. Angela, a middle manager working in pharmacy, responsible for all shops in one of the country’s nine sales regions, testifies to WAH being a more demanding situation. She claims it requires the manager to be more available and even engaging (LO), while seeking contact with employees, to an extent not seen before:

“[i]f I’d been physically present. Physically it is enough to see a person present and feel a safety. Now I have to give this safety to them at a distance, to make them understand: ‘Angela is there...’ This is something I’ve been working with.”

The new context (C) of WAH has also caused, an increase of verbal communication (I) from management to co-workers. Confirming this, Angela counted interactions over a two-hour time period, finding that communication accumulated to answering forty-five emails, making several phone calls, and attending a meeting lasting an hour. Another respondent testifies to ‘an incredible’ amount of time spent on phone calls to co-workers. Time, not taken out of other tasks, but time added. As the volume of communication soars (C), i.e. *informatisation* (see *Chapter 2. Background*), causing a long-time outcome (LO) of leaving less time as flexible or unmarked. The limit between the private and professional sphere is hence becoming increasingly blurred and even at times being erased (LO). This leads us on to the third hypothesis.

H3: Where the private and the professional sphere overlap, the professional is more likely to prevail. Thus;

(a) temporally, commuting time, lunch breaks etc. are replaced by work; (b) spatially, work related object may remain present in the private sphere.

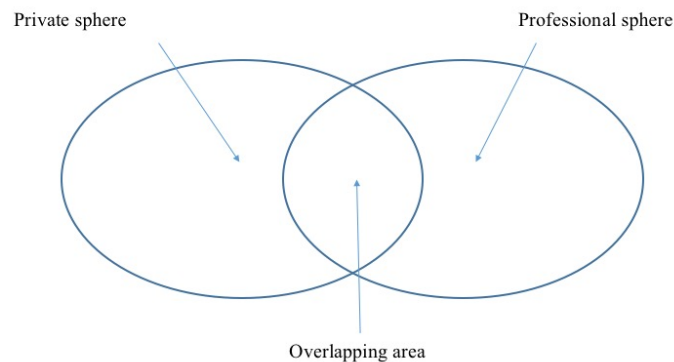


Fig. 6.1 Overlapping spheres

The clash between the structures of the private and professional spheres, has indeed been made graphic both during the video interviews, and through pictures submitted by the respondents. As these, due to integrity of the respondents, are not disclosed in the master’s dissertation, a quote from James serves best to summarise:

“Well somehow... I don’t want to say its ugly... it may sound like that, but... here, we’ve invited our employers straight into the central part of life, and family... without really having a chance to talk about it.”

A common finding among respondents both to be considered working from home (WFH) and working at home (WAH) is the perception of commuting time being saved. However, as a

mechanism (M) of absent commuting time, time is not saved per se (as that is impossible), but rather spent on other things than commuting (O). As it turns out, employees (A) only in a very few cases claim the time to their private life. More frequently the commuting time (previously dedicated to reading, e.g. fiction, news, etc., listening to pods or just recuperating), varying from 15 – 60 minutes one way, is now replaced by work, in turn causing a long term outcome (LO) of habitually longer working days (H3a).

As an intermediate outcome (IO), this also gravely alters the mentally perceived boundary between professional and private sphere. The commuting time offered a now long-lost mental break, not easily replaced. James, who in order to get to the office, drove 45 minutes from the seaside into town explains:

- “- It is... when I go to work I charge my batteries, and when I go home I know exactly what the last thought should be when I turn off [the main road] to be home just in time to let it go...
- And be the private...?
- Mm, there is no such thing now. I have absolutely nothing like it.”

Thus, it becomes clear that it is not just a matter of temporal replacement, it is in addition also clear that the spatial difference that instigate commuting is utterly important for creating contrast, and by so doing also manufactured a work life balance now lost.

Further, several respondents testify to shorter lunch breaks, absent coffee breaks and even meals being had in front of the computer screen while continuing to work. The lack (M) of intervention (I) from other co-workers (A), no longer creates natural breaks but a more continuous work (O), causing isolation (IO), fatigue (IO), higher productivity (see H4 below) and in the long term higher expectations of future productivity (LO).

Spatially, not everybody is entitled to clear boundaries between the private and professional sphere (H3b). Some choose to work in the context (C) of having only their laptop and mobile phone, thus enabling themselves to put work away in a cupboard, while, however, at the same time compromising their working environment by not having a proper chair, a larger screen etc. Jill, who is living in a one room apartment elaborates further:

- “It is a bit of a challenge when it comes to work [...] I don’t really need an elevatable desk and... you know... all that stuff... I could have it ordered here from the office if I would like to. It claims space... and then I want my home to look like a home after the job is done.”

Others enjoy the privilege of a designated work area, perhaps even in a separate room, with a door that can be closed, even if it means compromising a guest bedroom (not many visitors these days anyway). Pete, on the other hand recently split with his partner, leaving him alone in a three-room apartment with more space than he would need, if the professional sphere would not be present.

More commonly though, the private sphere is forced aside by physical reminders of the professional sphere (M). Submitted pictures illustrate constant reminders through physical objects such as an office chair and an elevatable desk in the sitting room. A large computer screen, despite being lifted aside, still remains ever present throughout the meals by the kitchen table. In the living room, a stack of papers and post-its are always lying on the sofa (C). During

school hours, work is intermingled with posters of furry kittens in the daughter's room, while the most ergonomic work place, on the other hand, is to be found in the room belonging to one of the boys, hosting an interest for computer gaming. When the children (A) come home from school (M), and meetings prevail, work is forced into the master bedroom (I) in search for tranquillity (O). A handwritten note is taped to the ceiling light stating 'QUIET! I'm in a meeting'.

Over all though, it should in all fairness be said, that several respondents see the benefits of now being able to take a short break from work to attend to chores such as loading the washing machine or attending to some errands of private nature. However, in the context (C) of freedom, this deliberate intervention (I), is by the actors (A) seen as a privilege, and its exercise carries an air rather of guilt than of right (IO). Jill, working at the public employment office, says:

"But when I'm home, and no one sees what I'm doing, I can adapt according to how I feel on a daily basis"

In search of further understanding we turn to the next hypothesis.

**H4: The nature of the relation between office and home is dialectic. Thus;
(a) the opinion of the office alters the opinion of both WFH and WAH; (b) WAH and WFH alters the private sphere.**

As stated above, the now absent commuting time is in some cases replaced by a slow start of the working day. Naturally, this is seen as a valuable perk of both WFH and WAH. On a more general note, the real benefit being recognized is the possibility of working undisturbed. As social noise decreases (See also H1), a solitude ensues (M) enabling better focus (O) and hence raising productivity (LO).

Prevalent as this may be, practically nothing in the empirical material indicates that a better working environment raising productivity is due to the presence of the private sphere (H4a). Rather, both WFH and WAH is often compared to the professional sphere, hosted in an open office landscape and applying an activity based spatial solution. In a conversation with Jill, this becomes evident:

"- Were you in an office landscape before?"

- Yes! [emphasis with ill-concealed contempt]

[...]

- You don't like it?

- It is the most despicable working environment one can have. [...] Now they are moving to activity based, which means you don't have your own desk and not a place of your own, it's like musical chairs. Where you... ↑hope... to find a place (laughing). I call it a social experiment."

Similarly, James reflects on the implementation of activity based offices, expressing a feeling of a slow and steady removal of the employer's soul as a long term outcome (LO) of the

abandoning of traditional offices. In some cases, respondents testify to having to clear their desk before leaving it for more than an hour. Gloria, a senior woman in the public health sector, recalls finding someone in their spot, when coming back from the restroom or just getting a cup of coffee. Last but not least, Lucy working in the shipping industry, who claims that seventeen years of longing for a door of her own, has now been realised by the transfer of the professional sphere from the office, into the private sphere. A previous agony of going to the office is now gone, and she no longer considers looking for a new job.

On the other hand, an identified mechanism (M) of WAH, is an increase of social interaction in the private sphere (H4b). This may or may not contribute to a beneficial outcome (pLO). In some cases, the feeling of being able to spend more time with the children is considered a privilege. Lucy, mother of two teenagers explains:

“[c]ause we were at home anyways, and they got food. They didn’t have to fix that themselves, and we could go places. So the summer vacation was a lot better, and less bad conscious than usually.”

In another case, when the child (A) is a young adult, struggling to find both occupation and housing (C), the increased interaction (M) loses its flair and causes strain on the relation (LO). In conclusion, the dialectic nature of the relation between office and home may help explain the ambiguous findings by Ipsen et al. (2020). This leads us on to the next hypothesis.

**H5: The more mandatory WAH, the larger invasion of the private sphere. Thus;
(a) enforced domestication may decrease willingness to spend free time at home.**

An imperative finding throughout the interviews is the big, and equally consistent, differences in perception of WFH and WAH. When respondents like Jeff, working in telecom, by the nature of his work, is prevented from spending the full week in the private sphere, i.e. WFH, and equally, when the choice of working at home is voluntary (C), it is generally considered as not only acceptable but frequently also convenient. However, an enforcing mechanism (M) over time gravely alters the perception WAH (IO).

Despite what may seem like a grave intrusion in the private sphere, most respondents still feel content with having to do their work at home, much due to the common perception of it being a temporary solution. Particularly those respondents enjoying the benefit of a choice, like Jeff and Gloria, who may choose if she’s to work at home or go to the office. In the words of Gloria:

“[a]nd so far there is no prohibition... I have the option and that feels really good. If I have to... err... go to there... It’s easier, you know... with two screens [...] and [...] nay, on my behalf I like this”

Respondents subjected to WAH testify to a feeling of incarceration and even an urge to escape out of their own home (IO) as work is done and the private sphere ensues. James, who is living in a seaside bungalow offering two separate rooms dedicated to offices, still feels deprived of his effort to create a sanctuary:

“What was sweet about a home, has all of a sudden become my workplace... and what was my spare time and my resting place... is suddenly removed.”

Yet another respondent, George living in a three-room apartment with wife and his eighteen-year-old son, testifies to an urge for flight as the working week came to an end (IO):

“One Friday [...] I made dinner, and then just said [to the wife] I just have leave. So I went out into the forest and was there with the dog for three hours.”

As an intervention (I) for coping and making the confinement bearable (IO), Alice and her husband, on the other hand, indulged themselves in a complete renovation of the kitchen. Likewise, Rachel who despite having a dedicated work area upstairs, testifies to spending an increased amount of time at the summer house, serving as a weekend refuge (O). Hence, also confirming the perceived need for flight from the now infested private sphere. However, the Foucauldian dichotomy of power and resistance proves itself prevalent, leading us on to the next hypothesis.

H6: Restrictions form new initiatives. Thus;

(a) civil disobedience such as unauthorised gatherings are undertaken; (b) online agendas are created to maintain social interaction.

When employees are forced (M_1) into WAH, the social noise (as seen in H1) is severely decreased (M_2). This in turn give cause to unsanctioned gatherings both during and outside working hours (I). One senior respondent, Bob, who sold the house on the outskirts of town and is now resident with his wife (who is a teacher and hence does not work at home) in a one room apartment of 45 m² in the city centre, explains (H6a):

“I’m sitting in an apartment of 45 m². It is very [emphasis] lonely ... if you look at the walls, it’s like.... Like boredom... you need to talk to someone, not just through Skype or Teams or something like that.”

In a slightly lighter tone of voice, he continues:

“↑ We’ve solved it like this, we go to each other’s homes and hang out. I think we’re about five or six that stick together. [...] Also, our best customer has invited us home for hot dogs and burgers, so we could go there and hang out.”

Other respondents testify to arranging ‘after works’, where anyone of the co-working team may join, but are also perfectly free to decline (I). Also, individual initiatives are being undertaken in the shape of ‘challenges’ for co-workers (I). These challenges may consist of walking five km, swimming, reading a book, knitting. Thus, initiatives of single actors (A) help mobilise social interaction (M), in turn creating a team spirit and a maintaining of company culture (LO).

Throughout the last pages, we've seen social implications of both WFH and WAH. These include an alteration of social noise, increase of workload, and also an alteration of the relation between the private and the professional sphere, where the latter is usurping the former. It has also been shown that respondents, while missing the social interaction, still prefers to work at home. Not necessarily because it is at home, but rather because it is *not* in the office, and hence more undisturbed.

Taken together, these six hypotheses with their sub clauses offers a good micro level understanding of WAH. Hence, this is where we once more zoom out in benefit of a wider macro perspective of the social implications of WAH and its relation to institutional individualism. This will be done using critical theory while also looking into what mechanisms may aid our understanding.

6.2 Social implications of WAH in relation to Institutional individualism

There can be no doubt that the time passed since the outbreak of Covid-19 has been a time of trial in many ways. When asked to recollect a memory of a particular difficulty or hardship, respondents have shared diverse personal stories relating to uncertainty, isolation, urge for escape, concern for colleagues, friends and loved ones, and even fear of what the future may hold. When, on the contrary, asked to recollect a particularly positive memory, participants almost unanimously referred to the common effort of the co-workers. Expressing a mixture of joy and relief in terms; 'we did it!'. Angela, elaborating on the answer, explains:

"The collaboration, communication, how fast we... the company... could adapt. That was fantastic, I must say [...] that we adapted with the premises we had... it can't be compared to anything else."

In a mechanism (M) of the uncertainty prevalent over the last month a higher level of both flexibility and productivity has been aided (LO). This is particularly clear in H1-H3. At the same time, there are several cases of cutbacks (not only among the respondents, but on the labour market in general). Taken together this has fuelled the twofold *flexibilisation* (see chapter 2. *Background*).

Further, as shown above in both H1 and H2, the dispersion of the work force implies as a mechanism (M) more work for management, both in actual management, and in communication out of concern for their co-workers (IO; LO). Likewise, WFH in general and WAH in particular has also put more responsibility on the individual (LO). Where the spatial separation of the professional and private sphere once offered a natural boundary, the two now overlap even more. Surely most white-collar workers brought home work on time or another before, but now work is always in some way present as exemplified by Alice:

"[b]efore I had the discipline not to bring my computer home after... I have it as a lesson learned after my burn out... that I don't bring it, nor the office mobile. I left them at the office and closed the door for the weekend. But now I have it here... now it's my... ↑ sitting here!"

This was also confirmed in the second round of interviews, when Rachel laughing at the perceived absurdity, shares the reality of her son living alone in a one room apartment, now permeated by the professional sphere:

“He’s not willing to move to a bigger apartment, because the cost is simply far too high”

While acknowledging that not separating work from private life, thus maintaining work life balance, is both wrong and unhealthy, Alice at the same time recognises her own responsibility, and her own blame by saying she’ll have to suit herself. Simultaneously, in the name of *informatisation* (see chapter 2. *Background*), email and meeting reservations for the following weeks accumulate. A mechanism (M) fuelling self-inflicted work. On that note, an air of responsibility also confirms the self-inflicted feeling of guilt when letting the private sphere intervene with the professional. In the second round of interview, James confirms this by confessing to a lost sense of weekdays LO:

“I used to have an inherent sense, today is Monday or today I Wednesday, but lately, I often find that I don’t know what weekday it is”

As a strategy for coping with an increased workload, Angela has taken refuge to the living room couch where she sleeps. Next to her, as shown in one of the submitted photos, a laptop and a pile of papers are ever present. As her husband eats breakfast with the children in the kitchen, preparing them for the school day ahead, she starts her day by going through work mail in need of address. When I ask her if she never has breakfast with her family during the week, she looks straight into the camera. With sad eyes and a desolate smile on her lips she slowly shakes her head in silence. It seems as if she cannot bare herself to say it out loud.

Disturbing as it may seem, and indeed does even to herself, she also takes full responsibility, claiming it is a self-inflicted choice to work as much as she does. Additionally, as has been shown above (H2), there has been an overall increase of workload (LO). When asked if she regards work the same way now, she replies that it is not the same; that it’s too much, while at the same time there is a consensus of both acceptance and even liking, i.e. *individualisation* (see chapter 2. *Background*). Employees frequently say:

“yes, I’m fine, it’s really busy, but it’s just [emphasis] fun!”

In the second round of interviews, she elaborates on the transformation of mandatory into self-chosen:

“What at first was perceived of as forced, over time becomes perceived of as chosen. It becomes a natural part of everyday life, and hence becomes perceived of as self-chosen”

Further, there seems to be a mechanism (M) of consensus proclaiming that as the hardships and additional work proved manageable, it can (and will) be done again. Hence, the bar has been raised, while the means of reaching it has been made more flexible (LO), i.e. *flexibilisation* (see

chapter 2. *Background*). This flexibility offered is still commonly perceived of as a privilege, while volitional WFH is to be considered a company perk, since (as testified to) WFH traditionally has been viewed as means to shirking, and in turn lowering production. The last months though, often considered a gigantic social experiment, has proved the contrary, i.e. a consistence and even improvement of productivity.

What the future social implications of this will be, we do not yet know for a fact. All we can do, at the time, is reflect through critical theory on the social implications of a larger scale that we do know at time of writing, leading us on to the next chapter; 7. *Conclusion*.

7. Conclusion

In this master's dissertation I have examined the social implications of working at home (WAH) against the background of institutional individualism. This has been done using the two parallel theories *critical theory* and *critical social realism*. While the latter, by serving the method of research gave good insights on contexts, actors, interventions, mechanisms and outcomes demonstrated in the previous chapter, the former *critical theory* must be understood not only as a theory connecting the real and the empirical, but also in a greater perspective being a theory for framing the master's dissertation per se. From the research undertaken, six verified hypotheses could be derived conceptualising the social implications of WAH. These have then been put in a wider perspective of social implications due to transformations of structures synonymous with both the private and professional sphere.

The implementation of flexible office solutions, open landscape, activity based offices must be seen as being in line with an incentive to lower the cost for office space, while at the same time meeting ever changing market criteria (see chapter 4. *Background*). As WAH/WFH now proved itself being functional, there is a high probability of shrinking office spaces, causing a long-term outcome that has given rise to several discussions of the nature of the future office. Respondents testify to management plans of creating separate teams, that take turns to attend the office and to stay at home, thereby seizing WAH/WFH to be considered a privilege and instead becoming rather a new encouraged normal.

In the second round of interviews, Angela shared a feeling of a temporary solution (WAH) now regretfully being more and more transformed into a permanent status quo. In reality, this implies that WFH seizes to be voluntary and thereby transfers into WAH. Thus, the social implication of what is initially promoted as both voluntarily and emancipatory will, through the transformation of the previously held semi separate spheres of professional and private life, in fact not be emancipatory, but rather on the contrary. WAH is hence, in the perspective of critical theory, in fact enslaving the individual while leaving him or her bereft of the very sanctuary the private sphere seeks to instigate. What we see as a long-term outcome is a structural usurpation of the private sphere by the professional sphere, well worthy of an additional reflection. A home is (or at least should be) a sanctuary and a safe haven where recuperation and leisure intermingle and prosper. This safe haven that we know as home, is within the production apparatus, not merely financed, but also fundamentally dependent on work and the professional sphere per se.

7.1 Critical reflection

As this master's dissertation is based on research undertaken through interview with an in one sense diverse cohort of respondents; e.g. different age, sex, social status and residency etc., and on the other hand, a non-diverse cohort, as all respondents were native middle class Swedes. One must therefore ask; would my result have been different with a less diverse cohort of respondents? Well, certainly it would have been different, however I feel, it would not be contradictory to the present result. A different and more narrow cohort of respondents, be they immigrants, single parents or whatever you like, would generate, I anticipate, a result that if anything would be more pronounced as it would be equally less generic for society as a whole. Having said that, I'd also like to seize this moment to emphasise that no definite indications in relation to gender, age, civil status or residency could be established despite a diverse empirical material, but rather a conclusive picture illustrating the concepts of WAH.

Now, in the previous chapter, we met Alice, Rachel, James, George, and Bob among others. All are either middle aged or senior, who over the years had, and still do have a good career, thus, through work providing for housing of their choice. A housing made to a be pleasant fundament of the private sphere. However, it is the very same providing work that now through professional usurpation demands its toll out of the heart of private sphere. Thus, the employee is forced striving to harvest sweet grapes now gone sour in the process by the very work they eo ipso instil. Furthermore, like a blood vein, the red line of individual free choice runs, ex tripodi, through the professional sphere. Regardless if it is a free will of accepting additional work or a free will of having the discipline to call it a day, there is a consensus of both the individual responsibility and the liking thereof. The emergence of the empirical material offered through the eleven interviews, however, tell a different story. A story confirming structural extradition, enslavement (using Horkheimer's critical terminology) to meetings, emails, and clustered calendars. All in the name of the production apparatus, as illustrated by critical theory in chapter 4. *Theory*, forcing the masses to not only sustain, but rather to catalyse the structured system of society, benefitting the few while simultaneously cursing the many in addition to making them believe they've chosen it for themselves.

Future researchers shall have the benefit of using my master's dissertation offering an overview of the concepts of WAH in relation to institutional individualism as a step stone for such undertaking. Further, the implication of this in terms of personal matters such as mental illness, divorce rates, domestic violence, abuse or other tragedies, we do not yet know. Nor can we at this utmost contemporary moment prophesise, let alone know anything about the aspects of the labour market, nor the housing market or even the fiscal aspects for that matter. These are all very important issues I in great anticipation leave to future research.

8. Disclaimer

This master's dissertation was written during a three-month period (Sept. 10th – Dec. 10th) of autumn 2020, based on the facts and current events known at the time. Any events and/or facts occurring or submerging post December 10th, that in retrospect may seem contemporary are hence not accounted for.

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11. Appendix I

The following text served as an invitation to participate, posted on social media.

Södertörn University

Institution for Social Studies

Alfred Nobels Allé 7

141 89 Huddinge

2020-09-25

Request for study participation

To you who is ordained working at home

I'm a student at the institution for social studies at Södertörn University. During autumn 2020 I'm writing my master's dissertation, equivalent to 30 credits. The master's dissertation aims at investigating working at home in large scale, using qualitative method such as interviews.

Therefore, I'm looking for a contact with you, who as an employee is ordained working at home on full time, and would like to participate in my study through an individual interview. I'm primarily interested in understanding your experience of working at home.

Naturally, participation is voluntary and can at any time without explanation be terminated. The interview with each respondent is anticipated to last 45-60 minutes and is recorded in order to be transcribed. According to GDPR the collected material will be stored so that only I and my supervisor will have access. The recorded material will be anonymised. The result will be published in a master's dissertation through the Institution for Social Studies at Södertörn University.

Please feel free to contact me if you have any inquiries.

Yours Sincerely

Andreas Kjörling, Student

Phone: 0709464350

Email: 19ankj1@sun.se

Supervisor: Mikael Svensson

Email: mikael.svensson@sh.se

Appendix 1I

The following semi structured questionnaire was used for conducting the interviews.

Semi structured questionnaire

Introduction, structure, GDPR & research ethics

Formalia

- Gender
- Age
- Residency

Professional sphere

- Tell me about your work?
 - Type of organization?
 - Size?
 - How long have you been an employee?
- Can you please describe a regular working day?
- In terms of work, which are the biggest differences between working at home and going to the office?
- What is most similar?
- How are the relations with the colleagues?

Private sphere

- Can you please describe your home?
 - Type of home?
 - House, owned apartment or rental apartment?
 - Size?
 - Where do you sit and work?
 - Can you please describe what it looks like?
 - How is work affecting the private sphere?
- Are there others living where you live as well?
 - If yes, anyone working at home?
 - How does that work out?
 - How does other members of the family feel about you working at home?
- In terms of your private life, which are the biggest difference between working at home and going to the office?
- What is most similar?

Work life balance

- How does working at home affect your work life balance?
 - Change in commuting time?
 - Do you know when to quit working?
 - Do you take breaks?
 - Do you eat lunch at home?
 - When does the working day end?
 - Do you work in the evenings and on weekends?
 - More or less than before?
- Do you look forward to weekends and free time?
 - More or less than before?
- What do you think and feel on a Sunday night?

Concluding questions

- Can you share a memory of something that perceived as particularly difficult during the last eight months?
- Can you share a memory of something that perceived of as particularly positive during the last eight months?
- Would you consider, in the future, working in a virtual organization?
- Has your attitude towards work changes since you've started working at home?
- Has your attitude towards your home changed since you've started working at home?
- May I call you for an additional interview?

Thank you for your participation.