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Haute école de gestion  
Genève

**Leadership effects on the empowerment  
of Millennials and Gen Z  
working from home in the banking sector**

**Bachelor Project submitted for the degree of  
Bachelor of Science HES in International Business Management**

by

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## **Disclaimer**

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## Executive Summary

In March 2020, the Covid-19 crisis completely transformed the way employees work all over the world in many sectors. Employees and managers had their first experience of working from home, and all employees had a different experience while working from home. Hence, the purpose of this thesis is to uncover the real sentiments of Millennials and Gen Z and how leadership affects the empowerment of the young generation working from home in the banking sector. Also, this paper aims to understand whether work-from-home is favorable or detrimental for banks and whether they should offer this possibility to employees.

To answer the research questions, this paper starts with a thorough literature review on work from home, the needs of Millennials and Gen Z, psychological empowerment, and the role of the leader in the workplace.

Primary data was collected through qualitative research with in-depth semi-structured interviews in order to evaluate the perspectives of both the employee and the manager on the topic of work from home.

This research paper shows how well-being impacts the feeling of empowerment of the young generation. Positive emotions showcase a stronger feeling of empowerment. However, negative emotions, such as isolation, depression, and sadness, decrease the feeling of empowerment. Yet, offering work-from-home possibilities would be favorable for banks as flexibility is what the young generation wants as a result of re-evaluating work and life. Many aspects of the workplace influenced the experience of each participant.

Therefore, this thesis presents recommendations on how to improve the experience of remote work for Millennials and Gen Zers. The recommendations include fostering communication within the team while working remotely, showing a more precise status of colleagues, organizing the social aspect of work, and leaders should assume their role by providing emotional support to the young generation.

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# 1. Introduction

At the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, technological advancement and improved productivity made society move from rural areas to cities (Boustan, Buntin, Hearey 2013; Bairoch, Goertz 1986). As cities offered much more job opportunities, people went from working in agriculture to working more in the service sector, which included jobs in advertising, hospitality, insurance, and banking (Hayes 2022; Jennequin 2008; Bairoch, Goertz 1986).

There are two important characteristics in the banking sector: the perception of the employee by the client and the direct customer relationship (Hobeika 2021; Bazin, Aubert-Tarby 2013; Barone 2021; Khiar et al. 2017).

First, the perception of the employee by the client helps maintain a healthy direct relationship with the client and ensures customer satisfaction (Hobeika 2021). Indeed, the image of the worker should reflect the culture and values of the organization (UBS 2010; Bazin, Aubert-Tarby 2013). As banks handle the money of their clients (Barone 2021), employees' image should reflect reliability, respect and professionalism (UBS 2010). For this reason, the work environment has since been characterized by strict rules. Managers have had a lot of power to know what is best for their company and employees (Beckett 2021).

Second, direct relationships with clients help create trust. Working in banking means that employees are handling a considerable amount of confidential information (Barone 2021). Therefore, banks introduced data security to face cybersecurity challenges. Using the infrastructure of the office ensures the data security of the client (Khiar et al. 2017).

In March 2020, the Covid-19 crisis completely transformed the way employees work all over the world in many sectors. Governments imposed lockdown, and work from home (WFH) became mandatory for those who could, especially knowledge workers who are employees that work with ideas (Anthony 2020).

Thanks to technology, companies used this opportunity to create a competitive advantage in the work environment to attract top talents anywhere in the world (Rigoni, Nelson 2016; Deloitte 2020; Beckett 2021).

As for employees, the boundary between work and home became unclear. People started wearing their jogging trousers instead of suits and ties (Long 2021). According to a survey by CBDistillery (2020), 70% of Americans find it challenging to find a good balance between work time and home time. WFH has a different impact depending on the employee (Dellatto 2021), and leaders need to adapt to ensure the satisfaction and well-being of all (Barrero, Bloom, Davis 2021).

On the one hand, some employees enjoyed spending more quality time with family (Sawhney 2021), which led them to re-evaluate what the meaning of life and work is (Long, Clement 2021) and “what gives them purpose” (Coleman 2022). They now had more autonomy to organize their time (O’Connor 2021; McLauring 2015; Lim, Teo 2000; Gallup 2017), and giving them more power in their career-related decisions (Long, Clement 2021). The Covid-19 pandemic changed the labor market, and leaders now need to adapt because WFH is likely to remain (Barrero, Bloom, Davis 2021). For instance, PwC’s Deputy People Leader, Yolanda Seals-Coffield, believes that offering remote work to employees “is a natural next step”, especially in the services sector. She claims that if a worker wants to work from home, he/she can (Kelly 2021a).

On the other hand, other employees suffered from this change. Research shows that the pandemic heavily impacted the mental health and relationships of Millennials and Gen Z (Dellatto 2021). Also, a survey by Dellatto (2021) has shown that 46% of Gen Z and 36% of Millennials mentioned how difficult pursuing an education or career is. A study by Ten Spot (2021) showed that only 13% of Gen Z faced no challenges when working from home and loved it (Feldmeier 2021).

As employees experience WFH differently, questions arise on how leaders should react to this labor market change. Many leaders still make decisions without asking employees (Long, Clement 2021). For instance, banks like Goldman Sachs and JP Morgan (Barrero, Bloom, Davis 2021) required employees to return to the office full time (Barrero, Bloom, Davis 2021; O’Connor 2021). This decision leads employees to think that management does not trust them (O’Connor 2021). They feel undervalued and ultimately not satisfied with their job because their manager does not consider their needs (Brown 2021). Beckett (2021) showed that 30% of employees would consider leaving their job if management decided that everyone should be at the office. By not engaging with employees (Rigoni, Nelson 2016), leaders miss building long-lasting relationships with employees (Brown 2021).

In 2021, many employees resigned from their job as a consequence of them re-evaluating life and work and their employers not adapting to the changes in working habits. In the United States, four million Americans left their current job in April 2021, which gave the name to the Great Resignation (Ivanova 2021). The discontent of employees led to an increase of 200% in resignations in the US compared to 2020 (Ivanova 2021; Gallup 2021).

As such, WFH changes are predicted to have long-lasting effects (Brown 2021). According to a survey by Adobe (2021) of 5'500 Gen Zers, 56% of them would consider quitting their jobs next year. They value work-life balance and their job overall. It is important to note that by 2025 Millennials will represent 75% of the workforce (Rigoni, Nelson 2016), and they will be the new talents that will bring fresh ideas and lead the world of tomorrow (Srinivasan 2021).

## **2. Objectives of the study**

### **2.1 Aim of the study**

This research studies the effect of WFH on the workplace behavior of Millennials and Gen Z. To narrow the scope of this study, the focus will be on the employees of the banking sector in the French-speaking part of Switzerland, as academics have found that investment banks are becoming less and less attractive to Millennials because of long hours and overwork (Morris, Fontanella-Khan, Armstrong 2021). According to a survey by the University of Pennsylvania's Wharton School, in 2010, more than 20% of MBA students worked for investment banks. In 2020, that number decreased to 12% (Kelly, Nguyen 2021).

Hence, the purpose of this thesis is to uncover the real sentiments of Millennials and Gen Z and how leadership affects the empowerment of the young generation working from home in the banking sector. Also, is work-from-home favorable or detrimental for banks? If favorable, should the bank offer work-from-home possibilities to employees?

### **2.2 Research questions**

The research questions are the following:

- How can leadership affect the empowerment of Millennials and Gen Z working from home in the banking sector in the French-speaking part of Switzerland?
- Is work-from-home favorable or detrimental for banks in the French-speaking part of Switzerland?
- If favorable, should the bank offer work-from-home possibilities to employees?

### **2.3 Objectives of the research**

In order to answer the aforementioned research questions, this thesis presents findings that are based on a thorough literature review on work from home, the needs of Millennials and Gen Z, and psychological empowerment, as well as a qualitative study consisting of in-depth interviews with Millennials, Gen Zers, and managers. This research will explore how the lasting changes of the Covid-19 pandemic apply to the banking industry in Switzerland.

## **3. Literature review**

### **3.1 Introduction of the literature review**

Due to the research questions, the aim of the following section is to build a solid understanding of the subject and to analyze what the gaps in understanding are. Therefore, four main areas will be studied, which will be used as a foundation for the collection of the primary data in order to close the gaps (Western Sydney University 2017).

First, work modes, such as focus, socialization, collaboration and learning, will be analyzed both at the office and when working from home to be aware of the differences between both ways of working (Gensler 2012). Second, this thesis studies the current needs of Millennials and Gen Z in the workplace, which organizations need to comprehend to retain top talents (McLauring 2015). As mentioned, the young generation represents the new workforce, and they will be the ones leading the world of tomorrow (Rigoni, Nelson 2016; Srinivasan 2021). Third, the theory of psychological empowerment will be defined, and its four elements will be explained. Then, this thesis studies how organizations and employees can benefit from an empowering workplace. Finally, the role of the leader in the organization will be analyzed as the future of work is now in their hands.

### **3.2 Work modes**

According to Gensler (2012), there are four main work modes: focus, socialization, collaboration, and learning. First, focus consists of work done individually that requires concentration and attention for it to be done correctly. Second, socialization involves all the informal interactions done at the office that build trust and successful relationships in the long term. Third, two or more colleagues working together to accomplish a project is collaborative work. Collaboration can be done online and/or offline. Fourth, learning is the concept of acquiring new knowledge or skill while working (Gensler 2012).

In the following sections, each work mode will be analyzed when working in a traditional office as well as when working remotely. By understanding how these four work modes work together, an organization can better accommodate the needs of employees, which could lead to improved employee engagement and performance (Gensler Research Institute 2019).

### **3.2.1 Traditional office**

#### **a) Focus**

As mentioned, focus work is individual work that does not require collaboration with colleagues. This kind of work is usually performed by establishing an uninterrupted time in one's schedule to get deep work done (Blankson 2019). It requires a lot of concentration and is the dominant type of work. But why? A lot has changed in the workplace, with an open-office culture with less time to focus on individual work and more distractions, focusing demands more attention and is, therefore, more laborious. All four work modes are linked together, but focus is the work mode that will determine the effectiveness of the three other work modes (Gensler 2012).

At the workplace, employees have all the equipment needed to perform their job well. For instance, they can make their professional calls with their phone work. If they have an IT problem, they can directly call the IT team. The chair is ergonomic, the keyboard and mice are also ergonomic, which can relieve back pain, and employees are able to concentrate for longer hours. Having all the equipment at work makes it easier to do the most important work, which is focus work (Meister 2019; Snook 2005; Grant 2017).

#### **b) Socialization**

Socialization is the human interactions, which are universal needs (Maslow 1943) in private life and at the office. They happen in between breaks, during lunchtime, or after work. Such small interactions create rich relationships and build trust in the long term. Also, by communicating face-to-face with colleagues and clients, employees who start to build their network tend to be seen as more trustworthy (Berinato 2020). These unplanned interactions bring value to the company because it leads to a better team who is able to come up with more innovative ideas and solutions to solve problems more efficiently (Kelly 2021b; Berinato 2020). Therefore, interactions with colleagues have been linked with higher work engagement (Hewett, Becker, Bish 2018).

The most important factor to build relationships is proximity. People who see each other regularly tend to have deeper bonds because they understand each other and build empathy for each other (Brower 2021). Thus, many executives believe the office is key to maintaining the success of the organization and to keeping the company culture alive (PwC 2021). By being at the office with colleagues, people feel like they align with the purpose of the company and that they are part of a community (Brower 2021). This satisfies an essential human need that is belonging (Maslow 1943).

### **c) Collaboration**

Collaboration involves working with a team on a single or multiple projects (Gensler 2012). By socializing face-to-face at the office, employees create an emotional connection, build trust, and lasting success (Hooijberg, Watkins 2021). As a result, collaboration becomes more effective and fosters innovative ideas (Barrero, Bloom, Davis 2021; Gripenstraw, Saini 2020). Moreover, face-to-face interactions reduce misunderstandings (Bohns 2017; Padgett 2021).

### **d) Learning**

Learning can come individually through the participation in a workshop or seminar or through knowledge sharing with peers (Gallup 2016). According to a paper by Zhining and Nianxin Wang (2012), when employees share their knowledge with each other, more innovative ideas emerge, and the performance of the firm will eventually increase. Many companies, including banks (career days interaction), encourage communication through an open-door policy, which means that all employees can come into someone's office and ask questions or raise concerns (Kruse 2016).

In the learning work mode, feedback, which can be both positive or negative, is essential to help employees improve their performance at work (Chappelow, McCauley 2019). Indeed, providing feedback gives space for open communication between two individuals, consequently strengthening their relationship and building trust. If given effectively, it can even be linked to successful performance as it fosters a culture of learning and growth (Center for Creative Leadership 2020a; 2020b).

### **3.2.2 Work from home**

#### **a) Focus**

What influences the effectiveness of focus work is the place at which the work is done (Gensler 2012). When working from home, the boundary between work and home becomes unclear. During the pandemic, employees started wearing their jogging trousers instead of their suits and ties (Long 2021; Saunders 2017). According to a survey by CBDistillery (2020), 70% of Americans have trouble finding a work-life balance.

In addition, some employees found focus work harder because of the distractions at home (Saunders 2017). Employees who had no distraction felt lonely and isolated from their team, which Breslau and Ramseur (Breslau, Ramseur 2021) warn could lead to depression.

Still, other remote workers appreciated the autonomy when working from home and the fact that they have little to no commute to do every morning and evening. According to Smith et al. (2020), 75% of surveyed participants found focus work easier to do when working remotely and were more likely to work overtime. As a result, firms saw an increase in productivity by workers. Possible explanations could be that some employees were more motivated or that they could concentrate better without distractions and had the proper equipment to work from home (O'Connor 2021; Lim, Teo 2000; Gallup 2017).

#### **b) Socialization**

Remote workers have fewer face-to-face interactions with colleagues, leading them to be isolated from the team. Employees enjoy independence but not isolation. Yet, the fear of missing out (FOMO) is present, as they miss opportunities to build stronger relationships face-to-face (Lim, Teo 2000; Gallup 2017). As a matter of fact, trust comes from social interactions with colleagues in the long term, which can be a source of problems for remote workers (Grenny, Maxfield 2017). According to a survey by OnePoll during the pandemic, 67% of remote workers in the US felt pressured to always be available (CBDistillery 2020).

Moreover, a survey done before the pandemic by INSEAD showed that 76% of the surveyed participants found building relationships with their colleagues challenging. This insight shows that employees were feeling isolated even though they were surrounded by their team. Furthermore, over half of the participants qualified their relationships at work as superficial (Hadley, Mortensen 2020).

### **c) Collaboration**

Compared to in-office work, collaboration becomes more difficult when working remotely (Kelly 2021b). Without creating a connection with colleagues, it becomes harder to work collaboratively on a project when trust is not built. However, Gallup (2017) argues that dispersed teams can also collaborate effectively, but they have to be managed correctly and given support when needed. The pandemic has accelerated the use of virtual team management (Hooijberg, Watkins 2021). Remote workers mainly communicate with technology such as e-mails, Zoom, or Slack (Hatfield, Jones, Anderson 2019). The issue with excessive use of online collaboration is that it can really weigh on someone's well-being. Too many meetings or e-mails can create a stressful work environment (Gavett 2021).

### **d) Learning**

Sharing knowledge when working from home is difficult without face-to-face interactions with colleagues. Working remotely requires adapting, communicating effectively, and working independently through technology (Prossack 2020). Depending on where someone stands in one's career, new employees need more mentoring than existing employees (Gallup 2016). For example, WFH does not work for Junior employees who want to learn from their colleagues, and the traditional office is preferred for this specific situation (O'Connor 2021).

### **3.3 Needs of Millennials and Gen Z**

To create an environment where Millennials and Gen Zers want to be, leaders need to understand their needs (McLauring 2015). This section will discuss the needs of Millennials and Gen Zers separately. Even though they are relatively similar, they can have divergent needs due to the different events that affect their behaviors (Böhlich, Axmann 2020).

#### **3.3.1 Millennials**

Because defining the generations is not an exact science, there is not one universal definition of when the cut-off point is for Millennials and Gen Zers (Dimock 2019). Therefore, this research will use the definition of the Beresford Research, which explains that Millennials are people born between 1981 and 1996 (Beresford Research 2022).

Many political events have shaped the lives of Millennials, such as 9/11 or the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. Moreover, as travel has become easier, Millennials are known to be a very diverse generation (Dimock 2019; Gallup 2016). They are mainly characterized by two factors: the development of technology and access to education (Gallup 2016).

Firstly, Millennials are the first digital native generation. They were the first generation who grew up with the Internet, Wi-fi, laptops, and phones. These devices have evolved so much during the years that Millennials now have numerous options and preferences to communicate. These options are fast and easy to use. For this reason, Millennials prefer to communicate through technology and can easily integrate the online and offline world into their everyday lives. They are also highly aware of what is happening in the world around them. As a hyper-connected group, they have a special way of seeing the world, and their interaction, consumption, and working habits differ immensely compared to previous generations (Gallup 2016).

Secondly, Millennials are highly educated and are now entering the workforce. They had to excel in everything they did and believe they could handle work well under pressure. One common misconception is that this group lacks social skills. The other older generations think this young group is antisocial because of how much time they spend on their phones. Nevertheless, this group is extremely empathic and can easily put themselves in the shoes of others (Gallup 2016).

In 2020, Millennials represented 50% of the global workforce (PwC 2012). By 2025, they are expected to account for 75% of the US workforce (Rigoni, Nelson 2016). Today, this generation feels less involved in their work than the previous generations and can be perceived as unengaged in work (Gallup 2016). For this reason, understanding the needs of Millennials is crucial to creating an environment where they can thrive and feel empowered and ensure the development of the labor market in the future (Goffee, Jones 2013).

In the following paragraphs, the needs of Millennials have been categorized into five topics: meaning, ongoing development, ongoing communication/feedback, well-being, and flexibility, which will be discussed one after the other.

#### ***a) Meaning/feeling of purpose***

As previously explained, Millennials are highly educated and aware of their surroundings where they make conscious decisions. Therefore, it is important for them to find meaning and purpose even in the work environment. In other words, a job is not just a job, it is an inherent part of their life (Gallup 2016).

Simon Sinek (2017) explains that finding purpose is feeling fulfilled, happy, and safe while working. He adds that it is crucial to feel satisfied with ourselves after a day of work and think that we are contributing to something that aligns with our values. This is exactly what Millennials are looking for: feeling empowered by everyday work (Sinek, Mead, Docker 2017; Gallup 2016).

This generation wants to understand how their contribution helps the organization reach its objectives (Gallup 2016). Their desire to be valued as the unique individuals they are within the company is strong (McLauring 2015), and they do not hesitate to make career changes if they feel different. They know what they want and what other companies have to offer through online interactions (Rigoni, Nelson 2016).

### ***b) Ongoing development***

Having chosen to study, Millennials are highly educated and have a thirst for knowledge. They are eager to grow and acquire new knowledge and skills. A survey by Gallup (2016) found that 87% of Millennials find career growth and development opportunities important in their job. In addition, the main reason why workers leave their position is because they do not have any more place to grow within the company (Robinson 2019). This is problematic because finding talent is much more costly than retaining existing employees (Allen 2008).

### ***c) Ongoing communication, feedback, and trust***

As digital natives, Millennials have grown used to instant communication. Therefore, annual performance appraisals can be a source of frustration for them and have a little positive impact on the quality of work (Wigert 2017). Indeed, Robinson (2019) showed that annual performance appraisals only motivate two in ten employees to improve the quality of their work. They are long awkward meetings where the manager and the employee try to remember and summarize a year's worth of occurring to review the performance of an employee (Wigert 2017).

Instead, they prefer frequent formal or informal feedback based on current performance (Robinson 2019). Feedback can be given virtually or face-to-face, as Millennials are comfortable with both (Gallup 2016). This constant feedback better reflects the actual performance of an employee and gives room for direct improvement (Wigert 2017). This way, Millennials can grow quickly in their careers (PwC 2012).

Psychological safety at the workplace is an important element Millennials need to have, but the issue is that the young generation shies away from raising their concerns to their managers. Conversations around negotiating a higher salary, learning more, asking for more responsibilities, or even asking for more feedback are difficult for them. As a solution, ongoing conversations can help develop trust (Rigoni, Nelson 2016).

#### **d) Well-being**

Well-being is an important element for Millennials as they are highly connected and full of empathy. They want to open up to managers if they need to about their daily work and what is happening outside their work life. Therefore, leaders need to be open to discussing with them. By doing so, research has shown that engagement increases, and Millennials are more likely to be loyal to the company because trust will start to build between them. The goal is to create psychological safety to make employees feel heard, safe, and supported (Gallup 2016).

Well-being is even more important in the banking sector. In the US, it is normal to work many hours as the 40-hour workweek is seen as the bare minimum, which could be seen as a toxic culture. Millennials are not inclined to want to sacrifice personal time for work. Instead, they value an employer who genuinely cares about their well-being (Gallup 2016).

Therefore, promoting well-being at work can foster a more lenient workforce, and it will reduce absenteeism at work, and Millennials will be less likely to quit their job (Gallup 2016).

#### **e) Flexibility**

Flexibility is another important element for Millennials to have in the workplace that other generations did not desire as much (Gallup 2017; PwC 2012; Robinson 2019). Millennials are aware that they have a variety of options in the job market and do not feel obliged to keep working for a company that does not understand what they value (Gallup 2016). In fact, sixty-three percent of Millennials strongly agree that they could find an employer that could offer the same or more benefits, and 51% are currently actively looking for a new occupation (Robinson 2019). This generation can be seen as greedy, but in reality, they know what they want and value. Hence, they seek employers who understand that (Gallup 2016), and companies should become more attractive to have loyal Millennials in their workforce (Brown 2021).

Millennials also desire flexible working hours and work-from-home possibilities because the development of technology has given the flexibility to employees: they can work whenever they want, wherever they want. Remote working has been supported by implementing business processes and putting in place systems (Gallup 2017).

### **3.3.2 Gen Z**

Generation Z (Gen Z) was born between 1997 and 2012 (Beresford Research 2022) and counted for more than one-third of the world's population (Deloitte 2020).

This young generation (Barna Group 2018) is more racially and ethnically diverse than Millennials (Fry, Parker 2018; Parker, Igielnik 2020), and highly educated. They are more likely to go to college than previous generations (Parker, Igielnik 2020), which shows that they are highly achievement-oriented (Barna Group 2018). Like Millennials, they are digital natives and have never experienced the world without the internet (Deloitte 2020; Parker, Igielnik 2020).

As they are highly educated, Gen Zers are also more likely to not have prior working experience (Fry, Parker 2018). Since they were missing this first working experience, their work expectations can appear to be irrational (Huselid 1995).

This group is entering the labor market at a crossroad where technology has eliminated redundant and manual jobs (Ramic et al. 2019).

Gen Z tends to change jobs often early in their careers (Workforce institute 2019). That is why understanding their needs is very important. In the following paragraphs, the needs of Gen Zers have been categorized into five topics: pay, ongoing development, ongoing communication, flexibility, and mental health.

#### **a) Pay n°1 priority**

For the young generation, pay is their number one priority (Workforce institute 2019; Deloitte 2020). A survey found that 44% of Gen Z see their success based on their salary, meaning the higher, the most successful they believe they are (Workforce institute 2019). A reason for that could be that they had not had a professional experience when they were young and studied most of their life. Therefore, their first job is primarily a way to have money to enjoy life. Also, according to a paper by Böhlich and Axmann (2020), Gen Zers would be stimulated to work harder if offered variable pay, which again shows the importance of salary.

Moreover, Gen Zers want a stable and predictable job with good employee benefits. They value financial safety over personal satisfaction. For them, having perks such as free snacks, discounts, or gym reimbursement do not matter as much as job stability (Böhlich, Axmann 2020; Deloitte 2020; Workforce institute 2019).

### ***b) Ongoing development***

As mentioned, this group is the most educated generation and is therefore very eager to learn (Parker, Igielnik 2020). They want to learn from colleagues, but they value organizations that offer possibilities for career growth (Deloitte 2020). Also, for the new generation, their measure of success is determined by how quickly they can evolve within a hierarchy. Gen Zers want a stable job, but they also want more frequent promotions, at least once a year (Workforce institute 2019). A paper from Böhlich and Axmann (2020) found that 74% of Gen Z would be willing to work overtime to reach their objectives.

### ***c) Ongoing conversations***

Ongoing conversations are very important for the young generation to advance in their career. For instance, the Workforce Institute (2019) found that receiving real-time feedback will make Gen Zers more motivated. Gen Zers, like the previous generation, would rather have regular weekly or monthly feedback than one yearly performance review only (Workforce institute 2019). Also, this group wants a mix of formal and informal feedback (Gold, Mortimer 2017, p. 198). However, according to a German survey, 60% of Gen Z find it challenging to accept negative feedback without having the ability to discuss about it (Böhlich, Axmann 2020).

Contrary to popular belief, Gen Z really values face-to-face interactions for some specific situations. For instance, on their first day at the company, for personal feedback, for trainings, and to communicate with their team. They believe face-to-face interactions are more effective (Workforce institute 2019; Yozell Associates 2017). Nonetheless, the smartphone is part of their life and has completely changed how the new generation interacts with people. Research has found that the amount of human interaction within this group has decreased after the release of smartphones on the market. This lack of in-person communication can negatively impact their communication skills when interacting with others in the office. Even though this group is used to communicating with technology, face-to-face interactions are better to create trust between people. Therefore, some researchers believe that Gen Z has failed to acquire many crucial conversational skills (Bradbury 2018; Twenge 2017; Bradbury 2018; Drolet, Morris 2000)

#### **d) Flexibility**

Although Gen Zers are hard workers, the need for work-life balance is also present in this group. They require autonomy and flexibility to have control of their own time. According to a global survey by the Workforce Institute (2019), 26% of Gen Zers would remain loyal to their employer and work even harder if offered flexible working hours. They see it as a fundamental perk. Gen Zers want flexibility specifically over when, where, and how they work, this will lead to increased motivation (Workforce institute 2019). Moreover, according to a study by Böhlich and Axmann (2020), 57% of Gen Zers want to work remotely because they enjoy the freedom that comes with it.

#### **e) Mental health**

Mental health is extremely important for Gen Z, and offering mental health days, where they get to take care of themselves, can increase their engagement at work (Workforce institute 2019). Indeed, Gen Z struggles more with mental health issues than previous generations, and many are diagnosed with depression followed by anxiety. For instance, eighty-five percent of Gen Z worldwide stated that stress hinders them from assuming leadership roles (American Psychological Association 2018; Bresman, Rao 2018). According to experts, the Covid-19 pandemic strongly affected their mental health and made maintaining healthy relationships challenging. Also, with mental instability, many believe that pursuing an education or career has become harder than ever before (Dellatto 2021).

Then, to ensure happiness and satisfaction at work, Gen Z greatly values a good work environment. For instance, if employees are not happy and engaged in their organization, the young generation will see it as a warning that managers are not supportive nor caring and that they would not put Gen Zers' well-being as a priority. Research has shown that a stressful environment can negatively affect the performance of this young generation at work (Workforce institute 2019).

### 3.4 Psychological empowerment (PE)

Psychological empowerment (PE) is a theory that combines many concepts and therefore justifies the many literature written on that subject (Kanter 1983; Thomas, Velthouse 1990). This theory came to light at a time when competition and change requested employees to take the initiative and become more innovative (Drucker 1988). In 1995, Gretchen Spreitzer was the first researcher to measure psychological empowerment at work, which will be the main focus of this thesis because PE plays an important role in maintaining managerial and organizational effectiveness (Bennis, Nanus 1985; Kanter 1983; David Clarence McClelland 1975; Spreitzer 1995).

#### 3.4.1 Definition

In simple words, the Cambridge Dictionary (2022) defines the verb "to empower" as "to give someone official authority or the freedom to do something". Many academic researchers agree with the more precise definition by Thomas and Velthouse (1990).

***Psychological empowerment is “increased intrinsic task motivation manifested in a set of four cognitions reflecting an individual's orientation to his or her work role: meaning, competence, self-determination, and impact”.***

The four elements of PE are cumulative and represent an active approach to work rather than a passive one. In other words, an active approach means the degree to which an employee can influence his/her role and context (Thomas, Velthouse 1990). For instance, instead of delegating work to someone, empowerment is about making it possible for that person to feel motivated to accomplish the task at hand because he/she has the capability to do it (David C. McClelland 1975; Conger, Kanungo 1988; Spreitzer 1995; Thomas, Velthouse 1990). Therefore, PE is seen as a motivational construct (Conger, Kanungo 1988; Thomas, Velthouse 1990).

There are three assumptions to consider before explaining the four aspects of empowerment. First, feeling empowered or not is not linked to the personality of someone but rather to the four cognitions of PE that are shaped by the working environment (Thomas, Velthouse 1990). Second, people are not put into two different boxes: feeling empowered versus not feeling empowered. It is, in fact, a continuous variable where someone can feel more or less empowered, and it can vary in time. Third, empowerment is specific to an industry and cannot be generalized through life situations or roles (Spreitzer 1995).

### **3.4.2 Four cognitions**

As mentioned, PE is the motivation someone gets from the task. A task is defined as “a set of activities directed toward a purpose”. There are four cognitions that positively influence intrinsic task motivation: meaning, competence, self-determination, and impact (Thomas, Velthouse 1990).

#### **a) Meaning**

Meaning is the value that the job activity gives to the individual (Thomas, Velthouse 1990). Employees want to feel that what they do is important for the company (Robinson 2019; Knight 2021) and that their contribution helps the company reach its objectives (Gallup 2016). For some people, their day-to-day job is their life, and they want this life to be meaningful (Gallup 2016). As a result, a job with meaning will lead to higher commitment and involvement from the employee (Kanter 1968; Sjöberg, Olsson, Salay 1983).

#### **b) Competence**

Competence represents how capable someone is and how well he/she can work on a task (Thomas, Velthouse 1990; White 1959; Gist 1987; Conger, Kanungo 1988). Bandura (1977; 1986) defines it as self-efficacy or personal mastery. He found that an individual with low competence will tend to avoid a specific situation because he/she is missing the skills required to accomplish a task successfully. Abramson, Seligman, and Teasdale (1978) rather describe it as people experiencing personal helplessness. In other words, the person with low self-esteem will strongly believe that he/she does not have the capacity to perform a task or resolve a problem. On the contrary, someone with high competence tends to be proactive, initiates the first step, and persists when faced with challenges (Bandura 1977).

#### **c) Self-determination**

Self-determination refers to whether an individual has the opportunity to pursue a task (Deci, Connell, Ryan 1989), which can be linked to the level of autonomy and decision-making power given to someone (Bell, Staw 1989; Spector 1986). As people are autonomous, they are also responsible for the consequences of their actions (Hackman, Oldham 1976).

A person who has the choice to perform a task will not only be more flexible, creative and resilient, but he/she is also more likely to take initiatives when needed (Deci, Ryan 1985).

#### **d) Impact**

Impact is known as the extent to which an employee's contribution matters and influences a potential outcome at work (Ashforth 1989; Thomas, Velthouse 1990). In contrast, learned helplessness suggests that people feel that their contribution has no impact on the situation in a work context and, therefore, they cannot handle it (Martinko, Gardner 1982). As a result, the employee becomes less motivated and struggles to recognize opportunities that make an impact. It could even lead to depression (Abramson, Seligman, Teasdale 1978).

### **3.4.3 Implications for the organization**

The four elements that are linked to empowerment have been described. Now, the effect of empowerment on the organization will be explained. There are four implications: self-esteem, access to information, managerial effectiveness, and innovative behaviors (Spreitzer 1995).

#### **a) Self-esteem**

PE positively correlates with someone's self-esteem, which represents how confident an individual is about its self-worth (Brockner 1988; Bandura 1977). With empowerment, employees will describe themselves as unique and valued individuals within the company. They will be active at work and aware of the value their talent brings to the table (Gist, Mitchell 1992).

#### **b) Access to information**

In order to make room for empowered employees, leaders need to make information accessible to everyone in the organization (Kanter 1989). A paper by Harvard Business Review about *Creating the best workplace on earth* also states that employees need to have the information that concerns them to do their work accordingly. Transparent, clear, and complete information is key to engage people within the organization (Goffee, Jones 2013).

In addition, Lawler (1992) reveals that two other types of information should be given: information about the mission of the company and information about the performance of the employee.

First, people need to understand where the firm is heading in order to take the initiative to make a difference and improve the business (Kanter 1983; Lawler 1992). Explaining the mission also creates a sense of meaning and purpose which is needed to empower people (Conger, Kanungo 1988). Second, employees value feedback about their own performance in order to improve it subsequently. Information about performance proves their capacity to do the work and reinforces that they are important individuals in the organization (Lawler 1992).

### **c) Managerial effectiveness**

Empowered employees become more effective as they are committed and usually exceed their working expectations. They also tend to be more proactive, and they can foresee problems and find a solution quickly. Other positive aspects of empowerment are that the team is more concentrated, willing to learn, and resilient when faced with difficult situations, which makes the leader successful because they are able to manage their team effectively (Thomas, Velthouse 1990; Kanter 1983; Gecas 1989; Deci, Ryan 1987; Ashforth 1990).

### **d) Innovative behaviors**

The motivation of empowered people triggers innovative ideas (Redmond, Mumford, Teach 1993). Creative ideas are more likely to emerge as they are autonomous and know that their contribution has an impact (Amabile 1988). Empowerment also helps when faced with change as individuals are flexible and have a proactive way of resolving a challenging situation (Conger, Kanungo 1988).

### **3.5 Role of the leader**

The Covid-19 pandemic transformed the labor market, and leaders will now need to adapt because work from home is likely to remain (Barrero, Bloom, Davis 2021). The future of work is now in the hands of leaders, they are the ones who can make a difference (Gripenstraw, Saini 2020). The researcher Stogdill (1948) wrote a paper about the characteristics of a leader. He established two categories leaders need to excel in: structure and consideration. The aim is to score high on both of them.

In the following sections, both aspects will be analyzed. The aim is to understand how an effective leader can create an environment of support for its team (Stogdill 1948).

#### **3.5.1 Structure**

The first aspect is structure which consists of organizing the work, including working relationships. The concept is about defining a structure in each employee's role to work towards the same objective. The goal is to have a clear and defined structure (Stogdill 1948).

In the following paragraphs, each element of the structure will be explained, such as clear expectations, constructive feedback, policies, collaboration, managing people, and flexibility.

##### ***a) Clear expectations***

Millennials and Gen Zers want clear information about what is expected from them (Gallup 2016; Schroth 2019). However, especially for Gen Zers, the role of management is crucial when starting a new role. As they are more likely not to have previous working experience (Fry, Parker 2018), the young generation needs to have detailed information about their new position. Also, this group wishes to be aware of what the job consists of and expects leaders to set clear goals (Workforce institute 2019).

### ***b) Constructive feedback***

As mentioned in the section on the needs of Millennials and Gen Z, they value frequent formal or informal feedback based on current performance. Feedback strongly motivates them to improve their performance (Robinson 2019; Workforce institute 2019). However, the issue is that the young generation shies away from asking for feedback (Rigoni, Nelson 2016). For instance, a paper by Gallup (2017) found that remote employees were not given appropriate feedback to improve their performance and reach their objectives. Leaders need to create an environment where these generations are comfortable talking to their superiors. Ongoing conversations can help develop psychological safety and build trust (Brown 2021; Freed 2020; Gallup 2016). Therefore, constant feedback needs to be part of the culture, and leaders need to create a system for it to be delivered effectively (Center for Creative Leadership 2020a; 2020b; Chappelow, McCauley 2019).

### ***c) Creation and maintenance of processes, policies, and procedures***

The work environment has long been characterized by strict rules, which were effective in the past (Beckett 2021). But now, many events such as the pandemic have lasting consequences and transform the way employees work and their needs. For example, the young generation wants leaders to rework those rules that have been present for many years, and they will not let rules be unchanged because the world has changed (Gallup 2016). For this reason, leaders should adapt, and these new rules and processes should make sense and ultimately bring value to the company (Goffee, Jones 2013).

Before, meetings used to be held only in-person at the office. But now, employees have grown used to using digital tools to hold online meetings. Technology has completely changed the way employees work (Abril 2021). By working from home, people have learned how to better communicate with their team. Therefore, leaders need to set an example and embrace the use of technology to communicate and collaborate effectively with co-workers (Blow 2021).

Despite employees being asked to return full-time to the office, meetings are still held on Zoom. Some even say it feels like they are working from home because they have very few social interactions at the office (Abril 2021). Hence, leaders need to create a structure where technology is not overused and where there is still room for social interactions (Gavett 2021).

#### **d) *Effective collaboration***

As mentioned in section 3.2.2, face-to-face collaboration is very effective. Many creative ideas come from unplanned physical interactions, which are harder to reciprocate when collaboration is done online (McKolskey 2012). Also, in-person interactions help understand people's expressions by looking at their posture and body language. Having the option to see someone in person can reduce misunderstandings. In fact, words correspond to 3% of what someone is saying, 97% is non-verbal communication (Mehrabian 1971). Yet, Gallup argues that dispersed teams should be able to collaborate effectively, but they need to be managed correctly, and support should be given when needed (Gallup 2017).

Moreover, a survey done by Gallup in 2016 found that only 43% of Millennials are aware of the work done by their team, compared to 57% of the older generations, which shows that team alignment is less present for the younger generation. However, Millennials wish to know how their job fits with their team, and this is also where the role of the management is crucial. They need to explain how the team is supposed to collaborate to lead the company towards success (Gallup 2016).

#### **e) *Managing people***

Managers have had a lot of power to know what is best for the organization (Beckett 2021), and asking employees to come to the office the whole week was one of them (Lim, Teo 2000). Leaders have long believed that the key to managing a team is to have them in proximity. They wanted to have the control and to be aware of what employees were doing (Gavett 2021; Freed 2020).

At the beginning of the pandemic, the shift to a fully remote work was challenging for some leaders who were used to having the team in proximity. According to a survey done by Gartner, 20% of the studied companies bought software to monitor employees during the pandemic (Zielinski 2020). An investigation is currently in process for Barclays, an English bank, because they were monitoring remote employees with such tools without their consent (Schwartz 2020). Leaders need to create a culture where they empower employees to do their best every day, monitoring them does not benefit the organization in the long term (Freed 2020).

The younger generation also expects leaders to change performance management (Gallup 2016). People do feel like their career growth suffers if they fully work remotely. In a traditional office culture, to be promoted, you needed to be visible in the office (Lim, Teo 2000). Leaders need to make sure performance is evaluated fairly (Wigert, Harter 2017) because workers enjoyed the autonomy of working remotely. They do not want to go back to the pre-pandemic era, where they were being monitored by their managers (O'Connor 2021). Leaders ultimately need to adapt (Barrero, Bloom, Davis 2021).

#### **f) Flexibility**

By not considering the needs of Millennials and Gen Z for flexibility, leaders put their short-term needs before the needs of the young generation (Chapman 2005). They want their workforce in proximity. Lim and Teo (2000) found that having a manager who actively supports remote work has an impact on how employees perceive work from home. Work is what someone is doing, not where that person is doing it (Sita 2021).

Everyone experienced work from home differently. Some enjoyed the autonomy that came with working remotely, while others' mental health was suffering because of loneliness. Therefore, the key is to customize the workplace so that employees who want to work remotely can, and those who do not, can work at the office as workers all have different preferences and ways of working. According to a paper by Gensler (2013), research has shown that giving options to employees increases their overall satisfaction. This way, companies can better attract and retain talent (O'Connor 2021; McLauring 2015; Lim, Teo 2000; Gallup 2017; Dellatto 2021; Deloitte 2020).

### **3.5.2 Consideration**

The second element is consideration which is more people-oriented. The leader should be concerned about the needs of its employees, care about their overall well-being at work and make sure that they are satisfied with their job. A supportive and caring leader can create better long-term trust and respect from their employees (Stogdill 1948).

Leaders who are able to acquire the skill of consideration put themselves in the shoes of the other person and understand the impact their behavior could potentially have on the other person (Stogdill 1948).

In the following paragraphs, each element of the consideration will be explained, such as active listening, self-awareness, strengths-focus, accessibility, support, and well-being.

#### **a) *Active listening***

Leaders need to actively listen and have a genuine interest in understanding the feelings and needs of Millennials and Gen Z (Brown 2021). In other words, managers should listen more than they talk in order to recognize someone else's concern (Seppälä, Stevenson 2017). In fact, when leaders actively listen to their team, not only do they build trust, but it also shows that managers strongly care about them as individuals and they have empathy towards them. As a result, leaders create an environment where employees and the young generation can openly communicate, where they feel psychologically safe and become more loyal towards their employer (Center for Creative Leadership 2022a; Brown 2021; Freed 2020).

#### **b) *Self-awareness***

Leaders need to be self-aware of how their behavior or actions can impact the people around them (Center for Creative Leadership 2022b). Leaders should ask their team for feedback and for their point of view so that the team has a sense of belonging and that they feel that they make a difference (O'Connor 2021) because the young generation does not like to be told what to do. Research showed that 30% of Gen Zers despise if a leader forces them to perform a task, or if a leader does not let them use their holidays when they desire it, or even if they cannot flexibly organize their own schedule (Workforce institute 2019). The issue is that if leaders are not aware of the impact their decision and behavior have over the workforce, the talent will be more likely to quit their job and not remain with the organization (Beckett 2021; O'Connor 2021). In contrast, being more self-aware leads to long-lasting relationships and trust and also diminishes the probability of being misunderstood (Center for Creative Leadership 2022b).

In addition, managers should coach the young workforce and really care about them as people and employees (Robinson 2019; Gallup 2016). A collaborative leadership approach (Cassidy 2015), where leaders create real relationships, is preferred rather than a directive approach. Leaders need to create an environment where Millennials and Gen Z want to work for, to do their best every day, and realize their full potential (Gallup 2022; Robinson 2019).

### **c) Strengths-focus**

The young workforce also wants their coach to focus on their strengths and not to fixate on their weaknesses only (Gallup 2022; Robinson 2019). This approach is known to increase the performance of employees (Goffee, Jones 2013).

### **d) Accessibility**

Millennials and Gen Z seek to learn and grow within the organization. Therefore, they strongly value leaders who are available to share their own knowledge and experience, someone who is willing to take time to teach the young workforce (Workforce institute 2019). As mentioned, in the banking sector, leaders are used to the open-door policy where employees can come anytime to ask questions or raise any doubts they may have. This should therefore endure (Kruse 2016).

### **e) Support**

A study by the Workforce institute (2019) found that the most important characteristics of a leader according to Gen Zers are trust, support, and care. Gen Zers want supportive managers that recognize their hard work and achievements. Having an unsupportive leader would negatively impact their performance at the workplace (Workforce institute 2019). The same goes for Millennials who desire recognition for their work (Gallup 2018). Managers also need to be positive and motivating by nature (Schroth 2019; Workforce institute 2019). According to research, employees are more likely to work harder and be loyal to the company when managers are supportive (Workforce institute 2019). Moreover, Gen Zers want, for reassurance, that their managers regularly check up on them when they just joined the workforce to be aware of how they are feeling (Workforce institute 2019).

### **f) Well-being**

Managers need to care about the well-being of their team (Gallup 2016). As mentioned, the young generation was more negatively affected by the pandemic (Dellatto 2021). Therefore, promoting well-being and open communication at work can foster a more lenient workforce, and it will reduce absenteeism at work, and the young workforce will be less likely to quit their job (Gallup 2016). Leaders need to adapt in a way that satisfies everyone and ensures their well-being (Barrero, Bloom, Davis 2021).

And this is important, especially in the banking sector, where workers work in a stressful environment and work long hours (Gallup 2016). Research has shown that a stressful environment can negatively affect the performance of the young generation at work (Workforce institute 2019).

### **3.6 Conclusion of the literature review**

The Covid-19 pandemic changed the labor market, and leaders now need to adapt because WFH is likely to remain (Barrero, Bloom, Davis 2021). For many banks, this change is a natural next step, and therefore, they used this opportunity to create a competitive advantage in the work environment to attract top talents anywhere in the world (Rigoni, Nelson 2016; Deloitte 2020; Beckett 2021; Kelly 2021a).

However, many leaders still make decisions without asking employees (Long, Clement 2021). Consequently, many young employees are actively looking for a new occupation (Robinson 2019), reflecting the younger generation's re-evaluation of what work is and how they see it as an element of their newly discovered lifestyle choices (Wingard 2021). They are aware that they have various options in the job market and do not feel obliged to keep working for a company that does not understand what they value (Gallup 2016).

Moreover, data showed that the young generation feels less involved in their work than the previous generations (Gallup 2016). For this reason, understanding the needs of Millennials and Gen Z is crucial to create an environment where they can thrive and feel empowered and ensure the development of the labor market in the future (Goffee, Jones 2013). As mentioned, by 2025, Millennials will represent 75% of the workforce (Rigoni, Nelson 2016), and they will be the new talents that will bring fresh ideas and lead the world of tomorrow (Srinivasan 2021).

Therefore, the objective of this research is to study the effect of WFH, which many researchers and organizational behaviorists believe will have lasting changes on workplace behaviors in a post-covid world. This paper will explore how these lasting changes apply to the banking industry in Switzerland. To close the gap and to answer the research questions, the author will proceed by collecting the primary data. Therefore, the next section explains the method used to collect the primary data.

## **4. Methodology**

### **4.1 Purpose statement**

The purpose of this empirical research is to uncover the real sentiments of Millennials and Gen Z and understand how leadership affects the empowerment of the young generation working from home in the banking sector.

### **4.2 In-depth interviews**

#### **4.2.1 Research design**

In this research, primary data was collected through qualitative research with in-depth semi-structured interviews in order to evaluate the perspectives of both the employee and the manager. These semi-structured interviews allowed for some flexibility during interactions while still covering important research topics to answer the research question (Harrison et al. 2016, p. 82). Secondary data, such as a literature review, was used as a foundation to draft the main topics discussed during the interviews in order to close the gaps (Western Sydney University 2017).

#### **4.2.2 Sampling**

Participants have been purposely sampled using the “snowball sampling” method by Coleman (1958). Participants were sampled through recommendations from the researchers. The conditions for being part of the sampling were to be working in the banking sector and having work-from-home experience. Moreover, they had to be born between 1981-1996 or 1997-2010 or have experience in managing a team.

The research will focus on eight banks located in the French-speaking part of Switzerland, which should represent the whole population. All types of banks have been included in the sample, meaning public and private banks.

During the research, four interviews were conducted with various managers at different levels of the organization to explore the institution’s perspective and get a better overview of the working-from-home experience. This thesis will explore whether WFH is favorable to banks or not and whether they should offer this possibility or not.

Six Gen Z and six Millennials were also interviewed to discover their sentiments and emotional state while working from home because many have experienced WFH differently (Boland et al. 2020). The interviews of Gen Z could be compared with Millennials who already had a first professional experience working in banks.

In total, sixteen interviews were conducted, and theoretical saturation was reached (Glaser, Strauss 1967). When possible, the pool of employees and managers has been sourced within the same eight banks.

Bank	N°	Name	Gender	Category	Bank	N°	Name	Gender	Category
A	1	Arthur*	Male	Gen Z	D	10	Zoé*	Female	Gen Z
	2	Louise*	Female	Gen Z		11	Jean*	Male	Manager
	3	Léo*	Male	Millennial	E	12	Jeanne*	Female	Gen Z
	4	Hugo*	Male	Manager		13	Camille*	Female	Millennial
B	5	Léa*	Female	Gen Z	F	14	Thomas*	Male	Millennial
	6	Alice*	Female	Millennial	G	15	Diego*	Male	Millennial
	7	Tom*	Male	Manager					
C	8	Anna*	Female	Millennial	H	16	Olivia*	Female	Gen Z
	9	Paul*	Male	Manager					

\* All participants' names were changed to ensure anonymity.

*Figure 1: Overview of in-depth interviews participants*

### 4.2.3 Research ethics

The names of the banks and the interviewees, and the recordings of the interviews remain anonymous. Moreover, they are only accessible to the researcher.

### 4.2.4 Procedure

Before conducting the interviews, the researcher did three pilot interviews with a Gen Z, a Millennial, and a manager to test the questions and perfect the interview guide. The pilot interviews have also helped the researcher practice and be more comfortable when leading the conversation with participants (Abdul Majid et al. 2017). The three interviews lasted forty-five, sixty and ninety minutes. Therefore, the interviewer will target an interview of sixty minutes. For the research, the lengths of the interviews varied depending on the time available to participants.

The primary data was collected through qualitative and exploratory research, which was based on in-depth semi-structured interviews (Appendix 1: Interview guide).

During the interview, the researcher welcomed and thanked the participant for taking part in the research. Then, the interviewer introduced herself and explained that the interview was an open discussion and that there were no right or wrong answers. The meeting was recorded after the participant's consent. The interview started with warm-up questions where interviewees introduced themselves, their professional background, and explained when they started working from home and how their overall experience was.

The discussion was then divided into four main topics: focus, socialization, collaboration, and learning within the working environment. Afterward, the researcher questioned participants about the needs of Millennials and Gen Z and psychological empowerment in the workspace. The interview guide varied depending on the profile of the interviewee. Finally, the recording was transcribed.

#### **4.2.5 Analysis method**

The data was analyzed objectively using a perspective of the grounded theory (Glaser, Strauss 1967). This methodology encourages the researcher to use critical thinking by constantly comparing the collected data to form themes and then classing them into different categories to finally conclude with a theory backed up with data.

Another qualitative data analysis method that will be used is thematic analysis. This method uses codes to analyze important patterns that are recurrent within the data (Saldana 2022). For this research, thematic analysis is appropriate in order to examine subjective insights such as people's sentiments, views, and opinions. The deductive approach will be applied as it involves creating a framework of subjects before the data collection, to be covered during the interviews (Braun, Clarke 2006).

## 5. Results

### 5.1 Codes

The following tables show how the themes were developed. The five main themes are well-being, productivity, socialization, collaboration and learning, and the role of the leader and feedback.

**Table 1 From codes to the first theme: Well-being**

<b>Codes</b>	<b>Intermediate coding</b>	<b>Final theme</b>
Work-life balance Managing one's time Re-evaluation of work and life No commute Happiness	Positive emotions	Theme 1: Well-being
Isolation Loneliness Depression Tiredness Feeling distant Stress Too much pressure No clear boundary work and life	Negative emotions	

**Table 2 From codes to the second theme: Productivity**

<b>Codes</b>	<b>Intermediate coding</b>	<b>Final theme</b>
Computers Printer Office chair Office desk	Infrastructure at the workplace	Theme 2: Productivity
Confidential documents Interactions with colleagues	Accessibility of information	
Interruptions by colleagues More concentrated More motivated Open space (noise) Need of separation work/life	Distractions at the workplace	
Stress Pressure Anxiety Answer to instant message/calls Level of trust	Pressure of being constantly available	

**Table 3 From codes to the third theme: Socialization**

Codes	Intermediate coding	Final theme
Only professional interactions No spontaneous interactions Breaks alone Feel disconnected Distant Isolated Miscommunication	Difficulty of keeping close relationships	Theme 3: Socialization
Online coffee-chats Camera on Private setting More effort Fun	Close relationships with online socialization	

**Table 4 From codes to the fourth theme: Collaboration and learning**

<b>Codes</b>	<b>Intermediate coding</b>	<b>Final theme</b>
Camera Instant chat Microphone Non-verbal signals More reactivity online Faster answers	Positive aspects of online collaboration	Theme 4: Collaboration and learning
Lack of reactivity Stress Frustration Lack of motivation Feeling of isolation Lack of proactivity Time-consuming Proximity Lack of communication Misunderstandings Lack of informal interactions	Negative aspects of online collaboration	

**Table 5 From codes to the fifth theme: Role of the leader and feedback**

<b>Codes</b>	<b>Intermediate coding</b>	<b>Final theme</b>
Remote work infrastructure Equipment	Technical support	Theme 5: Role of the leader and feedback
Active listening Open communication Accessibility Psychological safety Self-awareness Proximity	Emotional support	
Ongoing conversations Time-consuming Organization Face-to-face interactions Virtual/face-to-face Discussion: negative feedback Recognition	Coordinators and communication leaders	

## 5.2 Interviews

### Bank A

**Interview 1:** Arthur, a Gen Z, has previously done an apprenticeship in the banking sector and has worked for Bank A for four years. He is a part-time student doing his Bachelor's. Arthur now enjoys working one day at home per week but still values going to the office to interact with his colleagues. The main themes that came up during the interview were:

- Well-being
- Productivity
- Socialization
- Collaboration and learning
- Role of the leader and feedback

**Interview 2:** Louise, a Gen Z, has previously done her apprenticeship in the banking sector and has now been working for Bank A for one year and a half. Due to her negative experience while working remotely, she prefers to be in the office and is now apprehensive about working from home again. The main themes that came up during the interview were:

- Well-being
- Productivity
- Socialization
- Collaboration and learning
- Role of the leader and feedback

**Interview 3:** Léo, a Millennial, has worked for Bank A for three years. When he entered this bank, it was his first professional experience in his field of interest. He is a part-time student doing his Bachelor's. His preference would be to fully work remotely as he realized how much time is wasted only with commutes. The main themes that came up during the interview were:

- Well-being
- Productivity
- Socialization
- Collaboration and learning
- Role of leader and feedback

**Interview 4:** Hugo had done an apprenticeship in Bank A and has six years of professional experience. He has seven months of experience in managing a hybrid team. Hugo is a Gen Z, born in 1999. The main themes that came up during the interview were:

- Well-being
- Productivity
- Socialization
- Collaboration and learning
- Role of leader and feedback

#### Bank B

**Interview 5:** Léa, a Gen Z, had done her internship in Bank B. She was then hired as a part-time student and has been working there for almost three years. Last September, she decided to leave her position as it was difficult for her to juggle work and classes for her Bachelor's. Léa enjoyed working from home, and she is currently looking for a new job and disclosed that if the company is not flexible in terms of remote work, she does not want to work for the company. The main themes that came up during the interview were:

- Well-being
- Productivity
- Socialization
- Collaboration and learning
- Role of leader and feedback

**Interview 6:** Alice, a Millennial, has done a master's in finance. As a professional experience, she had done two internships in Bank B and is now working as a graduate. Her experience while working from home was challenging, therefore, she prefers working at the office and seeing her colleagues. The main themes that came up during the interview were:

- Well-being
- Productivity
- Socialization
- Collaboration and learning
- Role of leader and feedback

**Interview 7:** Tom has worked almost forty years in Bank B and manages a team of fifteen collaborators. He was able to experience the entire evolution of technology and is very open to offering work-from-home possibilities to his team. He has been a manager for twenty-five years and was born in 1967. The main themes that came up during the interview were:

- Well-being
- Productivity
- Socialization
- Collaboration and learning
- Role of leader and feedback

### Bank C

**Interview 8:** Anna, a Millennial, started working for Bank C in September 2019. She is a part-time student doing her Bachelor's. She is not working from home anymore, she likes being in the office to learn. However, work from home is a possibility she would like to have if needed. The main themes that came up during the interview were:

- Well-being
- Productivity
- Socialization
- Collaboration and learning
- Role of leader and feedback

**Interview 9:** Paul has worked for over ten years as a manager in Bank C. As previous professional experiences, he worked in multiple different banks. He was born in 1977. The main themes that came up during the interview were:

- Well-being
- Productivity
- Socialization
- Collaboration and learning
- Role of leader and feedback

## Bank D

**Interview 10:** Zoé, a Gen Z, has previously done an apprenticeship in the banking sector and has worked for Bank D for three years. Also, she is in the process of obtaining her financial advisor certificate. The main themes that came up during the interview were:

- Well-being
- Productivity
- Socialization
- Collaboration and learning
- Role of leader and feedback

**Interview 11:** Jean has done his apprenticeship in Bank D. He has been the manager of three branches and twelve employees in total for two and a half years. He has therefore been working for nine years for Bank D. He is a Gen Z, born in 1998. The main themes that came up during the interview were:

- Well-being
- Productivity
- Socialization
- Collaboration and learning
- Role of leader and feedback

## Bank E

**Interview 12:** Jeanne, a Gen Z, had done an apprenticeship in Bank E and has six years of professional experience. She had a positive experience while working from home, even though she worked one year remotely. However, she still enjoys being at the office and having human interactions with colleagues. The main themes that came up during the interview were:

- Well-being
- Productivity
- Socialization
- Collaboration and learning
- Role of leader and feedback

**Interview 13:** Camille, a Millennial, had done an apprenticeship in Bank E and has seven years of professional experience. In June 2020, she started a new position in a new team. Tensions within the team had been created during the pandemic, so she now prefers to work from home. The main themes that came up during the interview were:

- Well-being
- Productivity
- Socialization
- Role of leader and feedback

#### Bank F

**Interview 14:** Thomas, a Millennial, has done his Bachelor's in economics and has now been working for four years. He enjoys being in the office rather than at home to have social interactions with his colleagues. The main themes that came up during the interview were:

- Well-being
- Productivity
- Socialization
- Collaboration and learning
- Role of leader and feedback

#### Bank G

**Interview 15:** Diego, a Millennial, has done his apprenticeship in the banking sector and has now been working for Bank G for four years. His bank is not offering work-from-home possibilities anymore, but Diego enjoys being in the office. He finds social interactions with colleagues enriching. The main themes that came up during the interview were:

- Well-being
- Productivity
- Socialization
- Collaboration and learning
- Role of leader and feedback

## Banks H

**Interview 16:** Olivia, a Gen Z, has worked for three years in a bank, and she quit because there were no possibilities to evolve within the company. She is now working as a part-time student for Bank H for nine months. Olivia is now enjoying working from home one day per week but still values going to the office to interact with her colleagues. The main themes that came up during the interview were:

- Well-being
- Productivity
- Socialization
- Collaboration and learning
- Role of leader and feedback

In the table below are all the five main themes that were discussed during the interviews. The order of the themes is not by importance but more by how heavily they can affect other themes. For example, well-being is the theme that could very heavily impact productivity, socialization at work, collaboration with colleagues, a manager's role, and how feedback can be received. The following section discusses the importance of each theme in the workplace.

**Table 6 Summary of the five themes**

	Gen Z	Millennial	Manager	Total
Theme 1: Well-being	6	6	4	16
Theme 2: Productivity	6	6	4	16
Theme 3: Socialization	6	6	4	16
Theme 4: Collaboration and learning	6	5	4	15
Theme 5: Role of the leader and feedback	6	6	4	16

### 5.3 Themes

The first theme that stood out as important for Millennials and Gen Z was well-being. They want to feel comfortable, healthy, and happy. Indeed, interviewees mentioned giving value to work-life balance and explained how remote work impacted it positively or negatively. In some cases, participants mentioned struggling with mental health. These negative feelings can lead to a negative impact on the quality of their work. Well-being can impact every aspect of an employee's work, their interactions, and how their work empowers them. Therefore, it stands out as the most important theme that was directly impacted by the shift to a work-from-home work environment.

Secondly, productivity was a source of preoccupation for employees and managers in banks because of the work environment changes experienced when shifting to work-from-home. Most interviewees mentioned feeling confident about their productivity at home and noticed that they could work more efficiently at home by not being interrupted by colleagues. Other interviewees explained struggling to focus at home and constantly being distracted as they used to feel motivated when seeing others work in the office. A manager mentioned that some employees took advantage of the fact that they could not be seen and were caught not working during working hours. Why did participants feel the way they did? How do interactions impact productivity? Does work-from-home imply being constantly available? Are employees being more productive as a result of work-life imbalance? The results of the interviews will be further discussed in the analysis section.

Thirdly, socialization at work is an aspect often mentioned by managers and employees because humans enjoy interactions and are usually social animals. They enable the creation of a network of professionals in the field but also the creation of friendships. Unplanned interaction at work can bring people closer, making them feel more comfortable sharing information and helping each other. With work-from-home, these interactions were considerably reduced, and teams had to welcome new members in an online environment where spontaneous non-work-related interactions do feel strange. As a consequence of the lack of opportunities to build trust among employees, the efficiency of online collaboration and even learning can be heavily impacted in some cases. The analysis will present some concrete examples of the different cases.

Fourthly, in accordance with what was discussed in the literature review, the highly educated young generation interviewed during the qualitative research showed a strong desire to learn. However, work-from-home challenged the way colleagues shared knowledge with others to grow professionally. Teaching from a distance was unknown, and many had to use video conferencing tools for the first time. As a consequence, employees and managers also had to learn to collaborate in a new way without having people physically next to them. Collaboration and learning are two topics strongly linked with each other as learning enables better collaboration and vice versa. Interviewees' inputs will illustrate the challenges faced in regard to learning and collaborating with colleagues.

Lastly, a leading figure during a change is crucial to ensure its success. Consequently, leaders, which are defined as managers in this thesis, have borne the responsibility of enabling a smooth transition to work-from-home while caring for their employees. They reassured them or made sure they had the infrastructure to work correctly. Then, they also had to keep track of their team's progress from a distance by organizing meetings or even keeping in contact with employees to check on their mental health during this change process. Was this the case for all employees and managers? How did each respective party feel in this regard? Did they feel supported or rather alone? Were managers reachable or too busy for employees? Could managers still help and lead employees to reach their professional goals through effective feedback? These different questions will be answered in the qualitative research analysis.

This section aims to discuss the themes presented above to answer the following research questions in the conclusion of the thesis:

- How can leadership affect the empowerment of Millennials and Gen Z working from home in the banking sector in the French-speaking part of Switzerland?
- Is work-from-home favorable or detrimental for banks in the French-speaking part of Switzerland?
- If favorable, should the bank offer work-from-home possibilities to employees?

## 1. Well-being

Interviewees expressed their feelings towards well-being at work and highlighted that it was extremely important to them as they were facing challenges during that time. Well-being is a state where a person feels comfortable, happy, and healthy in what he or she is doing. In this qualitative research, half of the participants described their emotions as negative by using vocabulary that reflected isolation, sadness, and depression. The following two statements from Arthur and Louise illustrate their state of mind when working from home:

*"When working from home a lot, it is true that you feel a little bit **sadder** (...). So the social connection wasn't really there,(...) the interaction with colleagues is something that is **missing** when you spend all day at home. (...) and with the home office, I feel **distant** towards my colleagues. You quickly **feel left** to your own devices. And it's true that after a while, you get **tired** of it. You're **saddened** by the situation (...), and you quickly feel very **isolated**." - Arthur*

*" (...) I'm a person, I **need to see people, I need to go to work to be able to vent** with my colleagues when a call goes wrong. And there, I was all **alone, locked** in my room all day. (...), it **depressed** me more than anything else honestly to stay at home, it was **weighing on my morale**. (...) I was all **stressed out** about the systems and I think it was mostly me putting pressure on myself" - Louise*

The main source of these negative feelings seems to originate from a lack of human interactions in the work environment. For instance, Arthur expressed that as soon as he had less interactions with people, he quickly felt very isolated. Alice also mentioned that when she is at home, everyone is a little bit less available for spontaneous interactions. Fourteen out of sixteen participants expressed that human interactions contribute positively to their well-being. It shows that having a sense of belonging is a universal need. The other participants did not mind the lack of interactions, but they mentioned enjoying catching up with their colleagues from time to time.

The second source of stress and isolation is the lack of trust coming from managers. Louise describes her work-from-home experience and explains suffering from constant monitoring from her superiors. She reveals:

*“If I left my computer for two minutes, a message would pop up asking what I was doing. (...) The constant monitoring was really **weighing on my morale**, and then I eventually asked my manager if I could come back to the office because it depressed me to work from home. I felt less monitored in the office.” - Louise*

Alice also explained experiencing micromanagement from her superior. She had to fill out an excel spreadsheet detailing the progress of each of her tasks three times a week. Often, she could not finish her tasks as quickly as she could not get the answers she needed from other colleagues as everyone was going through challenging times. This management process added extra stress and pressure to her work-from-home experience, and she could not work very peacefully.

These two testimonies show that a manager’s reaction can impact an employee’s well-being, and it is important to build trust between both to promote well-being in the workplace.

Then, the third source of negative impact on well-being was the lack of clear work-life balance boundaries. For instance, Anna points out that she did not enjoy working and spending personal time in the same environment. She adds:

*“I really like to have both separated. At once, I found myself not enjoying my time after work that much because I **could not disconnect my mind from work**. (...) I was still at the same location. (...) As soon as I could go back to the office 100%, I was happy.” - Anna*

While half of the participants did describe their work-from-home experience as negatively. The others enjoyed this new way of working which positively impacted their well-being.

Firstly, it increases the comfort of life and the quality of personal time. Jeanne organized her whole day-to-day life around the home office: the times she could do grocery shopping, the times she could go to the gym, the times she could meet her friends, or the times she could enjoy some me time. Going back to the office upset her day-to-day life as she just could not do what she used to do. Léo adds that avoiding commuting to work allowed him to build a better work-life balance. He explains:

*“Instead of commuting three hours a day, I could enjoy a better quality of life and enjoy activities I like. (...) I realized I did not want to commute three hours a day anymore. (...) Through work-from-home, I could **improve the quality of my day-to-day life** and take better care of myself.” - Léo*

Six interviewees out of the twelve have seen a better work-life balance and an overall increase in quality of life. In this qualitative research, fifty percent of young employees seek work conditions that allow them to improve their well-being and be happier, and they value companies that do so. As a matter of fact, eleven out of twelve employees would rather work for a company that gives them the possibility to work from home when they want to. What is more, two participants specified they would not consider working for a company that does not offer this possibility.

Secondly, work-from-home positively impacted well-being because it gave employees time to reflect on the meaning of work and happiness. Camille revealed that she did not have time to think if her work aligned with her values because she was under so much stress. At home, she regained some personal space and could work quietly without being disturbed. She continued:

*“The quietness at home allowed me to realize I was doing so many things mechanically: going by car to work, getting stuck in traffic, (...) many things were repetitive. (...) I am not a machine, and I enjoy having time for myself. Now, I am even drastically considering working at 80%, which is something I would have never considered before.” - Camille*

Camille’s statement illustrates clearly that the younger generation is re-evaluating what work is and how it is integrated with their lifestyle. Paul, manager for ten years, acknowledged that younger employees today value well-being more than twenty years ago.

Overall, the impact of remote work on well-being was balanced among employees. It has given them control over the way they manage their time and their work. As explained, some felt they regained command of their personal life, while others felt alone and preferred going to the office to enjoy social interactions. Also, well-being can impact other aspects of work such as productivity, motivation, collaboration, or socialization. Positive or negative feelings can weigh on employee empowerment and affect ownership of tasks in the workspace.

## 2. Productivity

Productivity is a measure of performance that compares the amount of work that can be completed with the time needed to do so. An increase in performance equals more tasks being completed in a shorter time. Respectively, a decrease in productivity equals needing more time to complete the defined tasks. During the interviews, participants were asked to evaluate their productivity at work and at the office. By doing so, three aspects impacting productivity were identified.

Firstly, infrastructure at the workplace and accessibility of information were pinpointed as influencing employee productivity. Infrastructure in the workplace includes computers, monitors, a mouse, a keyboard, a printer, an office chair, an office desk, or stationary. Olivia explained that it was difficult to work at home because she was working on her small laptop without a second screen and without a mouse. Consequently, working from home was less comfortable, but she could compensate for the negative impact of work-from-home comfort on productivity because of the decrease of interruption by colleagues when working at home. Another participant, Diego, disclosed that his bank did not desire to invest in work-from-home equipment as they wanted it to be temporary. In fact, he admitted that this was one of the reasons he was considering changing his job and working in another bank. Other participants added that due to bank secrecy, employees could not bring all confidential documents at home and had to delay some tasks to when they will go to the office.

Secondly, stress and pressure were mentioned as a factor that affected productivity. In this qualitative research, participants expressed that they were more productive because of stress. Although stress positively impacted productivity, three participants nuanced that it negatively impacted their mental health. For instance, Jeanne pointed out that she often sacrificed personal time for work because of fear of being seen as not available for work. She says:

*“(...) others were saying to themselves (...) they are at home, I do not understand why they could not answer an e-mail or a call at the end of the day. Whereas when you leave the office, you finish work.” - Jeanne*

In addition, Camille also expressed feeling like superiors thought it was unfair to be at home and assumed the employees were not working, without proof. She continues by describing feeling enormous pressure to be available and answer quickly. Similarly, Alice mentions that she feels anxious going to the bathroom or getting a cup of water and missing a call from a co-worker because she assumes that they would think she is not working. Olivia adds:

*"When you get up to get a glass of water, (...) you have your family (...) it is like when you are walking down the hallway, and you pass by a colleague, and you end up talking to them for five minutes and go back to work, and it is ok if you missed a call at this time. At home, it is different. I tell myself: they are going to think I am not working. (...) This is a pressure I do not have in the office." - Olivia*

Being new to the work environment, the young generation considers they have to prove themselves even more when working from home, and therefore, experience stress. While it is true that some employees cheat the system when working from home, as Tom, manager of bank B, explained, it is not the most frequent scenario. The level of stress can vary depending on the level of trust between the employee and the superior, but it can also be caused by other work-related subjects (e.g., project deadlines, clients, ...). Other participants evaluated the stress as manageable and said they understood this pressure and justified it because of pay.

Finally, the third factor to carry weight on productivity is distractions in the workplace, described by interviewees as interactions with co-workers, gossip, snack breaks, or spontaneous drop-bys of colleagues. To evaluate the impact of these interactions, participants were asked to rate the different interactions they had at work and how much value they brought to the quality of their work. Eight out of twelve considered their interactions with colleagues as important. Arthur expressed being more reluctant to ask every question he has when working at home. Whereas, in the office, he can directly see if a colleague can help and asks questions more spontaneously. The young generation seems to need assistance in subjects related to their work due to a lack of experience. Three participants explained that their interactions in the office were not necessary. Camille claims she gets interrupted every five minutes for subjects not related to work like current news (e.g. French elections, the war in Ukraine, ...). She adds:

*"(...) I even feel **anxious** to go to work and be interrupted by my colleagues as I cannot progress on the tasks I am working on as well as when I am at home." - Camille*

**Table 7 Summary of productivity evaluation by employees**

Productivity	Better at home	Same	Better at the office
Gen Z	5/6	0/6	1/6
Gen Y	2/6	2/6	2/6
Gen Z and Y	<b>7/12</b>	2/12	<b>3/12</b>

Out of twelve Gen Z and Millennials, seven mention being more productive at home because of less distractions (Table 7: Summary of productivity evaluation by employees). Thomas believes colleagues are less likely to disturb each other while working from home and that he can better focus on his tasks. This belief is also shared by Arthur who added that he is more likely to try and find solutions on his own when working at home in comparison to being in the office. Only Alice, Anna, and Jeanne claim that they could focus better in the office. They enjoy getting direct answers to questions, and seeing others' work increases their motivation to complete their work. They do not get distracted like they do at home. Alice expressed:

*“If I have a personal interaction with someone, it is easier to get motivated to continue, you really feel it, instead when you work from home, just calling someone, the call ends, and then you are like: ok, now **back at it on your own**. So I really prefer being at the office” - Alice*

In total, four participants described the office as being an environment that was “made for work”, and that they could focus more than when working at home. Also, they explain that at-work in-person interactions are nice to have because they can affect participants’ moods and create deeper relationships in some cases.

### 3. Socialization

Socialization at work is characterized by interactions on non-work-related topics that help strengthen the quality of relationships in the workplace. They can take the form of coffee breaks, lunch breaks taken together with colleagues, or small talks in between meetings. These spontaneous interactions help build bonds and team cohesion among colleagues that are deeper than just being co-workers.

As explained in the literature review, proximity is a crucial factor which influences the quality of a relationship. In other words, colleagues that see each other regularly tend to have a deeper bond (Brower 2021). Being social animals, socialization satisfies an essential human need that Maslow (1943) defines as “belonging”.

When remote work was established during the pandemic, consequent socialization opportunities disappeared. Hugo expressed that he misses opportunities to share meaningful moments with colleagues when he is at home. Diego and Jean explain:

*“I had **less fun** while working from home because I was alone all day. (...) In the bank, the goal is to see people, to see clients, to create a network and all that is not possible. (...) Informal interactions with colleagues are very important, there is so much information coming out at once, and this is when you learn.” - Jean*

*“I really value the social interactions at work, both with people I directly work with and with people from other departments, because I find those **interactions enriching for me**, both on a personal and professional level. (...) I think that the banking profession is something you have to live, and if you stay at home, you miss the social side.” - Diego*

Both acknowledge informal interactions are opportunities to access extra information that would not be shared when working at home. Camille even adds that working from home can lead to isolation from teams because, as she says:

*“(...) that’s what working from home is, **people forget about you**, and they think you are not there.” - Camille*

Information is less easily shared as some participants did not want to disturb other colleagues. Three interviewees testified experiencing miscommunication when working from home. They either were not made aware of an issue and learned about it later, or they were not included in social gatherings such as lunches. It seems like relationships were mostly negatively impacted by the switch to work from home. Ten out of the sixteen participants mentioned how difficult it was to keep close relationships with their colleagues. Arthur compared his ability to socialize at work and at home, and he admits creating bonds with colleagues online was more challenging. When he met new employees in the office, he got on with others much quicker. As such, offline interactions seem to be more favorable to friendly interactions, while online interactions are usually more professional. Eight out of twelve interviewees mentioned observing this tendency as well. Jean and Thomas admit that informal interactions can lead to having a better day at work. Two interviewees added that they appreciate the presence of colleagues in the workplace to relieve pressure in case of negative situations (e.g., a rude client, ...). Léo reveals:

*“Sometimes, we have calls with really rude people, (...) it has advantages to have colleagues next to you, it is that when you are under pressure, you can talk about it (...). When you are alone, you are just going to be **negative all by yourself.**” - Léo*

Overall, interactions in the office facilitate socialization. However, this does not mean that online socialization is impossible, but it is true that it requires more effort. Léa said she made a lot of extra efforts when she joined the team in early January 2020 because she wanted to build trust with colleagues. She looked for pending work of colleagues she could help with, and she contacted them through the phone, through video conferences, and e-mails to help them as much as possible. Léa believes her efforts helped her build a strong relationship with colleagues based on trust. She adds:

*“If you work from home and do not make efforts to communicate, you will not hear about the important information. (...) **Ongoing communication** becomes extremely important.” - Léa*

Similarly, Alice decided to put in place online coffee chats and invited colleagues to join and get to know each other. Colleagues and senior managers joined these video calls, and she described them as “fun”. Still, she nuances that these interactions are not as rich as office interactions.

Three out of sixteen interviewees explained that management put in place special rules for online meetings to foster online interactions and build the quality of relationships at the workplace (e.g., recommendation to turn on the camera, camera aperitif, ...). These participants acknowledge that working from home and having online meetings enables them to see colleagues in a more private setting. They realized everyone has a life next to work, and it made it easier to talk about non-work-related subjects when they came back to the office. Organized online interactions favored a sense of belonging and community. Without initiatives, participants recognize that working from home disconnected the team.

#### 4. Collaboration and learning

The highly educated young generation interviewed during the qualitative research showed a strong desire to learn. However, work-from-home challenged the way colleagues shared knowledge with others to grow professionally. Teaching from a distance was unknown, and many had to use video conferencing tools for the first time. Consequently, employees and managers also had to learn to collaborate in a new way without having people physically next to them.

Communication platforms such as Teams, Skype, or Zoom were widely used during work from home. Features such as the camera, the chat, and the microphone have shown to improve the efficiency of online collaboration. As such, four out of the eleven participants declared that online collaboration is effective if used correctly. Participants noticed a difference in collaboration quality when the camera is turned on versus when the camera is turned off. For instance, Tom explained:

*“(...) It's not an obligation, but as much as possible, we ask our employees to have the **camera on** in order to be attentive to **non-verbal signals**. It allows us to understand how they are feeling, what they are thinking and so on.” – Tom (manager)*

In addition, Léa realized that her colleagues were more reactive online and answered faster. It was easier to discuss about a topic with a colleague at home because people at the office are often busier. She would call and explain to her colleague that her answer was essential to continue her work. Thus, adding an additional pressure. Whereas at the office, she explained that:

*“There is a greater tendency for colleagues to say: Ah, we will look at that later because we are at the office until 6pm. (...) Whereas when you are at home, you say, ok, I'll show you right away how it's done, and then I'll move on to something else, and you will move on to something else.” – Léa*

Léa revealed that online collaboration would sometimes positively affect the speed of receiving information. However, not every participant found online collaboration effective. There are three challenges with online collaboration that negatively affect its efficiency: lack of reactivity, lack of proactivity, and lack of communication (informal and formal).

First, four out of eleven participants saw a lack of reactivity from colleagues when working from home. They were left with unanswered questions, which led to negative emotions such as stress, frustration, and lack of motivation. Arthur reveals:

*“There are times when I am faced with a situation where I don't necessarily have an answer, and **I can't reach colleagues for help**. So, I'm on the phone with the client, and I can't move forward in my day without getting that case resolved. So, it's true that we often feel much more **isolated**, (...), we quickly feel stuck. And it becomes more complicated.” - Arthur*

Second, young employees are less proactive when they work remotely. Six out of eleven participants mentioned that they are reluctant to ask questions or call their colleagues. They find that calling someone requires more effort and is more time-consuming. Another reason is because employees cannot see what the other person is physically doing, and they do not want to disturb. Olivia added:

*“When I'm at home, I don't really dare to call colleagues and to **disturb** them, because I know that in the office, it's **stressful** and that phone calls disturb a lot, (...) On the other hand, when I'm in the office, I really ask spontaneous questions. I dare more easily to disturb.” – Olivia*

Finally, eleven out of sixteen participants mentioned a lack of communication while working from home. Compared to the home office, an open space is usually louder and favors communication opportunities. People can listen to their colleagues discussing work or non-work-related topics and learn from topics they would not know about if they were not physically present. Paul, a manager, believes:

*“(...) there is a lot of information that passes between us when we are in **open space**. It is better and more efficient to be in the office. There are much more interactions.” - Paul*

Additionally, Olivia admits there is a lack of communication that leads to misunderstandings. When she works from home, colleagues do not update her as frequently as when she is in the office. She adds:

*“My colleagues have been used to working 100% in the office and **communicating all day long**, so when someone is working from home, you don't think to tell that person where things stand.” - Olivia*

Also, collaboration becomes more difficult when working remotely as spontaneous social interactions are missing. This affects the quality of relationships and the opportunities to build trust among co-workers. Without this trust, misunderstandings or tensions can start to emerge. To illustrate, Camille explained that tensions in her team were created during the pandemic when they worked from home. The team had to reinvent their offer which led to more work and led to people working more individually.

Zoé, Olivia, and Alice acknowledge that colleagues tend to speak less spontaneously when working from home than working in the office. For instance, Olivia experienced a negative change in office relationships. She explains that there was no team cohesion left after a long period of working from home. Remote work created a divide among colleagues, and they were not close. The home office worsened the situation as nobody wanted to turn the camera on during team meetings and discuss. As a result, she did not try to communicate with them because she had this fear of being a nuisance. For this reason, Hugo, a manager from bank A, points out:

*“(...) it is important for employees to come to the office most of the week to keep the **team spirit alive**. If half of the team were to do 100% home office, they would not know the newcomers, and they would **lose the team cohesion**. Newcomers would hesitate to ask questions and would not know who to talk to.” – Hugo*

Keeping the team spirit alive is quite an important point for the topic of remote work because Alice even mentioned that people are less present and not as enthusiastic when they work from home. This is because proximity plays an important role in creating relationships based on trust, and therefore, the efficiency of online collaboration suffers.

On the one hand, communication usually comes naturally at the office, thanks to the open space and the open-door policy. On the other hand, online collaboration requires more effort as teams are dispersed and not all physically in one space. This research has shown that there is a difference between teams who are used to collaborating with digital tools and teams who always collaborate by having colleagues in proximity. Indeed, employees who are acquainted with digital communications tools demonstrate the same efficiency of collaboration at the office and at home.

Five participants out of the twelve used to interact with colleagues using digital tools even before the pandemic. These participants have all worked for more than two years in the bank. For them, the switch to remote work was not as impactful as the other participants.

Léo revealed:

*“ (...) the fact that you are in home office is **not a hindrance to collaborate** with colleagues since the **tools** we have **allow us to continue to collaborate well.**” – Léo*

The efficiency of collaboration can impact the ability to exchange knowledge, and colleagues' reactivity can make young employees feel less isolated. In fact, ongoing communications can help build trust and make young employees feel more comfortable asking questions or discussing a new topic.

## **5. Role of the leader and feedback**

Interviewees explain how their managers guided them through the work environment changes, and their different experiences show that leaders have to assume a critical role in ensuring a smooth transition when working from home. On the one hand, five out of twelve participants did not get particular support from their management and felt isolated. On the other hand, seven Gen Z and Millennials mentioned that their managers did all they could to make the experience of working from home more enjoyable. They act as technical support, as emotional support to ensure psychological safety and well-being, and as coordinators and communication leaders.

Firstly, all managers had a technical support role. As the pandemic was unexpected, it led to needing a quick transition from a fully in-person working environment to a fully remote one. The interviews showed that half of the interrogated banks already had remote work infrastructures in place, while the other half did not. Through this change, managers had to support employees and make sure they could work from home with adequate equipment. For instance, Olivia explains that she did not have a computer for a week, and could not work, which was a source of frustration.

Secondly, managers have the responsibility to care for the well-being of their employees, even when working from home. Léa describes her experience:

*“(...) my boss was very well organized and **planned meetings** quite regularly. (...) She always asked how we were doing (...) she understood this change was unexpected and maybe difficult for some. She **called everyone all the time** (...), and we had briefing sessions every two weeks.” - Léa*

Léa's manager showed consideration for her employees while actively listening to how they were feeling. She cared about their well-being and encouraged open communication. Consequently, she was accessible for her team and created an environment of psychological safety. In other words, they felt like they could talk to her about work or non-work-related issues that affected their day-to-day at work. In contrast to other participants who did not benefit from such attention, Léa did not feel as much pressure to be available every second of the day because she could talk about it with her team. Each colleague understood that leaving the computer for some minutes was acceptable and that they did not have to assume the person was not working. Even her bank expressed to all employees that they should take time for themselves and do some exercise. They emphasize that they are not there to check if they are working from a certain time to another. Subsequently, Léa rates her home office experience the most positively out of all participants.

Moreover, managers should possess self-awareness skills. In other words, they should be aware of the impact their own actions have on their team, and be understanding towards them. Camille discloses:

*“ (...) My boss was putting **pressure on herself** on a project, and she is not managing her stress at all, but she is **unconsciously passing it on to others**. I was going through some difficult times personally and she was asking me a lot of things, (...) I asked her if I could talk to her, but she did not have time. (...) After five minutes, she finally had the time, and I told her: this is how I feel, (...), I could not stop crying, and even afterward, she told me: but why are you putting so much pressure on yourself? I have my stress, I manage it, it is fine. (...) - Camille*

Camille's manager did not show understanding towards her team members and, instead, valued her stress as more legitimate than hers. Such behavior does unfortunately affect an employee's mental well-being and does not encourage open communication and trust within the team. Consequently, Camille grew distant from her manager and the team.

As such, managers have a responsibility to maintain the proximity with the team while respecting each employee's personal space. All interviewed managers explained that seeing and being close to employees enabled them to better perceive how the team was feeling. Through the perception of non-verbal actions (hand gestures, head position, and other body language), managers can understand the team's overall well-being better. Therefore, work from home challenged the way they could manage their employees. Some interviewees mentioned feeling the stress from managers about them not working when at home. In three cases, participants mentioned being heavily monitored by management and having to report to them every day. This leads them to feeling stressed, frustrated, and disappointed. Manager's suspicions affected employee well-being and relationships within the team.

Finally, in accordance with taking care of their employee's well-being, managers also have to lead conversations to ensure ongoing conversations on different subjects such as positive and negative feedback. Leading a team remotely requires a lot of time and organization because many additional calls or meetings need to be scheduled to have discussions with employees.

Moreover, managers need to lead meetings and give employees opportunities to express their opinions in a trustworthy environment. For instance, two managers explained that they had set some ground rules and asked employees to turn on the camera during meetings. As mentioned in the literature review, words correspond to 3% of what someone is saying, 97% is non-verbal communication (Mehrabian 1971). Not being able to physically observe the person they are interacting with can create tension and misunderstanding.

When discussing difficult topics related to any concerns or worries employees might have, nine out of the twelve participants mentioned wanting to discuss them face-to-face. They even mentioned that online interactions are colder because the other person could have another meeting right after the call or could have a problem with the connection which could impact the interaction between two people. They also mention being more limited in time. Eight out of the sixteen pointed out that it was not common practice to turn on the camera, which makes delivering an important message more challenging. Face-to-face interactions were described as being more honest. A manager explained that:

*“I like to have all the information when I pass on information to a collaborator, I like to know how he reacts, what he thinks about it, it allows us to have a more honest reaction” - Hugo*

The young generation shares his point of view. They still value face-to-face interactions for difficult topics and also for feedback. Four out of twelve participants prefer receiving feedback face-to-face to have more enriching conversations. Additionally, online interactions are shorter and do not favor open discussions, especially when receiving negative feedback. The following quote of Olivia shows her reaction when receiving such feedback:

*“I've received negative feedback before, and fortunately, because that's when you **learn**, (...), show me what I did wrong, and then **we'll look at it together**, and that way I'll learn, and then I won't do it again.” - Olivia*

Millennials and Gen Z are highly educated and have a thirst for knowledge. For them, understanding the reason why the feedback turned out negative is important to avoid making it again. Therefore, they favor face-to-face interactions because they find it challenging to accept negative feedback without the ability to discuss it.

Two out of the twelve participants mentioned having a preference for receiving feedback by e-mail. For instance, Léa explains that receiving positive feedback by e-mail is a source of motivation, she would sometimes put them in favorites. She realized that she enjoys receiving positive feedback and loves the recognition that comes with it. The following quote illustrates her happiness:

*“(...) I would send them a general e-mail saying that I had done this and that, and then when I finished the tasks, they would send me messages, that’s great, **thank you very much**, you’re the best. (...). it’s a great **source of motivation**. And what made me happy is that they knew **it wasn’t easy for me** (...), and to see that they are grateful for what I do, it’s very **gratifying!**”*  
– Léa

The remaining six participants mentioned feeling comfortable with both virtual and face-to-face feedback. For them, the actual feedback, meaning what managers say, is more important than the way the feedback is given. The two following quotes describe the point of view of Léo and Thomas:

*“(...) Whether the feedback is given face-to-face or online, the feedback remains the same, it does not change the dynamic. They say the same things.”* - Léo

*“If it is an important topic, I think I would prefer to hear it live, so it would at least be by phone if I am at home or in-person, but for feedback on small tasks, if I get an e-mail, that is fine with me.”* - Thomas

To sum up, the leader plays a crucial role in how the young generation experiences work from home. Therefore, the leader needs to listen, encourage open communication, be self-aware, and be accessible when needed. Then, participants have their own preferences for discussing feedback or difficult topics. But, many still want face-to-face interactions to have more honest discussions.

## 6. Discussion

To answer the first research question,

*How can **leadership** affect the **empowerment** of Millennials and Gen Z **working from home** in the banking sector in the French-speaking part of Switzerland?*

it is important to understand that psychological empowerment is not classified into two categories: feel empowered or not. It is a continuous variable, meaning someone can feel more or less empowered because of a specific situation or event. Also, this feeling can change over time. For this thesis, the feeling of empowerment for young employees will depend on the leader and his/her actions.

First, a caring and supportive leader that actively listens to their people, fosters open communication with them, is accessible when needed, and is self-aware have shown to affect the empowerment of the two generations. In some cases, participants mentioned struggling with mental health. On the one hand, when the leader cared about their well-being, these participants had a more positive experience while working from home because they were not left alone and felt understood by their managers. On the other hand, other participants who did not benefit from an emotional support experienced negative emotions while working remotely.

Second, a leader that could foster socialization when working remotely affects the empowerment of Millennials and Gen Z. If Millennials and Gen Z can keep close relationships with colleagues through online interactions, then they feel more empowered, and they will be more open to communicating. To contrast, participants that mentioned feeling disconnected from their team and lonely felt less empowered. Moreover, the difficulty of keeping close relationships with colleagues can lead to misunderstandings and can decrease the efficiency of online collaboration.

Third, leaders who foster open communication at work can affect the empowerment of the young generation. For example, during online collaboration, many participants mentioned a lack of reactivity from colleagues, which led to them feeling stressed and frustrated. In addition, a lack of communication between the team led to negative emotions, such as being forgotten because they were at home and not at the office. All these events would negatively affect empowerment. In one particular case, a participant mentioned that colleagues were more reactive online and that they would answer faster, which in this case would make that participant feel more empowered.

Now, after understanding how leaders can influence the empowerment of Gen Z and Millennials working from home, the following paragraphs will concretely present the impact of these actions on the four cognitions that are known to positively impact intrinsic tasks motivation: meaning, competence, self-determination, and impact.

The first cognition, "meaning," is the value that the job activity gives to the individual, which will depend on each individual and his/her work-from-home experience. During the pandemic, many have re-evaluated the importance of work and life. Participants would enjoy having the flexibility of working from home when they need to and find now more meaning in their work. The young generation would also feel grateful and have respect for banks that are flexible and offer WFH possibilities.

The second cognition, "competence," represents how capable someone is and how well he/she can work on a task. This cognition will depend on the work-from-home experience of each employee. Participants that had the information available when needed did feel competent. However, many participants mentioned that they were left with unanswered questions from colleagues or were unaware of important information for them to do their work. This lack of reactivity and communication could make the young employee feel less competent and, therefore, less empowered.

The third cognition, "self-determination," refers to whether an individual can pursue a task, which can be linked to the level of autonomy and decision-making power given to someone. The young generation is not given a lot of decision-making power because they are not able to make the decisions. The level of autonomy for many participants was the same if they were at the office than if they worked from home. Still, a few participants mentioned that they were more reluctant to ask questions to colleagues, which could mean that they became more autonomous as they tried to find the solution by themselves first. Therefore, the third cognition will depend on the personality of a Millennial or a Gen Z.

The fourth cognition, "impact," is the extent to which an employee's contribution matters and influences a potential outcome at work. Depending on the experience of the participants when working from home, they will feel that they have more or less impact. In this research, Gen Zers and Millennials that were micromanaged, monitored, or left with unanswered questions from their colleagues would feel that their contribution had no impact as they experienced negative emotions such as isolation, stress, and depression. On the contrary, participants who had a positive experience working remotely felt that their contribution made a difference. Consequently, they mentioned feeling more motivated and, in turn, more empowered as they feel in control over a specific situation.

To conclude, as every participant experienced work from home differently, the effect of leadership on the empowerment of Millennials and Gen Z working from home in the banking sector will depend on the three elements that have been discussed before: a supportive and caring leader, a leader that can foster socialization, and promote a work environment with open communication.

Concerning the second research question,

*Is work-from-home **favorable** or **detrimental** for banks  
in the French-speaking part of Switzerland?*

the bank would benefit from offering work-from-home possibilities as it would lead to happier and more loyal employees as they enjoy the freedom that comes with this flexibility. Millennials and Gen Zers want flexibility specifically over when, where, and how they work, leading to increased motivation. According to a paper by Gensler (2013), research has shown that giving options to employees increase their overall satisfaction. This way, companies can better attract and retain talent (O'Connor 2021; McLauring 2015; Lim, Teo 2000; Gallup 2017; Dellatto 2021; Deloitte 2020). Thus, banks benefit because finding talent is much more costly than retaining existing employees (Allen 2008). In addition, this paper found that most of the employees are more productive when working from home as they have less distractions, and productivity has always been seen as an important element that wants to be increased, and remote work offers that.

However, it is possible that offering work from home possibilities become detrimental for banks. The office still plays an important role in keeping the team cohesion. Giving employees the possibility means that some people will be working from home while others will be working from the office. As many participants mentioned the difficulty of keeping close relationships with colleagues, the team cohesion might suffer and create a divide. In fact, having a dispersed team can lead to employees feeling distant and feeling that they do not belong within the team. Some remote employees might believe that they are being forgotten, they feel disconnected from their team as they are not physically in the office. And, the lack of team cohesion can lead to less performant teams and less innovative ideas as it impacts the effectiveness of collaboration and exchange of knowledge.

Also, if colleagues are not accessible or do not communicate enough within the team, the quality of the work can be impacted. For example, young employees are more reluctant to ask questions when they work remotely and prefer to find the solution by themselves. This lack of proactivity leads to mistakes that need to be corrected by colleagues. Consequently, this will lead to the young generations feeling negative emotions and not learning as much as in the office. In such a case, managers have to put in place certain communication processes to ensure efficient collaboration between employees.

To answer the final question,

*If favorable, should the bank offer work-from-home possibilities to employees?*

banks should offer work-from-home possibilities as people have seen an overall better quality of life. During the pandemic, the young generation has re-evaluated work and life, and even now, people are still quitting their job, which is referred to as Flexit. From the perspective of the institution, offering work-from-home possibilities is seen as a competitive advantage.

Eleven out of twelve employees would rather work for a company that gives them the possibility to work from home when they want to. What is more, two participants specified they would not consider working for a company that does not offer this possibility. It is crucial that banks are flexible, and employees should be their main priorities. These two generations can be seen as greedy, but in reality, they know what they want and value. Hence, they seek employers who understand that (Gallup 2016), and companies should become more attractive to have loyal talented employees in their workforce (Brown 2021).

Offering work from home possibilities can be favorable for banks, but the recommendations in the following section should be applied.

## 7. Conclusion

### 7.1 Recommendations

Remote work was first put in place during the pandemic, during an uncertain time. Therefore, banks and managers needed to learn to collaborate, manage a team, socialize, and work from a distance. When participants were interviewed for this research, leaders were not ready as they faced many challenges while working remotely.

This paper aims to leverage those challenges and find ways to reduce or avoid them.

The recommendations include fostering communication within the team while working remotely, showing a more precise status of colleagues, organizing the social aspect of work, and leaders should assume their role by providing emotional support to the young generation.

First, leaders need to foster communication within the team. Employees were used to communicating all day when they worked at the office, and therefore, the open space in the office is not the same as the open space at home. At the office, people would walk to the office next door to ask a question, which requires zero effort. At home, employees are alone, and colleagues are not anymore next to them, but they are available using online tools. Many participants evaluated online collaboration as less efficient than offline collaboration. Therefore, the gap between what employees used to hear in an open space and what employees are hearing when working from home needs to be compensated.

To do so, more effort is needed when working remotely, colleagues need to communicate more. Moreover, each worker should understand the role of each colleague to be able to find the right person to address more efficiently. Yet, the literature review showed that only 43% of Millennials are aware of the work done by their team, compared to 57% of the older generations, which shows that team alignment is less present for the younger generation. However, Millennials wish to know how their job fits with their team, and this is also where the role of the management is crucial. They need to explain how the team is supposed to collaborate to lead the company towards success (Gallup 2016). For this purpose, companies could put in place a general platform where an employee could find everyone's work information.

Second, a common issue while working from a distance is that employees do not know what their colleagues are doing. Skype now has three different statuses: green (available), yellow (away), and red (do not disturb). These three statuses: green, yellow, and red, were put in place before the pandemic, and since people have worked from home, the pressure to always be available has never been more present. In the office, this status would not bother people as they are in the office, they are visible. However, managers and colleagues do not know what remote employees are doing at home. The status "away" meant that the employee left his/her computer and did not touch its mouse or keyboard for a period of more than five minutes. When Millennials or Gen Zers work remotely, the status "away" or "do not disturb" can be a source of frustration. In this research, participants mentioned having this pressure of being constantly available. If this status could be changed to a more precise description, for example, break of five minutes, meeting for one hour, young employees will know when colleagues will be available again. Therefore, it could reduce this pressure and lead to more positive emotions. Collaboration between colleagues will be less time-consuming, as young employees will be able to know what their colleagues are doing, and they will be less shy to communicate with them. Overall, they would feel more empowered as they will not encounter negative emotions.

Another alternative would be to communicate more frequently with colleagues they work directly with. One participant mentioned that before she was disconnecting from her session, she would tell her colleagues that she was done for the day and that if they needed something, she could quickly reconnect. However, this requires a certain degree of team alignment, meaning that employees should understand the role of each person within the team and for which reason collaboration is needed.

Third, another common challenge when working from home is the lack of social interactions. It negatively impacts the well-being of the young generation, and it can also have negative effects on the team cohesion. People feel more distant from their team and have difficulty maintaining close relationships with their colleagues, which could lead to misunderstandings and tensions. And the fact that the team cohesion suffers further impacts the efficiency of online collaboration. Therefore, the leader should organize opportunities for colleagues to discuss non-work-related topics. Examples of such social events include Zoom breaks, team lunch, after-work, or parties. This way, leaders will be able to keep the team cohesion between remote and non-remote workers.

Finally, leaders have an important role to assume, especially with the young generation. They need to listen, encourage open communication, be self-aware, and be accessible when needed. By doing that, they will create an environment of psychological safety, meaning that when employees start experiencing negative emotions, they will not shy away from discussing it with their managers. To achieve this, managers have to be organized to create an environment where employees feel safe. They can put in place online open hours, frequent briefing sessions, or team-building activities like company bake-offs, or cocktail nights. Consequently, more interactions will be fostered, and more opportunities to build trust will arise to lead to a possible increase in empowerment.

## **7.2 Limitations and directions for future research**

This thesis is subject to limitations that need to be considered. Firstly, the selection of the sample size was challenging. The initial idea was to select five banks and interview three participants for each bank. Interviewing three participants in each bank was sometimes impossible, as there were no employees from the generation Z that was working in a specific bank. Secondly, with the time constraint, contacting participants and waiting for responses was time-consuming. Therefore, the researcher interviewed participants from eight different banks to accelerate the process. Finally, conducting online interviews come with its challenges, such as connectivity issues. However, participants were understanding, and the researcher believes that online interviews did not influence the participants' responses.

For further research, looking at the difference between how Millennials and Gen Zers manage a remote team versus how Baby boomers manage a remote team could be interesting. Millennials and Gen Zers are digital natives, therefore they are used to communicating online. Also, the young generation has experienced online classes. It is possible that they learned how to collaborate on a project remotely. This is something older generations did not experience. Therefore, another research paper could focus on finding differences in how young generations manage a remote team versus how a Baby-Boomer would manage a remote team.

Finally, this research paper interviewed participants working in the banking sector and understood how the young employees experienced working from home. The aim was to understand the effects of leadership on the empowerment of Millennials and Gen Z working from home in the banking sector. Every participant had a different experience while working from home, and their experience was influenced by many aspects of work which were explained through the five themes. The paper analyzed how these elements influenced the work-from-home experience rather than analyzing the difference between Gen Zers and Millennials. Therefore, further research could be done using quantitative research methods; it would be possible to use the elements that influence their work-from-home experience and do a survey to quantify the difference between how each generation experienced work from home.

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# Appendix 1: Interview guide for in-depth interviews

## Interviews:

- Estimated duration: 1 hour
- Place: virtual (Teams or Zoom)
- Conducted in French
- Average length of transcription: 17 pages

## Manager

### 1. Welcome & Introduction

- Welcome and thank you
- Introduction of the researcher and research topic
- There are no right or wrong answers; this is an open discussion
- Video recording, obtain the consent of the participants before starting

### 2. Warm-Up

- Please shortly introduce yourself and your professional background (general introduction: education, ...)
- When did you start to work from home? How was it organized; did you work 100% from home?
- How is it now? How many days per week do you work from home?

### 3. Work from home

- During the pandemic, did your company instore WFH?
  - How did you feel?
  - How has work from home evolved from the first day of remote work until now?
  - Had you ever worked from home before or was it the first time?
  - How do you feel now when you work from home?
- Has WFH challenged the way you work from the office in any way?
- Do you think the direct relationship with the customer has changed? Positively or negatively?
  - If yes, how do you think the direct relationship with the customer has changed from working at the office, to working remotely?

- Did you discuss your team's preferences on WFH now that the situation has changed?
  - o Does the company still offer work from home to employees?
  - o Why?

#### **4. Focus**

- Does your work require a lot of concentration?
  - o Which tasks require a lot of concentration?
- When doing work that requires focus, do you believe you perform better at home or in the office? Why?
- On a scale from 1 to 10, how well do you evaluate your capacity to balance work and life?
  - o Why did you evaluate your work-life balance as a X?
  - o What did you do to manage your work-life balance?
  - o Is work-life balance important for you?
  - o Can you describe your working environment at home?
  - o Would you say that you define boundaries?
  - o What boundaries did you set?
  - o How did you work with boundaries?

#### **5. Socialization**

- What did you miss while working from home?
  - o How did you feel the first day you worked from home, far from your team?
- Have you been able to keep close relationships with your colleagues when working from home?
  - o If no, why?
  - o If yes, how?
  - o Did you meet colleagues outside of work when working from home?
- Did you ever feel isolated when working from home?
  - o Did any of your colleagues tell you that they felt isolated when working from home?
  - o If yes, What was your reaction? And, what did you do?

## 6. Collaboration

- How many hours in a day do you think colleagues collaborate together?
  - o How would you evaluate the efficiency of online collaboration VS offline on a scale of 1 to 10 (for each one)? Why?
  - o How do you follow up on projects when working from home?
- How do you feel managing your team at a distance? If you could describe it in one word, what would it be? Could you elaborate on that?

## 7. Learning

### Open-door policy

- Is it easy or difficult to interact with colleagues?
  - o Do you have many opportunities to do so?
  - o Do you interact spontaneously as much when you work from home VS when in the office?
  - o Why do you think so?
- Do you discuss difficult topics with employees (their concerns, salary, if they want more responsibilities, learn more, promotion etc.) when working online?
  - o Did you make room for such discussions?
  - o How frequently did employees raise any concerns to you when working from home?
  - o How do you discuss difficult topics with employees?
- Did you have open door policy when in the office?
  - o How does the open-door policy help with exchange of knowledge with employees?
  - o Are the exchanges more valuable when done face-to-face or online?
  - o Why?

### Ongoing communication, feedback, and trust

- When you worked from home, how did you give feedback and how frequently?
  - o Did you see an improvement in performance?
  - o Was your online feedback different to your face-to-face feedback?
- Do your juniors ever ask you to give feedback?
  - o Do you have any idea why?

### Well-being (Role of leader)

- Did employees ever have negative emotions when working from home?
  - o Did they talk to you about it?
  - o How did you react?
- What was/is the process to integrate newcomers working from a distance and how do you ensure their well-being?
  - o How did you feel when new hires worked directly from home?
  - o How were you able to manage them?

## **8. Millennials & Gen Z**

- What do you think Millennials and Gen Z seek in their daily work?
- How important is work flexibility to you, on a scale of 1 to 10? Why?
  - o Now that you experienced work from home, would you ever choose a job that has work from home opportunities over one that does not? Why?

## **9. Psychological empowerment**

### Implications for the organization

- a) Self-esteem
  - Are you as likely to give new tasks when working from home as working from the office?
    - o How would you describe the reaction of employees when given a challenging new task?
- b) Access to information
  - On a scale from 1 to 10, how accessible is the information for employees in the office and when working from home? Why?
- c) Managerial effectiveness
  - Did you see any difference with your team's performance during the months the whole team worked from home?
  - If yes, what difference did you see with your team's performance?
    - o How do you evaluate the performance of your team compared to in the office?

## **10. Wrap-Up**

- We have been talking about the working from home experience for over an hour. Do you feel like we have forgotten something important?
- Or would you like to add something that you believe would be important

## **11. Demographic**

- What is your nationality?
- How many years were you a manager?
- How old are you?

## **12. Ask feedback**

# Millennials: 1981 – 1996

## 1. Welcome & Introduction

- Welcome and thank you
- Introduction of the researcher and research topic
- There are no right or wrong answers; this is an open discussion
- Video recording, obtain the consent of the participants before starting

## 2. Warm-Up

- Please introduce yourself and your professional background.
- When did you start to work from home? How was it organized, did you work 100% from home?
- How is it now? How many days per week do you work from home?

## 3. Work from home

- During the pandemic, did your company instore WFH?
  - o How did you feel?
  - o How has work from home evolved from the first day of remote work until now?
  - o Had you ever worked from home before or was it the first time?
  - o How do you feel now when you work from home?
- What do you like about work from home?
- What do you dislike about work from home?

## 4. Role of leader

- How did you find the transition to remote work?
- What were the role of your superior and colleagues?

## 5. Focus

- Does your work require a lot of concentration?
  - o For which tasks do you require a lot of concentration?
- When doing work that requires focus, do you believe you perform better at home or in the office?
  - o Why?

- On a scale from 1 to 10, how well do you evaluate your capacity to balance work and life?
  - o Why did you evaluate your work-life balance as a X?
  - o What did you do to manage your work-life balance?
  - o Is work-life balance important for you?
  - o Can you describe your working environment at home?
  - o Would you say that you define boundaries?
  - o What boundaries did you set?
  - o How did you work with boundaries?
- When you work from home, do you have any pressure to respond to instant messages from your colleagues?
  - What did you do?
  - Did you talk with a colleague or your superior?

## **6. Socialization**

- What did you miss while working from home?
  - o How did you feel the first day you worked from home, far from your team?
- Have you been able to keep close relationships with your colleagues when working from home?
  - o If no, why?
  - o If yes, how?
  - o When you returned to the office, did you notice a change in the relationship with your colleagues after a period of work from home?
  - o Did you meet colleagues outside of work when working from home?
- Did you ever feel isolated when working from home?
  - o If yes, did you already tell a colleague or your superior that you felt isolated?
  - o If yes, what were their reaction?

## **7. Collaboration**

- How many hours in a day do you collaborate with your colleagues?
  - o For which reason do you need to collaborate with your colleagues?
  - o How would you evaluate the efficiency of online collaboration and face to face on a scale of 1 to 10 (for each one)? Why?

- When you worked from home, was there a moment where there was a misunderstanding?
  - o If yes, could you explain to me what happened? What did you do?
- Did you ever face a challenge when working remotely on a project with a team?
  - o What was the challenge?
  - o What was your reaction?
  - o What did you do?

## 8. Learning

### Open-door policy

- Is it easy or difficult to interact with your colleagues?
  - o Do you have many opportunities to do so?
  - o Do you interact spontaneously as much when you work from home VS when in the office?
  - o Why do you think so?
- Are you able to discuss difficult topics (their concerns concerning your work, project, deadline, salary, if they want more responsibilities, learn more, promotion etc.) with your superior when working from home?
  - o Does your manager make room for such discussions?
  - o If yes, how does your superior make room for such discussions?
  - o Did you already raise any concerns to your superior when working from home?
  - o How frequently did you raise any concerns to your superior when working from home?
  - o Could you give me an example?
  - o How do you feel when you need to raise a concern to your superior?
  - o What is the reaction of your superior?
  - o (If prefer to discuss difficult topics face to face), why do you prefer to discuss difficult topics face to face?
    - What do you look for when you do face to face meetings?
- Did you have open door policy when in the office?
  - o How does the open-door policy help you learn from your colleagues?
  - o When working remotely, how were you able to learn from your colleagues and ask questions?
  - o Are the exchanges more valuable when done face-to-face or online? Why?
  - o Do you learn as much when you work from home than at the office?
  - o Do you interact spontaneously as much when working remotely as when you are in the office?

### Ongoing communication, feedback, and trust & Ongoing development

- When you worked from home, how frequently did you receive feedback?
  - o Does the feedback help you to perfect yourself?
  - o What is your reaction when you receive negative feedback?
  - o In what ways do you usually receive feedback (in person, email, call)?
  - o How do you feel about the way the feedback is given to you?
  - o (If prefer feedback face to face), why do you prefer to receive feedback face to face?
    - What do you look for when you do the meetings face to face?
- In your everyday job, do you feel like you learn something new every day? Is it important for you?

### Well-being

- Do you remember a time when you had negative emotions when working from home?
  - o Did you talk to your manager or to a colleague about it?
  - o How did your superior or colleague react?

## **9. Millennials**

### Meaning/feeling of purpose

- How do you feel about your daily job?
- What do you like about your work?
- What do you dislike about your work?

### Flexibility

- How important is work-from-home flexibility to you, on a scale of 1 to 10? Why?
  - o Now that you experienced work from home, would you ever choose a job that has work from home opportunities over one that does not? Why?

## 10. Psychological empowerment

Four cognitions

- a) Meaning
  - On a scale of 1 to 10, how important do you believe your job is for the well-being of the company? Why did you rate it as a XX?
- b) Competence
  - How do you feel when given a new, challenging task?
  - Do you believe that you have the competence for it?
- c) Self-determination
  - On a scale from 1 to 10, how much autonomy do you have to perform a task?
    - o Why?
    - o For which tasks do you not have the autonomy?
- d) Impact
  - In a few words, how would you describe your contribution in the company?
    - o Do you feel valued when you do your job?

## 11. Wrap-Up

- We have been talking about the working from home experience for an hour. Do you feel like we have forgotten something important?
- Or would you like to add something that you believe would be important

## 12. Ask feedback

# Gen Z: 1997 – 2012

## 1. Welcome & Introduction

- Welcome and thank you
- Introduction of the researcher and research topic
- There are no right or wrong answers; this is an open discussion
- Video recording, obtain the consent of the participants before starting

## 2. Warm-Up

- Please introduce yourself and your professional background.
- When did you start to work from home? How was it organized, did you work 100% from home?
- How is it now? How many days per week do you work from home?

## 3. Work from home

- During the pandemic, did your company instore WFH?
  - o How did you feel?
  - o How has work from home evolved from the first day of remote work until now?
  - o Had you ever worked from home before or was it the first time?
  - o How do you feel now when you work from home?
- What do you like about work from home?
- What do you dislike about work from home?

## 4. Role of leader

- How did you find the transition to remote work?
- What were the role of your superior and colleagues?

## 5. Focus

- Does your work require a lot of concentration?
  - o For which tasks do you require a lot of concentration?
- When doing work that requires focus, do you believe you perform better at home or in the office?
  - o Why?

- On a scale from 1 to 10, how well do you evaluate your capacity to balance work and life?
  - Why did you evaluate your work-life balance as a X?
  - What did you do to manage your work-life balance?
  - Is work-life balance important for you?
  - Can you describe your working environment at home?
  - Would you say that you define boundaries?
  - What boundaries did you set?
  - How did you work with boundaries?
- When you work from home, do you have any pressure to respond to instant messages from your colleagues?
  - What did you do?
  - Did you talk with a colleague or your superior?

## **6. Socialization**

- What did you miss while working from home?
  - How did you feel the first day you worked from home, far from your team?
- Have you been able to keep close relationships with your colleagues when working from home?
  - If no, why?
  - If yes, how?
  - When you returned to the office, did you notice a change in the relationship with your colleagues after a period of work from home?
  - Did you meet colleagues outside of work when working from home?
- Did you ever feel isolated when working from home?
  - If yes, did you already tell a colleague or your superior that you felt isolated?
  - If yes, what were their reaction?

## **7. Collaboration**

- How many hours in a day do you collaborate with your colleagues?
  - For which reason do you need to collaborate with your colleagues?
  - How would you evaluate the efficiency of online collaboration VS offline on a scale of 1 to 10 (for each one)? Why?

- When you worked from home, was there a moment where there was a misunderstanding?
  - o If yes, could you explain to me what happened? What did you do?
- Did you face a challenge when working remotely on a project with a team?
  - o What was the challenge?
  - o What was your reaction?
  - o What did you do?

## 8. Learning

### Open-door policy

- Is it easy or difficult to interact with your colleagues?
  - o Do you have many opportunities to do so?
  - o Do you interact spontaneously as much when you work from home VS when in the office?
  - o Why do you think so?
- Are you able to discuss difficult topics (their concerns concerning your work, project, deadline, salary, if they want more responsibilities, learn more, promotion etc.) with your superior when working from home?
  - o Does your manager make room for such discussions?
  - o If yes, how does your superior make room for such discussions?
  - o Did you already raise any concerns to your superior when working from home?
  - o How frequently did you raise any concerns to your superior when working from home?
  - o Could you give me an example.
  - o How do you feel when you need to raise a concern to your superior?
  - o What is the reaction of your superior?
  - o (If prefer to discuss difficult topics face to face), why do you prefer to discuss difficult topics face to face?
    - What do you look for when you do face to face meetings?
- Did you have open door policy when in the office?
  - o How does the open-door policy help you learn from your colleagues?
  - o When working remotely, how were you able to learn from your colleagues and ask questions?
  - o Are the exchanges more valuable when done face-to-face or online? Why?
  - o Do you learn as much when you work from home than at the office?

- Do you interact spontaneously as much when working remotely as when you are in the office?

#### Ongoing communication, feedback, and trust & Ongoing development

- When you worked from home, how frequently did you receive feedback?
  - Does the feedback help you to perfect yourself?
  - What is your reaction when you receive negative feedback?
  - In what ways do you usually receive feedback (in person, email, call)?
  - How do you feel about the way the feedback is given to you?
  - (If prefer feedback face to face), why do you prefer to receive feedback face to face?
    - What do you look for when you do the meetings face to face?
- In your everyday job, do you feel like you learn something new every day? Is it important for you?

#### Well-being (Role of leader)

- Do you remember a time when you had negative emotions when working from home?
  - Did you talk to your manager or to a colleague about it?
  - How did your superior or colleague react?

## **9. Gen Z**

#### Flexibility

- How important is work-from-home flexibility to you, on a scale of 1 to 10? Why?
  - Now that you experienced work from home, would you ever choose a job that has work from home opportunities over one that does not? Why?

## 10. Psychological empowerment

Four cognitions

e) Meaning

- On a scale of 1 to 10, how important do you believe your job is for the well-being of the company? Why did you rate it as a XX?

f) Competence

- How do you feel when given a new, challenging task?
- Do you believe that you have the competence for it?

g) Self-determination

- On a scale from 1 to 10, how much autonomy do you have to perform a task?
  - o Why?
  - o For which tasks do you not have the autonomy?

h) Impact

- In a few words, how would you describe your contribution in the company?
  - o Do you feel valued when you do your job?

## 11. Wrap-Up

- We have been talking about the working from home experience for an hour. Do you feel like we have forgotten something important?
- Or would you like to add something that you believe would be important

## 12. Ask feedback