



Plan

The development of Plan Norway during the COVID-pandemic

**An analysis of the changes, opportunities and
challenges related to the conversion to virtual work
and home office settings**

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PREFACE

This report is conducted and written by six master students from the University of Oslo. All six students are enrolled to the master's program "Organization, management and work". During the master's degree all students must complete "Prosjektforum" which is a subject where the University of Oslo collaborates with different organizations to solve a task or a challenge for the organization. With a mandate from Plan International Norway we have tried to solve their challenge and map their current situation through a qualitative study.

We would like to thank Plan International Norway for giving us insight in their organization and letting us see how they work internally and how they collaborate with their partners abroad. We would also like to thank their employees and partners for their time, transparency and for trusting us with their knowledge.

We would like to express our gratitude and thanks to Arne Bygdås from Oslo Metropolitan University for his time, thoughts, patients, and professional guidance to help us find our methodological and theoretical way through this project.

SUMMARY

The purpose of this project is to map the Program and Influencing department at Plan International Norway's current situation, their future needs, opportunities, and challenges that may have arisen since March 2020. In addition, this project aims to discover how the cooperation between Plan International Norway and the COs has been affected due to the travel restrictions. With this study we aim to find the answers to *how has the corona pandemic changed the way Plan International Norway performs its tasks and what challenges and opportunities has this situation created in terms of communication and interaction?* Our findings led to different approaches that Plan International Norway can consider implementing in their everyday work life. With this report we hope that our findings can be relevant and valuable for Plan International Norway as well as other aid organizations.

In this report we have decided to split our findings into two main categories, the re-organizing of work setting and work methods at Plan Norway, and the digital collaboration within the Program department, but also with the COs. We have decided to split the findings in two categories to give a better analysis of the challenges and benefits home offices had within Plan Norway and how strictly digital communication has changed and created opportunities for cooperation and interaction with COs.

In the first category - re-organizing, we discovered that home office can be both disturbing and efficient. It was challenging to structure the day in the beginning when working from home, there is a lack of social and informal interactions among the employees. In regard to digital collaboration we discovered that technical difficulties and undefined norms created frustration. It is challenging to create new relations through a screen, traveling is important for a better understanding and control, and an important part of the employees' motivation.

In this study we found that the new office setting can be a combination of working from home and the office. We discovered that the informal interaction that occurs when working side-by-side one's colleagues in the office and when travelling is tremendously valuable for maintaining a good collaboration between Plan Norway and the COs. However, frequent digital meetings can be a good substitute for balancing out the lack of face-to-face communication and interaction.

Our research has been limited to the staff and some colleagues connected to the Program Department. We have overall interviewed 20 people on staff and manager level. Our research

has been limited to people working in the department, and a few other colleagues from COs in Tanzania, Malawi and Nepal, also chosen by Plan Norway. The study will therefore not be sufficient for other organizations to base their study on but can give an insight or inspiration to further research.

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1.0 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Plan International Norway

Plan International Norway (hereafter referred to as Plan Norway), is a part of Plan International and is an aid organization that has conducted development and emergency aid work from Norway since 1996. The organization works to protect children and adolescents from violence and to improve their educational and health services, as well as emergency aid in unexpected situations. The development work is based on cooperation between National offices (also referred as program offices or POs), such as Plan Norway, that perform fundraising work, and Country offices (referred to as COs) that carry out development and emergency aid.

Plan Norway consists of 65 employees, but in this study we have focused on the Program and influencing (PI) department and their team of 17 people. This department is responsible for following up and developing the humanitarian aid projects in collaboration with the COs, partners, and donors.

1.2 Project description

This study is conducted as an exam in the master's subject "Organization, management and work" at the University of Oslo, in collaboration with Plan Norway. As a consequence of the corona pandemic outburst in March of 2020 Plan Norway, as well as the rest of the world, was forced to implement new routines and working methods. Due to orders and recommendations regarding home office, and restrictions of international traveling, Plan Norway had to quickly adjust to a more digital workplace.

With the basis of Plan Norway's projects mandate we discussed possible thesis for this project. Early in our discussions we agreed to focus on the collaboration between the POs and COs, and how their communication and collaboration had changed. We also discussed that it would be interesting to see if their relationship or trust in each other had weakened this past year. Travel, or the necessity of travelling and the new work setting were also subjects in our discussions. In a meeting with our two contact persons in Plan Norway we presented a few suggestions to a thesis and agreed to use this project's thesis "*how has the corona pandemic changed the way*

Plan International Norway performs its tasks and what challenges and opportunities has this situation created in terms of communication and interaction?”

We will try to answer the thesis by comparing and analyzing our findings to different theories within organizational change processes, organizational learning, and trust. Our findings are based on answers given by the PI department’s employees in semi-structured qualitative interviews. We found limited research on the impact, consequences, and challenges caused by the ongoing pandemic, however there exists more research on virtual teams and the value of trust in organizations. It is highly common that international aid organizations travel, both employees and other partners, to other parts of the world to continue their work. According to Polzer, Crisp, Jarvenpaa & Kim (2006), travelling has in general an immense value for collaboration and establishing relationships between people. In this report we aim to see if this also is the case for Plan Norway or if digital communication can be a tool for a more sustainable cooperation and interaction.

2.0 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This project aims to investigate how the COVID-pandemic has changed the way Plan Norway works, and what challenges and opportunities that follow from it regarding communication and interaction. In the following sections we introduce different theoretical perspectives and understandings of organizational life and how they are applicable to this case. We will use theory as a tool to find opportunities of learning for future work settings – both within Plan Norway and for similar organizations that want to take advantage of experiences gathered during the COVID-pandemic. Hopefully our findings will thereby be of value for organizations beyond Plan Norway. In the following section on theory, we introduce the importance of dynamic change within organizations, methods that are suited for this type of research and how this enables opportunities of learning within the organization. This is discussed and explained through empirical evidence concerning improvisation among workers (Orlikowski, 1996), sensemaking mechanisms (Weick, Sutcliffe & Obstfeld, 2005), trust (Julsrud, 2018) and dialogue (Tsoukas, 2009). In addition, we present recent research on how organizations have handled (and handles) virtual teams and digital communication during the COVID-pandemic.

2.1 Different theoretical understandings of organizational change

How can we understand the changes that have taken place at Plan Norway during the corona-pandemic? Are they solely because of environmental shifts and managerial decisions, or have they undergone in smaller proportions through dynamic processes of improvisations and creativity among the employees? Theoretical research of organizational change can in a simplified way be divided into two categories: *episodic* and *continuous* (Weick & Quinn, 1999). The difference between the two perspectives is in the way that organizational change is either understood as, a) a discontinuous episode, often ordered by a managerial decision to change the structure of the organization, or b) a continuous, evolving process that is constantly happening within the organizations. One way to comprehend and contrast these two theoretical perspectives is by the analogy of an anthill. If you occasionally would bring your camera out in the forest, taking photos of the anthill from a certain distance through the shifting seasons, you would see the changes of the anthill as static and episodic. This would symbolize a macro-view of the changes of an organization and is effective when researchers understand organizational change as *episodic*. The photographs of the anthill would reveal that changes have happened over the course of the season – changes *have* taken place. However, this method does not show *how* these changes actually happened, only that they have in fact happened. If you instead would use a video camera, recording the changing process more closely, you would have a different empirical understanding of the changes that take place. This would be analogous to the *continuous theoretical view* of change within an organization and is based on a micro-perspective. Both of these ways of investigating an anthill (or organization) have its benefits and disadvantages. Understanding organizational change as episodic reveals that there *has* been a change, but it doesn't show *how*. Standing too close to the organizations on the other hand, makes it harder to actually realise that a change has happened because it's more difficult to detect a slow process when you are in the midst of it. Using both the episodic and continuous change perspective, we are able to divide sequences of change that have taken place at Plan Norway. They have been both episodic – in the sense of an abrupt environmental shift due to the COVID-restrictions (Huber & Glick, 1993), and they have been continuous – referring to the ongoing adaptation of home office and digital work as the new standard. Episodic change is traditionally based on Lewins (1951) assumption that organizational change undergoes three stages – *unfreeze*, *change* and *refreeze*. The *unfreeze* stage is, as a general rule, initiated by the management - often as a result of inertia within the organization, and an outside pressure forcing the organization to implement new routines and ideas. This is not entirely the

case for Plan Norway, but, if one would observe the structure of Plan Norway on three separate occasions during the pandemic, one would discover that episodic changes had occurred. What then, has happened at Plan Norway during this time, between the episodic observations?

2.1.1 Change as a dynamic process

Newer theoretical approaches embrace an alternative understanding of organizational change as a *dynamic process*, continuously evolving within the organization in order to stabilize itself from the chaotic surroundings that encloses it (Tsoukas & Chia, 2002; Weick & Quinn, 1999). This dynamic process is driven by *improvisation* among the employees (Orlikowski, 1996), *negotiation* among the different roles and characters that are involved in the everyday work tasks (Fine, 1984) and ties the collective of the organizational members together through *sensemaking mechanisms* which makes contingencies more comprehensible (Weick et al., 2005). Weick & Quinn (1999) emphasize a shift in the conceptualization of organizational change from “*change*” to “*changing*”, which would alter Lewin’s sequencing model, mentioned above, to “*freeze - rebalance - unfreeze*”. Through this perspective, the employees at Plan Norway are understood as active change agents that have the ability to change the organizational structure by adapting to new working environments, learning new technological work tools and implementing new norms of communication. In this sense, Plan Norway has an opportunity to evolve within the new criterias of organizational work life that has followed from the restrictions of the pandemic, and to implement these experiences in the future. A perspective of organizational change that tells us that the structure of the organization is continuously adapting, and thereby continuously being constructed, makes possible for new insights and experiences that have followed from home office and the broader use of new technologies. Using the analogy of an organization as an anthill, this would mean that by studying it through the lens of a video camera instead of photographs, we are able to detect smaller changes as a result of improvisations of the individual, that might get caught up by others and implemented in the structure. The organizational life could be understood as a workflow of ants, running up and down the anthill trying to make it bigger and stronger by improvising new ways of carrying and building. As a storm (the COVID-pandemic) hits the environment of the anthill, all of the workers are forced to work from inside (home office).

How are we then able to understand the changes taking place within the anthill (organization)? This opens up for the advantages of qualitative studies within organizations (Gioia, Corley &

Hamilton, 2013), where we as an investigative project group had the possibility to enter into the organization, asking the employees at Plan Norway directly about the issues and possibilities that has come as a result of working from home such as contingencies, digital work tools, communication, trust-building, travels etc. Thereby, we are not just entitled to say that there *has* been a change, but also *why* and *how*.

2.1.2 Virtual Teams and digital work

This section seeks to combine the theory of episodic and continuous change with organizational research on virtual teams during the COVID-pandemic. This means that we include technology as a component leading to possibilities for future organizational work.

Even though technology has changed and improved the way organizations work for some years now, the unforeseen impact of the COVID-pandemic still came as a surprise and “ordinary” work teams became exclusively virtual. To work in a virtual team or virtual organization means that the members working towards a common goal are geographically dispersed, without any centralized buildings that usually are the trademarks of traditional organizations (Malhotra, Majchrzak & Rosen, 2007; Hartman & Guss, 1996). This setting calls out for a re-conceptualization regarding the role of management and communication (Staples, Hlland & Higgins, 1999). According to Hertel, Geister and Konradt (2005), the initiation of virtual teams undergoes five different phases: (1) preparation, (2) launch, (3) performance management, (4) team development, and (5) disbanding. The reason for this is to identify needs, knowledge, technology, and to clarify tasks and goals for the team. Assembling virtual teams are therefore usually put together gradually, not instantly.

In their meta review on how organizations have managed to deploy virtual teams rapidly as a consequence of the COVID-pandemic, Kilcullen, Feitosa and Salas (2021) states that organizations are in fact forced to find ways themselves for managing the deployment of virtual teams rapidly. This is because there aren't enough findings yet to describe a certain recipe for a fast, successful assembling. However, from previous literature they identify several tips for organizations trying to deploy virtual teams (see attachment 1). These tips fall under different levels of the organization: *individual*, *team* and *organization*. Further, the tips are being categorized into six different themes: *norm setting*, *performance monitoring*, *leadership*, *support mechanisms*, *communication* and *flexibility*. However, in order to assemble virtual teams, organizations must understand the complexities that are relevant for *their* situation and

make a subjective determination on what advice that suits *their* work-life (Kilcullen et al., 2021).

In this report, the recommendations in attachment 1 won't be discussed in depth since they are presented merely as tips, for a deeper discussion we refer to the actual article (Kilcullen et al. 2021). However, the recommendations could be understood as a way for organizations to continuously adapt to technological development and to exploit the opportunities it offers. They are in that sense an interesting example of how technological changes happen in organizations. The change process is dynamic and moves between all levels of the organizational hierarchy. In order to adapt the organizational work life into new settings – establishing arenas for communication is vital. If the organizations managed to implement some of the recommendations above, one could assume that it is preparing itself for the future by giving accountabilities to teams while simultaneously creating room and arenas for alignment.

2.1.3 Creating virtual teams as a consequence of episodic change

Even though the research on deploying virtual teams rapidly is yet sparse (Kilcullen et al., 2021), Klonek, Kanse, Wee and Runneboom (2021) asserts that their research, investigating the effects of the COVID-pandemic on virtual teams, indirectly implies that macro-temporal events (comparable to episodic) positively affect team members ability to cooperate virtually. To them, the effects on the COVID-pandemic shows that people are well adjustable to new work settings. However, pre-COVID research on virtual teams shows that knowledge sharing decreases when work teams become more virtual (Ortiz de Guinea et al., 2012). Due to time lag and constraints when using emails, chats and video calls, members of virtual teams are less open in sharing information compared to non-virtual teams (Mesmer-Magnus & DeChurch, 2009). This points to the importance of identifying possible improvements regarding the design on how members in organizations work on specific tasks. It puts managers in a position where they need to make sure that collaboration and communication does not fail. According to Klonek et al. (2021), this is done through the process of increasing interdependencies between team members, for example, by advising members to share digital documents instead of working in isolation, and to make sure that all team members have access to critical information and resources.

2.2 Can organizations learn?

So far, research tells us that organizations change both as a consequence of major, episodic environmental shifts like pandemics, and through continuous dynamic processes. We know that virtual teams are effective, and possible to assemble – at least when there is time and resources to do so. Finally, there also seems to be an opportunity for virtual teams to evolve rapidly because of people's ability to quickly adapt to new work-settings. How then can we learn anything from this? How will organizations adapt this knowledge into future work-settings? The following section aims to introduce theoretical concepts on organizational learning and how they are applicable in the case of Plan Norway.

With an understanding of organizational change as dynamic, it is the daily improvisations and the collective understanding of what needs to be done that is constitutive of Plan Norway as an organization. In this sense, the employees *create* Plan Norway day by day, rather than simply being parts of its structure. As the individuals in an organization adapt to a continuously changing environment, this leads to new insights and knowledge. For example, in Plan Norway the employees have faced (and often managed to overcome) daily issues that have followed from the COVID-pandemic and the abrupt change of organizational work and structure. How can this new knowledge be spread to the rest of the organization? Can an organization learn new knowledge in the same way as humans, or is the knowledge encapsulated within its employees and thereby lost if these individuals leave the organization?

Theory in organizational learning tells us that knowledge is often bound at the individual level instead of the collective level (Argyris & Shön, 1996). This makes the knowledge more exposed since it depends on the involvement of individual attachment to the organization. It is when an organization enables knowledge to advance from the individual to the organizational level that opens up new opportunities. This is often one of the main challenges for organizations - to make possible arenas of interaction where knowledge is transferred, transformed and implemented into the organization.

2.2.1 A contradiction that calls for dialogue

In order to understand *organizational learning*, we need to understand why the concepts of *organize* and *learn* are hard to combine. To *organize* is to stabilize in an ever-changing

environment (Westley & Weick, 1996), which is the case for modern organizations (especially in periods of pandemic). Humans organize by constantly creating sensible explanations and realities in situations we find ourselves in, and for our actions in them – both as individuals and as organizations. In order to guide ourselves through contingencies, we try to make sense of the world and our actions, and we base our conclusions on previous experiences and presumptions. This sensemaking-mechanism is in many ways activated without our awareness – it is a subconscious process, and it usually helps us to manage daily situations (Weick et al., 2005). This means that we don't have to halt and evaluate every single outcome in occasions of uncertainties, instead we recognize the similarity in situations and base our observation and outcomes of our decisions on previous experiences and assumptions. However, as sensemaking makes organizing possible, it makes learning difficult (Westley & Weick, 1996). When constantly trying to make sense of contingencies in organizational life based on previous experiences and assumptions, we block out possibilities to obtain new knowledge. In moments of uncertainty, we are otherwise able to encounter alternative perspectives and ways of doing things. These “learning moments” occur when the organization becomes disorganized, and it opens up possibilities to forget old categories of knowledge and create new (Westley & Weick, 1996). Therefore, organizations must *actively* try to make room for the possibility of creating and sharing new knowledge within the organization.

The COVID-pandemic could be seen as an environmental cause that leads to disorganization and contingencies in organizations. The employees have the possibility to overcome these obstacles through improvisation and comprehend their position in its new environment through sensemaking mechanisms. As times goes, these new insights can be shared and dispersed within the organizations through a dialogical approach (Tsoukas, 2009). This means that new categories of knowledge are enabled through social interaction and engaging communication among the members of the organizations. The effectiveness and the productivity in a dialogical approach lies in the ability of the individual to self-distanciation of one's own understanding of activities, roles and the organization as a whole.

In a recent quantitative study, Orth and Schuldis (2021) examined the relation between organizational learning and organizational stability. They intended to investigate and empirically validate the positive effects of organizational learning and unlearning's capabilities for resilience, based on the COVID-19 pandemic. Resilience, in this case, is about organization's ability to anticipate and absorb external disruptions (such as det COVID-

pandemic), learn from them and adapt for future challenges, while still pursuing their core objectives (Barasa, Mbau & Gilson, 2018; Witmer, 2019). The findings suggest that organizational learning has a positive effect on resilience. The authors state that: -“*the capability of an organization to learn, i.e. to take in feedback, reflect on experience and change accordingly (Duchek, 2019; Ma et al.,2018; Sutcliffe & Vogus, 2003), is therefore beneficial for organizations to stay resilient during a disruption such as the COVID-19 pandemic*” (Orth & Schuldis, 2021, p. 10). These results indicate that an organization's ability to learn positively impacts its ability to adapt during a time of major changes in the environment the organization operates in.

2.2.2 Single - and double loop learning

For Plan Norway, the consequences following from the COVID-pandemic, could be understood as a major opportunity to learn new ways of structuring and organizing in the future. Argyris & Schön (1996) would call this a possible outcome of *double-loop learning*. This refers to a type of learning that results in a change of overall assumptions, strategies and the implicit actions of performance within a certain activity (1996, p. 13). This implies that the organization intentionally searches for possibilities of new knowledge and action-routines through *inquiries* which, in this sense, should be understood as “investigative conversations”. *Double* refers to a sort of feedback-loop that lets information, thoughts and insights attach and transform at multiple levels of the organization at several occasions. This prevents ideas and insights to travel in a one-way direction, either bottom-up or top-down, which would suppress the possibilities of creating new assumptions and change of strategies through inquiries. In contrast to double loop learning, *single loop learning* is when the organization learns how to get more efficient at actions that are already in line with the established set of working. For example, if an employee suggests ways of improving established work routines and this is further implemented through the acceptance of management.

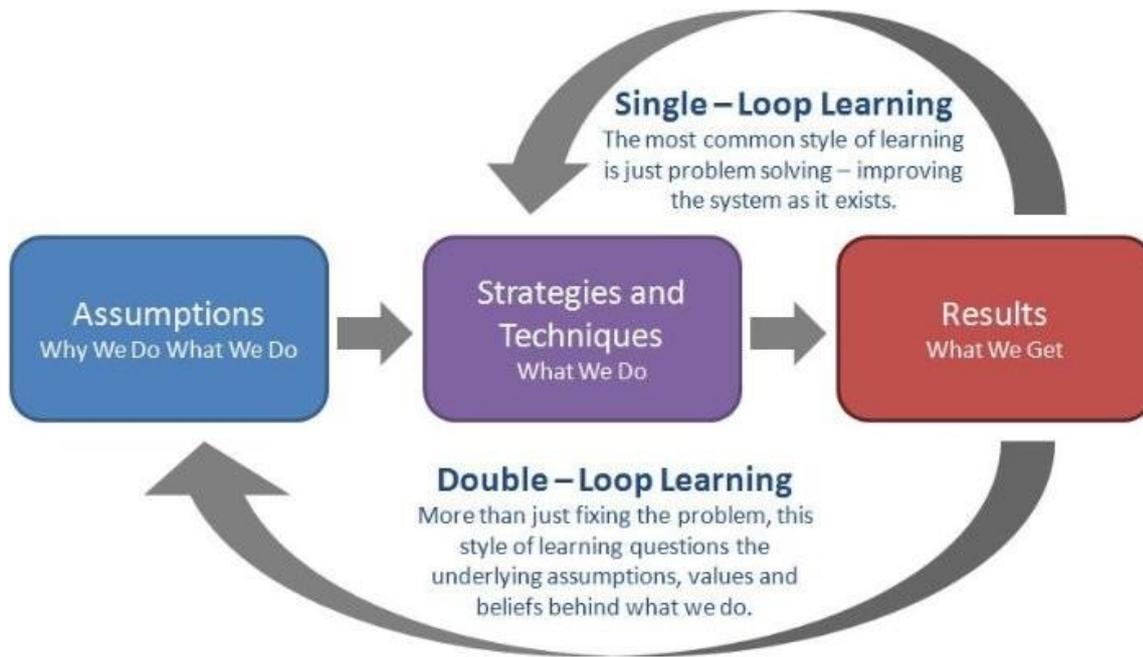


Figure 1. Chris Argyris model of single- and double loop learning

Single loop learning is often sufficient in order to get organizational work more effective, meanwhile the double loop learning implies a possibly frightening process, followed by inquiries and sometimes conflict, that leads the organizations into unknown territories. Single loop learning is about doing things the right way, while double loop learning is about doing the right things. Double-loop learning challenges fundamental values, norms and everything else that is familiar to the organization. In reference to the advice put forward by Kilcullen et al (2021), when establishing virtual teams, one recommendation is about setting a new norm for how virtual teams should collaborate and operate. This could be an example of how new technology and home office as a work-station sparks the initiation of *double loop learning* within an organization like Plan Norway.

2.2.3 To organize or to learn?

The pandemic forced organizations like Plan Norway to change the way they operate. Employees started to work from home, using digital tools more frequently and for different purposes than before. Working from home poses a challenge for generating and sharing knowledge between employees. This rapid and forced change in an organization can be used as an opportunity to explore new ways of thinking and re-evaluate old habits, processes and structures. By being open to taking in new information, and reflecting on previous experiences

and change, an organization can optimize its chances of favourable change in adverse situations. To achieve this, managers should “*foster an open system culture – generally open to learn and adapt – to practice active organizational resilience*” (Burnard & Bhamra, 2011; Witmer & Mellinger, 2016; Wang, 2008; Orth & Schuldis, 2021, p. 11). This can be done by facilitating a shared knowledge base available to all employees where there is room for experimentation, improvisation and new ideas. Additionally, employees must be aware of the challenges of the situation they find themselves in, and explicitly share knowledge and information.

To organize and learn simultaneously is in many ways a balancing act. Organizations that strive for innovative development, but at the same time hold on to established norms, values and assumptions are facing a dilemma. They are dependent on the ability to exploit already existing knowledge in the organization and to allocate time for its members to share insights through frequent communication. To continuously understand and develop one's position as an individual in the organization, and your organization's position in the environment, one must continuously move between states of *organizing* and states of *learning*. To put it differently, in order to *learn*, one might have to turn one's back towards *organizing* – if only for a brief moment.

2.3 What about trust?

Enabling communication in order to facilitate a dialogical approach and share new knowledge within organizations is, as noted, often a challenging task for organizations. In times of lockdown, this gets even harder since the COVID-restrictions make it impossible for human face-to-face interactions. The uncertainties that follow from limits of communication could be seen as a result of the complexity that often permeates and characterizes modern organizations (Julsrud, 2018). In order to collaborate in these highly complex organizations, trust is essential. A modern sociological understanding of organizational trust is that the more complex and global that our society gets, the more dependent we will be on developing and maintaining trust in organizations. In that sense, a paradox is taking place – trust is considered more important to attain and harder to get at the same time (Julsrud, 2018; Luhmann, 1979).

So, what is trust? Different research domains conceptualize and measure trust in different ways. A common understanding is however that trust is a vital human ability that is based on the

assumption that we have an intention to show ourselves vulnerable in order to collaborate with others towards a common goal. By trusting someone, I expect a certain behaviour from the other part – often in situations characterized by uncertainties (Julsrud, 2018; Rousseau et al. 1998; Luhmann 1988). When we as humans try to collaborate, we need to trust each other in order to succeed. Without trust, the collaboration fails. Trust is therefore a vital property within organizations.

There are many different forms of attachment points for trust where it can function as a common ground in a collaboration. For example, we give trust to institutions, symbols, groups, and interpersonal contacts (Julsrud, 2018; Lewicki & Bunker 1996). The cornerstone of trust is nonetheless communication, and especially face-to-face interaction. We act and react upon body language, cadency and posture to judge and present stereotypical reliable behaviour. In some cultures, this is basically the only way trust can be built on, while in others humans share common ground in institutions, such as the legal system. Many global organizations usually spend a lot of time and money on traveling in order to meet and establish personal relationships (Julsrud & Gjerdåker, 2013). There is profound evidence that boundary-crossing actors within organizations, establishing relationships at distance, are of immense value for collaboration across borders (Polzer et al., 2006). The effectiveness of traveling and to meet physically in order to build trust is due to the informal interaction that takes place before, between and after the formal meeting agendas (Julsrud, 2018). Trust is then allowed to grow in environments where communication is open, spontaneous and lasting. Such spaces are hard to create and maintain when working solely online. However, if one is limited to online options such as emails, the levels of trust and cooperation can be improved through small efforts such as a personal interaction. Research conducted by Morris, Nadler, Kurtzberg and Thompson (2002) found that a brief telephone conversation prior to online negotiation with someone increased many positive factors, such as friendliness, trustworthiness and perceived ability to work together. This further highlights the importance of communication and interpersonal contact when establishing trust.

As the COVID-pandemic forces organizational work to be held on digital platforms, this means trouble for trust-building, or does it? Some research actually states that interpersonal relationships actually are possible to build solely on digital platforms, but it takes longer time compared to face-to-face interaction (Walther, 1995). According to the *hyperpersonal model*, the limited ability of verbal and non-verbal communication within computer mediated

communication are an advantage when building relations at a distance (Walther, 1996). There are also indications that trust is hard to build via digital interaction, but rather easy to maintain (Julsrud, 2018).

2.3.1 Swift trust in virtual teams

Crisp and Jarvenpaa (2013) conducted a quasi-experimental study on swift trust on temporary virtual teams. The study examines the role of trust and social norms in ad-hoc virtual teams and further dissects the normative components of the term trust. The findings suggest that trust is critical for the emergence of normative actions and that trust works as a “glue” for collaboration in virtual teams (Crisp & Javenpaa, 2013, p. 54). Normative actions, such as a team’s trial and error behavior, are important in virtual teams where participants do not share social systems. To communicate which actions are useful in completing task goals serve as a descriptive action that in conjunction with normative action can help build swift trust in virtual teams. These findings are supported by Kilcullen et al. (2021) concluding the importance of setting norms regarding communication patterns (Ford et al. 2017; Gibson & Cohen, 2003).

In this project, we asked the interview subjects about their perceptions of how the restrictions had affected Plan Norway as an organization. We were curious to see if there would be an overall common understanding concerning the limitations of trust-building that entails digital work-platforms. Could there be some alternative ways of building and maintaining trust through online work methods that had not been identified? Through the theoretical perspective of trust we hoped to gain a deeper understanding of the way that online work methods have affected Plan Norway’s everyday challenges as a result of the COVID-pandemic.

When trying to understand how Plan Norway as an organization has been managed through the restrictions of the COVID-pandemic, one might find many helpful tools within the organizational theories of change, improvisation, learning and trust. In the following chapter we present the methodological approach we used to gather data for this project.

3.0 METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH

The mandate given by Plan Norway and our thesis formed the basis of our methodological approach, both on how we collected data and how we coded it. We started the project with an explorative research question as we could not assume what challenges the employees at Plan Norway faced during the pandemic without first interviewing them and hearing their thoughts. Because of the open nature of such a design, we considered it vital to include all voices equally and chose to utilize semi structured single interviews over focus groups during this process. These interviews were completed with 16 employees working in the PI department, and four interviews with partners at COs in Asia and Africa. Kvale and Brinkmann (2015) characterizes that semi-structured interview as convenient and advantageous when one tries to obtain information about how informants experience and describe their own worldview. Therefore the interviews were useful for us when trying to understand what has happened for the individuals and for the organization the last year.

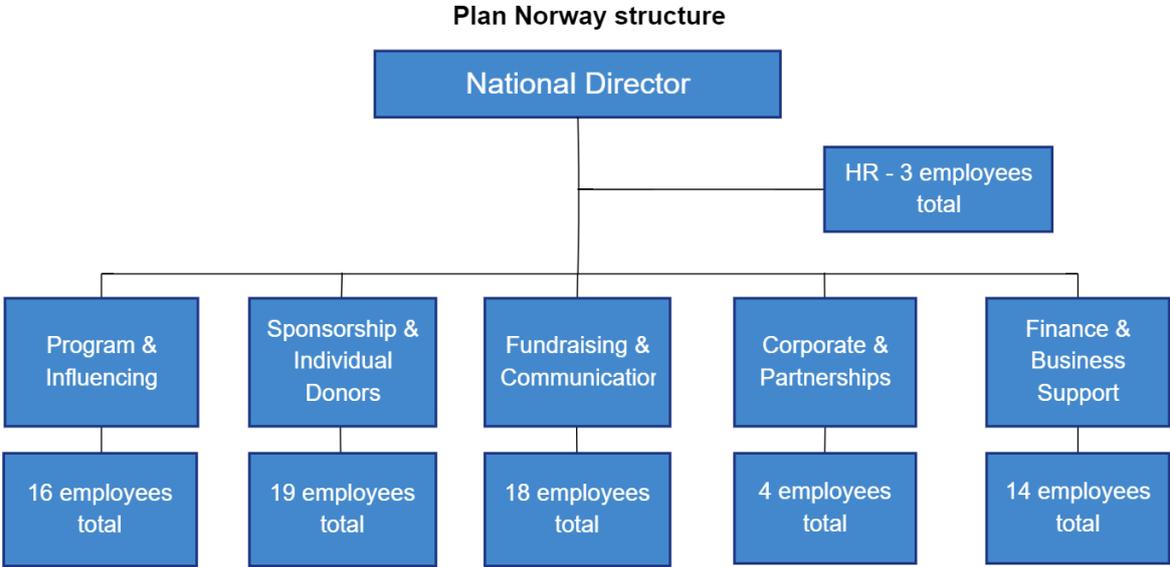


Figure 2: The Plan Norway Organization

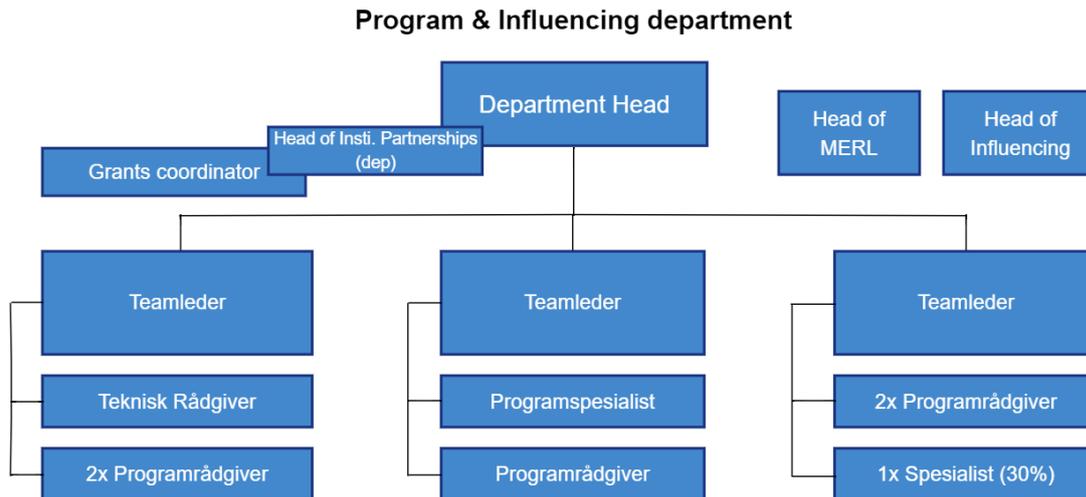


Figure 3: Overview of the PI Department

Both figures are from Plan Int. Norge - hvem er vi Oktober 2020.

3.1 Informant selection

The contact information to the informants for this report were all given to us by Mads Almaas, the PI Director at Plan Norway. The employees we interviewed were all working in the PI department. Not all informants had relevant information regarding the cooperation with COs, however they could all comment on the experiences they had the last year and answer our questions related to communication internally within Plan Norway as an organization. Every employee of the department was contacted and informed about our research project and interviews. Everyone who at the time worked at the department accepted our invitation for an interview. Therefore the data material we ended up with represents the department as a whole, and not just a selection of employees. The group discussed whether we should interview people working within the other departments of Plan Norway to obtain more data. We decided against it as a core topic of our assignment concerned itself with the cooperation between the PI and COs, and information outside of this topic was deemed superfluous to this report or outside the scope of it.

The other informants were employees at the COs of Tanzania, Malawi and Nepal. These countries were chosen after discussions with Mads Almaas in order to diversify the projects these informants were working on. Moreover it allowed us to not limit the information we received about COs cooperation with Plan Norway to a single project or office. Another criteria

when choosing informants from these countries was that the informant had to have strong English knowledge for us to be able to communicate properly with them. This excluded french speaking countries in Africa that Plan Norway has projects in, which otherwise could be an asset to our report.

3.2 Qualitative interviews

Since this project was completed during the corona restrictions in Norway, we were not able to physically meet any employees because of restrictions, all interviews had to be done digitally over Zoom. The advantage of this situation was that it let us be more flexible in terms of scheduling as it cut down on time spent travelling to and from meetings and thus we were not as affected by having to reschedule meetings. A potential downside to doing these interviews digitally is the technical difficulties we faced, like being unable to connect to the internet or unstable connections leading to one interview being cut short and answered per email instead, and another completed without the use of a camera on. Unstable internet connections would also sometimes affect the sound quality, leading to informants not being able to hear our questions and vice versa, thus affecting the flow of the conversation in a negative way. When talking over Zoom it can also be difficult to maintain eye contact with the person one talks to, which is something this report explores more later. As the camera usually sits over the screen and one looks at the person on screen, it makes it hard for eye contact to be maintained and it creates a disconnect between the two people talking. Despite these issues, as both we and the employees of Plan Norway have been accustomed to holding meetings digitally over the last year, these issues were not new to any participants and not seen as detrimental to the quality of our findings.

When commencing with the interviews, we tried to choose topics for discussion that enveloped all areas of the employees' daily life, and how they had experienced the changes to these areas after the lockdown in Norway started in March 2020. We made an interview guide and split it into two main sections (attachment 2). One focused on the employees' daily work life within Plan Norway. The other section revolved around cooperation between Plan Norway and COs, where we narrowed in on topics such as trust and collaboration. We focused on creating an environment where the informants could talk as freely as possible, and tried to create a good conversation between the informant and us as interviewers. We started all interviews with shorter, more informal questions where the informants could talk about themselves. This was

to follow the advice of Holstein and Gubrium (2003) where they highlight the importance of creating a climate, or in our case online environment, of mutual disclosure. In each interview the project group was represented by two members of the group. One member was the host of the meeting, driving the conversation forward while the other ensured that all questions on the interview guide had been covered and came with follow-up questions to the informants. The interviews were executed in this fashion as our project group members had varying degrees of experience with semi-structured interviews. Furthermore we wanted to ensure that all necessary topics were covered and that one person could intervene in the case of technical difficulties.

Although we interviewed employees working in the PI department, we saw the need to tailor parts of the interview guide based on job title or assignments that the informants provided us with prior to the interviews. For example, when interviewing a manager or an informant from a CO we would tweak some of the questions to better obtain relevant information from that individual. Additionally, semi-structured interviews allowed us to change or mold our questions as the interviews progressed based on the information we were given from the informants. This allowed us to explore topics we were not initially prepared to discuss. The lines of the interview guides were therefore blurred and the conversation became more natural (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2015).

3.3 Data analysis

Each interview was stored on a shared, secure cloud service provided by the University of Oslo. It was only accessible by the group members. The completed interviews were transcribed by project group members utilizing the Microsoft Word transcription application and f4transcript. After discussions in the group, it was decided that the host of each interview would transcribe their own interviews. This was done as they were the ones with the most knowledge about the interview and could add the most context to the sentences and external occurrences appearing in the sound files. All personal information, like the names of the informants, were swapped out with informant codes in the transcription so that the quotes used in the report would not be traceable to a single person.

The interviews were transcribed verbatim to not leave out any information or change the meaning of what was being said during the interview. When all interviews had been transcribed,

they were coded according to the thematic analysis approach by the person who transcribed the interview (Gioia et al., 2013). This process follows a grounded theory approach where inductive reasoning is used to make sense out of the material (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2015, p. 226), and starts with distilling the meaning behind each informant quote in our own words, or the 1st order analysis. All while keeping the analyses close to the original text and not focusing on the overarching themes at this point. Once this process was done with all the interviews, we started searching for similarities and differences within these primary analyses (Gioia et al., 2013, p. 20). From this process, more abstract themes emerged from the informant quotes that could be grouped together into broader categories. After individually clustering the quotes together within broader categories, we had a discussion in the group where we came up with the main overarching themes that were prevalent in the transcriptions and relevant to our research.

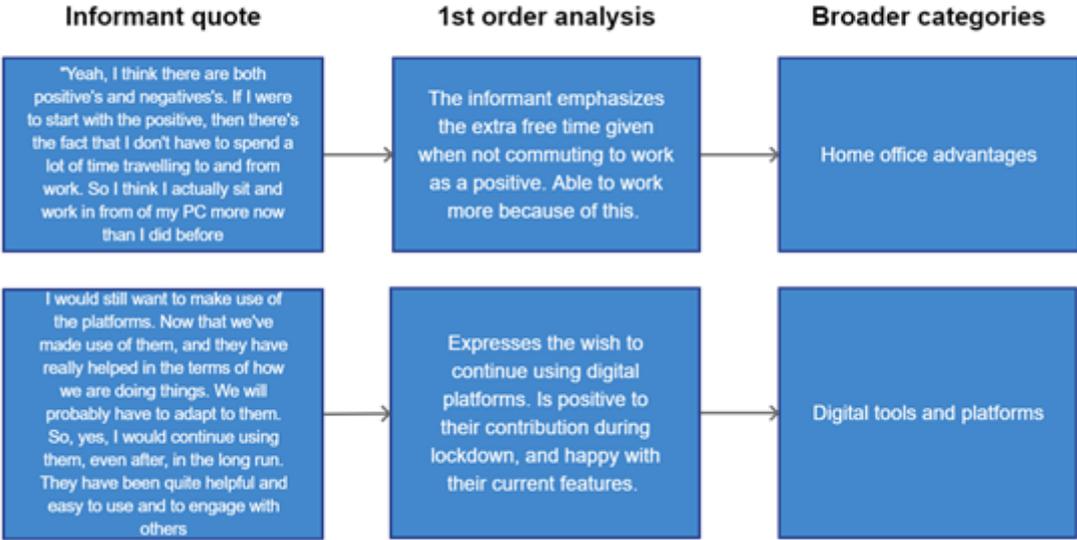


Figure 4: Example of empirically driven codes

We then created a shared document where we could all add quotes from the transcriptions into sections for each theme we had found. This gave us a document consisting of 23 pages worth of quotes out of the roughly 20 hours of conversation we had transcribed, from which we started to write about the findings. As many of our findings were interconnected in different ways, like home office advantages and digital tools, revisions to these overarching themes had to be made along the way as work with the final report progressed. The structure we ended up with divides the findings into two main categories; “The re-organizing of activities and work settings” and “digital collaboration”. The findings were then written as sub-categories fitting into these two overarching themes.

As the group was unable to physically meet each other during this period, each member was assigned a theme to write about. To counteract the inability to physically meet each other, we had frequent meetings to discuss the progression of this work to make sure we were all on the same page, and make sure the written texts did not overlap with the others. Once the group had concluded with all the findings that would be presented in the report, we had a meeting with Plan Norway to discuss these preliminary findings to get feedback and keep the organization oriented on our progress. Once work with the final report commenced, we consistently read the work of other group members to ensure the overall quality of the report. All translations were made independently by members of the group and verified by the group as a whole. We believe the translations offer fidelity to their original statements.

3.4 Ethics

Data collection has been done in accordance with guidelines and laws for the retention of personal information (the Personal Data Act) of the Norwegian Centre for Research Data (NSD). The project was sent in to and approved by NSD prior to the commencement of our study. Names and personal data has been anonymized and stored separately from the interview transcripts, both secured in cloud storage provided by the University of Oslo and only accessible by the project members.

All informants were given a consent form via email prior to the interviews where they were informed about the goals of the interviews and the report (attachment 3). Moreover, they were informed about how their data would be handled, their rights and what their participation entailed. It was also stressed that their involvement in the project was voluntary and that they could withdraw from participating at any moment without question. All informants gave their written consent per our request before moving along with their interview.

The participants were also asked if the transcription of their interview could be used in a potential master thesis. All information from the interviews and about the participants will be deleted after the completion of the project, unless they specifically stated in their consent that their information may later be used in a master thesis. In these cases their information will be securely stored in accordance with the guidelines of NSD for one extra year before deletion.

4.0. FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS

In this project we intend to examine how the COVID-pandemic has changed the way Plan Norway performs its task, and what challenges and opportunities this situation has created in terms of communication and interaction? When screening and analyzing the data from the transcribed interviews we identified changes as a consequence of the COVID-pandemic and the challenges and opportunities that have followed from them. These changes, challenges and opportunities are our findings. We have decided to split our findings in this chapter into two main categories: **the re-organizing of work settings and activities at Plan Norway**, and **digital collaboration**. We use the designation of the verb “re-organizing” instead of the noun “re-organisation”, this is because we want to highlight that changes within the organization happen continuously. The conceptualization of changes within an organization as dynamic follows from the theoretical perspective of change as an continuously ongoing process (Weick & Quinn, 1999). By separating the categories of re-organizing and digital collaboration we hope we can shed light on the consequences and the effects working from home offices has had within Plan Norway, and how digital communication has changed the relationship with COs. Throughout the chapter, we wish to anchor our findings to our empirical data by quoting some of the interview subjects. Theoretical perspectives are included and used as tools in the analysis in order to understand the complexities of organizational changes, learnings and inquiries.

4.1 The re-organizing of activities and work settings

The first part of the analysis concerns our findings regarding home office as the new work setting. As mentioned, we have chosen to call this chapter “the re-organizing“ to emphasize that the changes that have followed as a consequence of the COVID restrictions have been, and continue to be, overwhelming. We also see that Plan Norway is still *actively* trying to organize themselves in order to cope with new challenges and opportunities. These changes of routines and strategies, grounded in improvisation and adaptation, aren’t disposable events, but ongoing dynamic processes of conformity to the environment and its requirements. Therefore, “re-organizing” defines to a larger degree the processes happening within Plan Norway.

The following sections deal with changes related to the re-organizing, what challenges and opportunities that follow from them, and how organizational theory can be used as a tool to

understand them. More specifically, we will discuss and analyze the challenges and implications of 1) structuring a digital workday, 2) home office as the new work setting, 3) learnings within the organization, 4) the possible need of creating new norms in order to maintain trust and 5) the lack of informal arenas for communication.

4.1.1 Structuring the new workday

A profound change within Plan Norway as a consequence of the COVID-pandemic was to establish home office as the new work setting. This sudden shift of environment meant that the employees had to adapt and improvise to comprehend their new situation. This was by many seen as a challenge, especially during the first three or four months of the pandemic. They found it hard to establish a structured workday and to maintain some sort of self-discipline regarding work hours and lunch breaks. When sitting at home, it suddenly became difficult to take the regular coffee - and lunch breaks which were expressed as tough and taxing on the motivation.

“It took me about three months before I found out that I had to add lunch breaks every day, because if I didn’t - that time got filled with meetings, someone had something to bring up. But I won’t function very well if I don’t have lunch.”

The major change of work settings at Plan Norway can be representative as an episodic event (Huber & Glick, 1993; Weick & Quinn, 1999). As this led to confusion and uncertainties among the employees regarding accountabilities and communication, the organization of Plan Norway became disorganized. Inspired by Weick & Westley (1996), this event can be conceptualized as a potential “moment of learning” within Plan Norway, since the disorganized phase enables organizational learning. We see that, as time goes, humans adapt to work-settings through improvisation (Orlikowski, 1996), as in the case above, where it took some time to realise that lunch is rather necessary. Improvisations like these leads to change within organizations, even if they sometimes seem quite small and insignificant. When adding lunch breaks, and gradually realizing that it is rather challenging to structure your workday from home compared to the office, these realisations and improvisations lead to learning, which in turn leads to change. Changes that are based on improvisation and adaptation are dynamic and continuous (Weick & Quinn, 1999). For example one interviewee explaining the changes and learnings that have undergone:

“I remember the first three or four months – I felt like my whole day was filled up with Teams-meetings. And I would work after 4.00 pm. So I would keep on until 10 pm every day and then I felt that this isn’t working. If I’m going to sit and work on indefinite time, that won’t

work. So since then I've kind of forced myself to discipline the day a bit. But it was perhaps also important for people to find that rhythm ...”

These findings are in line with the ones from Klonek et al. (2021), that people seem to adjust well to new work settings (even episodic ones), and that this improves collaboration within virtual teams. One way to understand this adjustment is by the theory on sensemaking (Weick et al., 2005). In “normal” (pre-COVID) times – during a “normal” day at the office, the employees follow a recognizable pattern of activities. Even if a regular day is full of uncertainties, we tend to handle it as an “everyday workday” at the office. We constantly make sense of contingencies, based on former experience and assumptions. When doing this, we are able to organize towards a common goal, which for Plan Norway would be to function as an aid-organization. Organizing is in that sense a form of constant collective sensemaking. Shifting to home office disturbs our sensemaking of what a normal workday looks like. This creates uncertainties on who is doing what, how do we communicate, what is my role, who can I trust, how do I perform my work, or, as in the case above: when and where do I work, and when do I take time off when I'm constantly at home? Some interviewees mentioned difficulties faced with invisible lines between work and home. Defining work hours and being able to separate work from spare time has been expressed as a challenge, especially in the beginning, when home office was a new experience.

“...occasionally it can get kind of difficult to distinguish between work and private life in a way. In that – I'm sitting here, eating my breakfast here, eating my dinner here, sitting over there watching some television at night or keep working. So that's how it goes a little into each other...”

This interviewee is clearly struggling to comprehend the situation that home office entails. All of a sudden, there is confusion about what is work and what is private. However, working virtually does not necessarily mean that all the employees at Plan Norway have a hard time doing their job. Our study revealed that a majority of the employees actually enjoyed working from home, and that it definitely came with many advantages.

“I'm perhaps one of those who think that working from home isn't that bad. Because I like the flexibility... what can be negative is that you kind of forget to do other things. That you sit for a long time... It gets kind of blurred – what is work and what is private.”

It has not been an all natural and easy transition to settle for home office and to sit in physical isolation (at least from co-workers). This study, in concordance with previous research and literature (Kilcullen et al. 2021), implies that shifting to virtual work takes time and should, when possible, be implemented gradually. When the employees try to make sense of their new work setting, they need new experiences and new assumptions to base that sensemaking on. Therefore, we see that it takes some time to comprehend home office and virtual work as the new standard. During this time, the employees are continually improvising new ways of working and managing daily activities. These new conceptualizations are often shared among the co-workers through dialogue. Discussions about new knowledge and assumptions on what it is the organization does and should do can be either fruitful and stimulating, or stagnant and frustrating. It is during this process that *double loop learning* is enabled (Argyris & Schön, 1996). It opens up possibilities of finding and establishing new ways of doing things within the organization. *Double loop learning* can be rather painful in the sense that it is often pushed forward through periods of conflict and confusion. As a consequence, learning new ways to organize often takes place during times of disarrangement and disputes. The aim is that the organization will come out the other end as more experienced, resilient and wiser (Orth & Schuldis, 2021).

Summary of the findings:

1. To structure a digital workday is hard and confusing, and it requires structure and discipline.
2. Adaptation through improvisation and sensemaking enables ways to comprehend new work settings.
3. Plan Norway is in a continuous process of *double loop learning* – facilitating new knowledge and assumptions into the organization.

4.1.2 Time, efficiency and digital tools

In the following section, we present opinions from the employees at Plan Norway regarding home office. We intend to show that there are divergent thoughts on the benefits and disadvantages when working in virtual teams, and that some of the issues depend on different complexities, such as family situation, the ability to set up a well working home office and implementing new rules on virtual work. An overall conclusion is that a hybrid office solution

(home office in combination with regular office) is an attractive alternative for many of the employees.

Time and Efficiency

Several of the interviewees point out that a benefit of working from home is that it saves time usually spent commuting back and forth to the office. As a result, some interviewees feel it has become easier to juggle between work and simultaneously trying to raise a family or spend time on hobbies. However, others point out that it can be disturbing to work from home when living with friends or family in small housings, and especially for those that have to take care of children at the same time. On the other side, when comparing home office to ordinary open office space, many of the interviewees experience the open workplace as a disturbing environment, especially when handling specific cognitively demanding tasks. They believe it is easier to concentrate on cognitively demanding tasks when sitting alone at home. In a sense it has increased their efficiency.

“... it creates more room for concentration to sit at home and like work in depth with problems, so for me it fits well anyway. It’s individual though...(to) change from an open office workspace where there is lots of chatter and continuous dialogue, both informal and formal dialogue.”

When we asked the interviewees about how they would like to work in the future, after the pandemic, the majority of the interviewees suggested a combination of office and home office. They would like to be part of deciding where to work in order to balance family/private life and work life better and more stress free.

“Well, I hope for continuous flexibility when it comes to home office. Because it comes with some advantages, so I’d be surprised and think it’s a shame if this doesn’t continue to be arranged this way. But at the same time, you’ll have to find a way for people to meet in person at the office as well, and maybe it shouldn’t be acceptable to work from home in all settings...”

The employees at Plan Norway have expressed that they have learned a lot when working from home and found new ways to do so, but they believe it is important to meet their colleagues on a regular basis. This implies that, since the start of the pandemic, learning at an individual level has taken place. One could argue that this indicates a form of *single loop learning*, in the sense of improving organizational activities without changing its strategies or assumptions (Argyris & Schön, 1996), has led to enhanced action routines regarding the use of digital tools. Through

the perspective of episodic change (Weick & Quinn, 1999), learning has by today led to improved use of technology and routine actions when working from home. Concerning the realization of the importance of meeting co-workers on a regular basis, this can be understood as a form of collective sensemaking (Weick et al., 2005). Possibly it is not until the employees are restricted from physical interaction that they understand its importance and advantages regarding communication and trust-building. This insight can hopefully function as evidence in the future regarding the significance of communication, interaction and teamwork.

An expressed opinion, that follows from the above conclusion on single loop learning within technology and sensemaking realizations on the importance of regular meetings, is that the interviewees think there should be some rules or guidelines for everybody to follow when combining regular office and home office. For instance, a few would like to have “meeting days” – meaning days during the week where everybody must be at the office so that everybody can attend the meetings. It should also be mentioned that some interviewees strongly believe that regular office should be “the standard”, and home office a possibility. They believe that working from home has worked well during this time, but believes that the Program Department can work much better when meeting regularly at the office.

“..I think that our Programme department is structured in such a way that we all work with different countries and we also have technical advisors and the possibility to have more direct contact [with colleagues] and more frequent meetings in person I think are very beneficial for the quality for our programming”

However, those who wish to restore to old routines and regular office agree with those who wish for a hybrid solution, and do not think that Plan Norway should re-implement the old home office norm. Prior to the pandemic, according to the interviewees, the employees had to have specific reasons to work from home, such as sick children, sick parents or other caregiving responsibilities, and a couple of interviewees felt frowned upon for working from home. A suggested solution from interviewees is a modification of the rules, individual adaptation, and acceptance to work from home. They all agreed that new rules should be put in place, regardless if they want home office, or regular office as the new standard. The new suggested rules are also similar to each other.

“They (the organization) have already made it easier (since March 2020), so if we have sick children, sick parents, then everything is already put in place. But the rules can be more generous, that is okay. That is no problem, but the main rule should be to work from the office

as before, and then it is a responsibility for the management and the organization to adapt more to the individual needs in case of sick children and for the closed days at the kindergarten, and such”

Talking about the implementation of new rules concerning home office could be analyzed as a sign of change, learning and creation of new norms within Plan Norway. It could also be interpreted as a sign of mistrust, since the possibility to monitor each other becomes harder when working digitally. A result could be: when trust decreases, control has to step in in the form of more rules and guidelines. This is in resemblance with the modern sociological conceptualization of the trust-paradox – global interconnections and virtual work makes trust a more valuable property and more difficult to achieve (Julsrud, 2018). From our interviews, there was no indication that directly spoke about mistrust among colleagues or towards managers. Nonetheless, trust is nurtured through communication, and especially face-to-face interaction (Collins, 2004; Nohria & Eccles, 1991), which tells us that the call out for new rules could be a warning signal that trust is decreasing. An employee described the consequences regarding the trust in relation to the non existing face-to-face interaction towards the COs as following:

“Plan feels that they must act almost like policemen towards the program countries. Ask questions about “why haven't you delivered A, B and C?”. This leads to tricky discussions.”

In spite of the inconvenience of communicating with offices abroad using only digital tools, trust was not considered a shortage within Plan Norway. According to Julsrud (2018), trust can instead increase over time with small efforts of personal interaction and be more easily maintained. With an overall agreement that the rules on home office should be modified, it is possible that the employees also have learned to trust each other more within the Program department.

Digital Tools

Because of the rapid conversion to virtual work, we expected feedback from the interviewees that they were unprepared and that they were lacking some digital tools. The main digital tool the Program department and Plan currently utilizes is Microsoft Teams. Several interviewees claim they do not need other programs than Teams and email to be able to do their job well. When using Teams for chatting, many of the interviewees talk about how much more efficient

the straightforward communication has become. The digital arena allows for easy access to many colleagues at the same time. An interviewee points out that they should continue to use the chat function in Teams also when they are in the office. Several positive aspects of Teams which were highlighted is its user-friendly approach. For instance, how easy it is to organize meetings and have an overview of the calendar on their smartphone and computer.

“...we’ve become much better now almost one year later than we were in the beginning, so in that sense we’ve made, well from a technological perspective I think we’ve done a good job.”

There are also some employees that have come up with several proposals for digital services that could be implemented or utilized to a greater extent. Trello, Clubhouse, MIRO, Mario boards, Slack, Menti and training in how to make a good power-point presentation have been mentioned. Some say they have tried to talk to IT about certain programs but have either been rejected or not received a response at all. When, or if, new digital tools are implemented, many informants would like a pedagogical training in how to use them. These suggestions on how well digital tools can be used in Plan Norway's daily activities shows clear signs of learning within the organization. In reference to *single* - and *double loop learning* (Argyris & Schön, 1996) we see that single loop learning has taken place at the individual level. For example, with the improved use of digital tools such as Microsoft Teams and the realization that these new learnings can, and should be, kept in future work settings. There are also tendencies of initiating processes of double loop learning, where the employees put forward new suggestions on digital tools and services. These suggestions are grounded both in individual knowledge, and from acquaintances working in other organizations. One could argue that double loop learning in that sense acts across organizational borders – ideas and new concepts of technology transfers among the organizations and anchors wherever it finds opportunities to grow. As Argyris and Schön argue (1996), double loop learning is often met with resistance, and it flourishes through the process of conflict and dissonance within the organization. This could explain why many of the employees have not received any responses from the IT department when presenting ideas for use of new technologies. As a consequence, new ideas and knowledge might fade away and slip out of reach for Plan Norway as an organization. This could prevent the establishment of new knowledge, new assumptions and change of strategies that otherwise might benefit the purposes of the organization.

Summary of the findings:

1. There are divergent thoughts on home office among the employees. Many would like a hybrid solution in the future, combining home office with regular office.
2. A hybrid solution necessitates rules or guidelines on when to meet physically at the office. Frequent communication and face-to-face interaction have been realized as essential factors of good collaboration.
3. Learning has happened and there are opportunities of double loop learning regarding new assumptions and use of technologies. The more frequent use of digital tools should be kept in the future.

4.1.3 Learning from periods of disorganization

As the members of Plan Norway have struggled with new work settings, constraints regarding communication, and difficulties to separate work from free time, improvisation has been crucial. In this section, we will go more in depth on how our findings can be understood through theoretical perspectives of organizational learning.

As mentioned, organizational theory tells us that daily improvisation leads to a continuous change of the organization (Orlikowski, 1996; Weick & Quinn, 1999). During improvising in phases of disorganisation and uncertainties, we create new assumptions that make us comprehend the contingencies in organizational life. These assumptions function as the building blocks when creating new knowledge within the organization. From our interviews, we see that the employees have obtained new perspectives on many things that they previously took for granted, for example, the importance of face-to-face communication, traveling and lunch breaks. They have also realised the potential advantages of technology and the challenges of trust building. Below are two comments from the employees that implies both that learning has taken place and that new perspectives have appeared:

“... I think that we have also understood that there is maybe a need for greater flexibility at work at times. And that people can actually be efficient working not from the office but from home. And I think, as well that the kind of tools that we are using right now can also be very helpful in the future, even when we come back to the office.”

“The most important thing that we’ve learned over the past year is that humans are adaptable. We create new routines and new contents of meaning”

These comments imply that uncertainties and contingencies have the ability to lead to new knowledge – learning happens in organizations when there's opportunity for dialogue and investigative conversations (Argyris & Shön, 1996; Tsoukas, 2009). Simply put, people need to actively communicate with each other, and it is up to the management and leadership to set off time and resources to make this possible. It is also an individual responsibility to engage in communication, self-distance from unreflective ways of acting and to actively take part in the dialogue that enables knowledge sharing. To obtain new perspectives, it is vital to momentarily let go of established assumptions and to be open to new information. Therefore, organizations like Plan Norway need to create arenas for dialogue where knowledge can be shared. This may sound rather simple, but it's not, especially during a pandemic. Organizational learning should not be understood as a project with an end-state. Instead, learning is a continual process that acquires active commitment among the members of the organizations and adjustments of its structure. The following quote from one of our interviewees sheds light on the different aspects of learning in times of disorganization:

“In that sense I think it's both a challenge and an opportunity that's gonna come out of this situation, and hopefully organizations like Plan will continue to learn from, and build in those coffee times or wellbeing times through screens and not just using it for work. And I think Plan has responded to it as an opportunity as well as it has been a challenge.”

In the meta review by Kilcullen et al. (2021) several of the recommendations (presented in Table 1) is about how to manage communication when establishing and assembling virtual teams. How can we get people to talk to each other instead of working in isolation – when they physically *are* isolated? The interviews conducted in this project reveals that maintaining communication is hard, but with new knowledge on what technology can do (providing video calls, chats etc.) and new insights on the importance of communication, many see an opportunity for Plan Norway to learn from this. One employee discussed learning in relation to digital communication as following:

“... I think that we have learned to work better together because we’ve had these frequent Teams meetings. And to get in contact – that it is supposed to be as easy as possible to reach out to each other. I think we have learned a lot from this, which makes us work more tightly together even if we are sitting far away from each other.”

The solution to learn as an organization should be comprehended as an active, ongoing process. Learning can never be fully accomplished. With curiosity comes flexibility, which is later joined by improvement and finally stability (in the sense of: *to organize*). To summarize, we see that learning occurs within Plan Norway when contingencies are made comprehensible through sensemaking mechanisms (Weick et al., 2005). The opportunity and responsibility to enable new insights does not lie at the management exclusively, but at the organization as a whole. New learnings could transfer and be anchored at all levels of the organization by establishing a culture of empowerment, where learning is built-in into daily work activities *as* a daily work activity. This entails an atmosphere where people dare to question assumptions and routines, and have the courage to present new ideas without risk of being ridiculed or classified as the scapegoat if an incentive turns out as a failure.

Summary of the findings:

1. New learnings of perspectives have arisen within Plan Norway, both regarding the importance of communication and face-to-face interaction, but also possibilities in technology.
2. Learning happens when new assumptions are comprehended through sensemaking mechanisms, often in times of disorganization.
3. New knowledge is being enabled across the organization through dialogue and frequent communication that prerequisites a culture of empowerment and openness.

4.1.4 Creating new norms in order to maintain trust

An interesting advice from Kilcullen et al. (2021) when establishing virtual teams is about creating team norms (tip #1). A definition of team norms says that they are: *rules that teams within an organization adopt to regulate group members' behavior* (Feldman, 1984). One explanation of why there was some struggle adopting virtual teams in the beginning of the pandemic could be because of the confusion regarding norms in a new work setting. For example, when asked about virtual meetings, our interview subjects expressed difficulties concerning the use of camera and microphone. During a regular, physical meeting, most humans know what is expected of us – we know what behaviour is proper when sitting in the same room. Digital work setting means that people have the possibility to turn off the camera

and microphone, which often ultimately results in speakers talking straight into black screens with only initials showing. To some, this is no problem, while for others it can be uncomfortable. Our interviewees expressed that long video meetings can be frustrating, especially when talking to black screens that makes it impossible for response to expressed ideas:

“Because the worst thing is when you’re in a team-meeting and talk to a whole bunch of people that have turned their camera off. I think that is hopeless. So that thing about meeting-rules, how we’re supposed to have our digital meetings, I think that is really important.”

This signals an uncertainty regarding norms and unspoken rules of how one is supposed to behave in an online meeting. The choice of turning your camera on or not, can in many ways lead to a suspicion of whether or not the other person (or persons) are actively participating in the meeting. Some are also mentioning that they actually see that people are doing other things during a meeting, for example reading or writing. There is a need to improve established routines regarding the use of technologies, which implies the requirement of *single loop learning* (Argyris & Schön, 1996) on how to use digital tools and what rules to follow in a digital work environment. As a result, a wish for a better structure regarding digital meetings and a digital work environment are wanted.

“...and that I think is annoying, if I see that they do something else on the side. And then I see, you can see like when you’re in a meeting with colleagues that they’re reading something on their screens, if they read their mails or something, you can see that their gaze is running up and down the screen.”

Ultimately, uncertainties in communication and response to ideas and progress can result in a decrease of trust among the employees. The findings from Crisp & Javenpaa (2013) suggest that trust is critical for the emergence of normative actions and that trust works as a “glue” for collaboration in virtual teams. Even though some research state that trust building is possible only through online methods (Walther, 1995; Walther, 1996), the overarching evidence is that humans need active communication and most preferably face-to-face interaction in order to establish and maintain trust (Collins, 2004; Nohria & Eccles, 1991). Trust has always been important for humans, since they make collaboration possible. With the rise of technology, and the increase in global connections among organizations, research claims that trust is now more important than ever – but harder to establish (Julsrud, 2018; Luhman 1979). Members of organizations like Plan Norway need to work actively to create and maintain trust. And since

communication is the cornerstone of trust, we see that trust is at risk when communication decreases. One of the interviews described the problematics of video meetings as following:

“The ability to see people in their eyes is gone, non-verbal communication is gone. Well, you can see each of them from their chest and upwards, but people's posture is still missing and yeah – those things. And especially if you're muted or turn off the camera, then all forms of non-verbal communication kind of disappears. I find this exhausting and you have no idea, you really have no idea, especially with land offices, if what you're saying is being understood. You don't know if people are listening or if they simply don't care”

To determine, establish and maintain norms within virtual teams is difficult and it takes time (Kilcullen et al. 2021). Norms can nevertheless function as guidelines as how to behave in situations of uncertainties. Research stresses the importance of setting norms regarding communication patterns (Ford et al. 2017; Gibson & Cohen, 2003), and thereby deciding behaviours and understanding on how communication should work in a certain group, how often one should check in on progress and how the communication with managers should be. An analysis from our study indicates that the employees think that trust has been maintained, especially the ones that have been working at Plan Norway for some time. This goes in line with certain previous research, asserting that trust is rather easily maintained but hard to build through online communication (Julsrud, 2018).

Summary of the findings:

1. Long video meetings can be frustrating. There are also uncertainties and confusion on how to behave during video meetings. This entails a need for rules or guidelines regarding the establishment of new norms in virtual work settings.
2. A weakened communication, in terms of lack of non verbal language, implies a risk of a decrease in trust.
4. Trust is easier to maintain than build through virtual work settings.

4.1.5 Informal arenas for interaction

Due to the range and importance of digital interaction, the report separates the findings from the interviews regarding digital topics into two categories: informal arenas (4.1.5) and digital cooperation (4.2.1).

From the findings regarding home office and digital tools, a separate and important topic emerged. Many interviewees spoke about informal arenas, or lack thereof. The corona pandemic has hampered the ability to network or build relations at the informal arenas of communication. These arenas were mentioned as places such as the corridor between offices, at the coffee machine or during a car ride when visiting a CO. This finding was consistent with the literature from Klonek et al. (2021) in which they point out that meta-analytic research of virtual teams indicates that “virtual teams tend to communicate less and engage less in knowledge sharing behaviors”. Informants found it more difficult to reach out to a colleague about smaller everyday work issues that are usually solved by simply walking up to your colleagues’ desk and discussing it for five minutes. No digital tools were mentioned as being successful at replacing these types of interactions. Furthermore, the informal arenas serve an important function as a social arena that helps employees bond beyond work tasks.

“So that's the kind of information you get when you have coffee breaks in a meeting or sitting in the car with the right person... and maybe the director is not there or.. well.. so that type of thing we sort of miss out on.”

Some of the interviewees spoke about how there had been attempts by the management to recreate such informal communication arenas online such as Teams coffee chats in the morning or guided meditation videos. Many interviewees expressed thankfulness for these attempts and a large proportion of the employees found them useful. Others did not enjoy these types of meetings. For example some highlighted that the barriers to informal chats were higher during these meetings or during online interaction. This could possibly be explained by the fact that scheduling informal meetings makes them formal which then removed the intended purpose.

“A workplace that is dependent on a lot conversing with each other, both between colleagues and between departments and teams. We have sort of tried to create something like that... where it can be done, but it doesn't happen as natural or organic during a coffee chat on Teams as it does in the hallways.”

Sometimes people did not show up for the informal meetings. Interviewees did not think it is the management or colleagues’ fault that these types of meetings have varied results, but rather that it did not feel natural to have these types of meetings online.

“Having a low threshold to chat with colleagues is important.”

Interviewees spoke about the importance of a place to chat and speak freely, due to the lack of socialization with colleagues. The opportunity to ask genuine questions to colleagues about how they are doing or how their lives are going, not necessarily about the organization or work itself, is lacking. These interactions that a year ago seemed to take place between meetings, during lunch or at the coffee-machine have now diminished or disappeared from the work environment.

“...But I still think, what is missing, I mean internally, when a meeting is over we miss that little, those shorter conversations that often take place after a meeting – those are gone.”

Summary of findings:

1. Informal arenas of communication, such as in the corridors or during lunch breaks have been hard to maintain or replace with the shift to an online workplace.
2. These arenas serve an important social functioning and impacts network and/or relations building, which again impacts the work and trust within the organization.

4.2 Digital Collaboration

One of the consequences that came with the corona pandemic was travel restrictions. This meant that Plan Norway’s employees no longer could travel to visit the COs and see the projects being implemented in the local environment. This has led to the communication being done completely digitally, and in the following sections we examine the effect this has had on the collaboration between Plan Norway and the COs. First we analyze the digital communication and highlight the possibilities and shortcomings of this, then we look at which role travels play and examine the consequences of not being able to travel and physically meet, and if there are any opportunities for Plan Norway to deal with these consequences.

4.2.1 How digital communication affects cooperation

Like previously mentioned, the lack of informal arenas of communication were vocalized as something that the corona pandemic had affected. This was mentioned during many of the interviews conducted for this report. The interviewees also spoke about the consequence due to lack of body language, nonverbal cues, and face-to-face interactions when using digital

communication. Consequences such as less confidence or knowledge about the process that was being done by other parts, interruption of the flow of information and the lack of ability to form relations or networks. Some say that there have been meetings where colleagues in the COs have to turn off the camera to get a better signal. While others do not have the opportunity to communicate because there is no internet at home.

Several interviewees spoke about how there was frustration in this type of interaction. Some believe it has created a gap between them, and new challenges in the relationship between Plan Norway and COs. This was especially highlighted by those with less experience or no prior networks. In a digital meeting there is sometimes little room for other than strictly work-related topics and some believe that they are not getting the necessary information.

"Because we get to know more information, we exchange more, and we also find synergies that might be difficult to find. Because I think that what is a big difference now is that, you don't ask for information that you don't already have in a way, it's just impossible."

The informants explained this as frustrating and some tasks must be done in a rush because of misunderstandings or miscommunication, and that takes its toll on the trust of their colleagues at the COs.

"... And when you see the results afterwards it gets clear that - no, this and that hadn't been understood by all parts. And this in turn takes a toll on trust in the next round of projects, because you can't be sure that what you communicate is understood well enough."

One of the ways that some employees have been dealing with this is more frequent communication between the COs and POs. To engage in frequent check-ins to monitor performance and feedback is the second advice from Kilcullen et al (2021) on virtual teams, at an organizational level. There are more follow-ups and information being passed as employees at the POs need to have an understanding of the process that is being done at the COs. However, we want to note that there was not a complete consensus regarding the cooperation with the COs, and some individual variance existed.

"If you have never met each other and travelled around and seen the projects together and created that chemistry which you need to be able to tackle the hard questions, then it becomes much more difficult to work together."

It is worth mentioning that a few informants believed they had more frequent communication, although formal, with Plan Norway's colleagues internationally than they did with colleagues

at the Plan Norway office. Nonetheless, digital tools have created a challenge in terms of how that cooperation is done between Plan Norway and external parts of the organization.

From the side of the COs, the feedback from the interviews have been that the increased frequency of interactions utilizing digital tools have been positive. They are aware of the frustration that can be caused due to lack of digital tools or internet connections from their side. Moreover, they expressed that the concept of time is different at the COs than at the POs. Therefore the COs hope that Plan Norway and other program offices will (continue to) be lenient when digital solutions are utilized, due to the technical issues they might have or because of the difficulties the concept of time could pose. Interviewees also mentioned that having access to online workshops or presentations that one could watch independently from the time it was broadcasted had been a positive outcome of the corona-impacted workflow.

Having access to online workshops or seminars was a positive outcome that was echoed by interviewees at the PI department. Digital communication opens up an opportunity regarding the use of online platforms where Plan Norway's colleagues were able to watch meetings, seminars or conferences regardless of the location or time of the event. Furthermore the informants spoke positively about the fact that these online workshops and events could host more people than traditional or physical meetings.

“Since we've been able to draw participants because we've gone more digital, we've been able to also engage our colleagues in the countries [that we cooperate with] at an earlier stage, so that was actually positive.”

Summary of findings:

1. The lack of body language due to online interactions impacts the work process, mainly in a negative way.
2. A possible new challenge between Plan Norway and COs. Digital meetings are strictly work related and some informants experience frustration with this type of work relations.
3. Some interviewees had more frequent communication between POs and COs. This was experienced as mostly positive from the side of the COs.
4. Having access to online workshops, seminars and conferences was highlighted as a positive result of working online.

4.2.2 Travels

One of the main subjects of discussion in the interviews was that Plan Norway employees were no longer allowed to travel to visit the COs and see the projects that were being implemented, due to travel restrictions. In this section we analyze the consequences of not being able to travel, and how it has affected the working relations between Plan Norway and COs.

As presented above, there is a problem with technical difficulties due to poor internet connection when communicating with some COs. The second tip from Kilcullen et al (2021), includes a recommendation for using technology like video conferences, when deploying virtual teams, which can present a challenge when working with COs. The information gap that has been created due to only communicating through digital tools, can to some extent be filled by traveling. Visiting the COs is of great importance for the projects. By seeing, firsthand, how the projects are being implemented one can gain a new and deeper understanding of the working conditions. Furthermore, they can discover if there are any hurdles to overcome, and maybe just as important, learn what questions to ask.

“And also, apart from that if it's regarding the different countries coming [to visit], it also helps them, the physical interactions also helps us have them here to see, physically see, it's quite different when we're just reporting virtually in terms of how we're doing or they are seeing pictures or videos. So, when they are coming to the country, [to] appreciate how the projects are going it's really quite different, so that will still be important.”

This is related to the sensemaking-mechanism that essentially is happening in our subconsciousness (Weick et al., 2005). When working digitally and trying to implement projects or make sure reports are properly filled out, there might be difficulties that stem from a lack of knowledge from the root cause of the problem. We all have different perspectives and fundamentals of understanding, because our sensemaking mechanism is affected by our experiences and presumption (Weick et al., 2005). Therefore, it can be crucial to visit and participate in knowledge and information sharing face-to-face. By visiting the COs, one might randomly be able to talk to the right person, for example, like the previously mentioned informal setting of a coffee break or a car ride, while having a casual conversation. This knowledge or information might be innately understood from the COs' perspective, but not from Plan Norways' side. The roots of the problems can also be caused by cultural differences, where there is a difference in understanding what is need-to-know information. One informant expressed:

“There were some challenges, there were some delays in a project, and they didn’t feel the need to share it with us early on that they had some difficulties, and it was right at the end of the project. (...) Had we known about it two months earlier then we could have done more to intervene and correct it. And I think we would have gotten that information a bit earlier if we had a stronger relationship with that colleague or office”

Cultural differences are one of the barriers that are crucial to break to further maintain a good virtual team (Kilcullen et al, 2021). In these cases, visiting COs and participating in knowledge sharing may prove to be very productive. It helps employees from Plan Norway and the COs develop a common understanding of the projects they wish to implement. There is an opportunity here for Plan Norway as an organization to lift communication to a new level where the focus is on knowledge sharing and collective sensemaking, the goal should be to make implicit knowledge explicit. This could also help with Plan Norway's work with quality and control of the projects. One of Plan Norway’s main tasks is to ensure that the quality of the projects are up to a certain standard, and travel has been an important part of control in this regard. Therefore, communication, with an emphasis on knowledge sharing, can be fruitful in the collaboration between Plan Norway and COs.

Furthermore, problems have occurred during the pandemic that have been challenging to overcome because they have previously handled similar issues by gathering more people. One of the interviewees say that:

“ ... Some programs also need to get more people. (...) Typically in a crisis, there are extra personnel, and what do you do when you do not get the extra people to help? (...) Then you have to improvise, and it has gone surprisingly well - what one has managed to achieve anyway”

Luckily, improvisation is a skill Plan Norway has shown to manage well. Based on this, Plan Norway is changing as a dynamic process, according to theories related to organizational change (Tsoukas & Chia, 2002; Weick & Quinn, 1999). During this new and uncertain situation of experiencing a crisis where the known way to handle it is no longer achievable, the employees at Plan Norway improvise, like Orlikowski (1996) states as a driving force for dynamic processes. The improvisation then leads to creativity when it comes to using the resources available to make the best out of the situation:

“It is the country director who sits in the affected countries, who knows that the borders are closed, there are no planes coming in or out, so they have to do their best with the resources they have.”

This can be related to Fine’s (1984) theoretical perspective on how change is further driven by negotiation among the different roles and characters that are involved. All of this results in Plan Norway continuously evolving to stabilize the organization in the chaotic surroundings and changing as a dynamic process (Tsoukas & Chia, 2002; Weick & Quinn, 1999).

There is a clear difference between creating a relationship and maintaining a relationship through digital platforms. The employees who have been working at Plan Norway for a longer period have had the opportunity to build trust and relations between themselves and the colleagues in the COs. This is a great advantage to have during the pandemic because it makes it easier to maintain a working relationship (Julsrud, 2018). Research suggests that trust can be created through digital tools (Walther, 1995). However, the majority of the interviewees share a common understanding that it is immensely important for the newly hired employees to visit the projects they are working with.

“But I’m thinking, for example, about the employees who has started working with us during the epidemic, that have not been allowed to travel and meet the colleagues they will be working with, that have not seen the areas, the city, the village, in which the projects will be implemented, they will have a pretty tough time guessing how it is all connected, you are able to see so much more when you are there physically.”

Although it might be possible to build trust, it will be a slow process (Walther, 1995).

On the other hand, not all travel is equally necessary. The informants point out that the number of flights and certain reasons for travel can be reduced to a level of what is truly needed. It is a preferred solution to replace physical gatherings with digital tools, as long as it does not negatively affect the work. As previously mentioned, many of the interviewees are left with good experiences of having both meetings, seminars, and courses online after this pandemic. Technological development might also offer even greater solutions in the future.

“I think that where one might consider cutting travel is the type of director meetings in Helsinki or EU meetings, these things. Yes, it’s nice that they get to meet, but really, often the meetings are like “thank you for the kind introductory words and honorable...” you know, it’s

courtesy phrases, and then there's nine minutes of nonsense, and then there's five minutes of "ok now let's say some good words about..." there one might consider reducing a bit.

We previously wrote about Plan Norway's increased digital competence during the pandemic. The organization can take advantage of this new knowledge and re-evaluate who and when someone travels.

Summary of findings:

1. Travel is important to be able to see the projects, and get a deeper understanding of the projects
2. Improvisation is a driving force for dynamic processes
3. More difficult for newly employed to build trust via virtual platforms with COs.
4. Not all travel is equal according to some informants, there might be a possibility for Plan Norway to review who travels and when to take advantage of increased digital competence.

5.0 DISCUSSIONS

What consequences follow from a worldwide lockdown in terms of organizational work? How are employees making sense of chaotic surroundings? How are people's everyday improvisations and adaptations, in order to cope with contingencies in work life, implemented in the structure of organizational work? How does this affect communication and trust? The list of uncertainties goes on. Our starting point was to answer aspects of the above reflections through our project's thesis: *how has the COVID-pandemic changed the way Plan Norway performs its tasks, and what challenges and opportunities has this situation created in terms of communication and interaction?* In the previous chapter we tried to analyze our findings by the help of organizational theory. In the following section we intend to discuss the consequences and implications of these and present suggestions for future actions.

5.1 Challenges and opportunities when structuring a digital work setting

Along with the potential freedom of having your own house or apartment as an office, follows problems of drawing (invisible) lines between work and home. Defining work hours and to

separate them from free time is expressed as a challenge. Working from home calls for some sort of individual self-discipline. This is not necessarily about sneaking out from work earlier than usual or to check out the latest clothing fashion during work hours (which was not mentioned in our interviews, but a common suspicion related to home office work settings!) – but also to stop working when office-time turns to free-time. When sitting at the same spot at home, both during yearly conferences with important donors *and* when building LEGO-robots with your child, this implicates difficulties to mentally leave the office and enter family-time. As you leave the office building during “regular” times, this actually lets you physically leave work behind. This is also the case for lunch hours or breaks. If, for example, all of your colleagues want you to join them for lunch, this entails a break in work duties and a physical move from the office chair to the cafeteria. When working from home, these physical transportations or “awakenings” from work duties during lunch hour are to a large extent left to be handled by every individual themselves. This can be hard. One could say that, without the separation of work-hours and free-time – all hours have the tendency to become work-hours, especially if work tasks are hard to evaluate whether they are done or if there is still room for improvements. The interview subjects express the difficulties of discipline when working from home and the challenges to separate work hours from free time, especially in the beginning of the lockdown when home office was a rather new experience. However, there are also explanations of adaptation and a sort of personal learning phase that has undergone since then. This shows signs of individual improvisation to adapt to new environments of work settings (Orlikowski, 1996). Working from home has also shown to be functional when it comes to distributing the often limited amount of time that the average employee has, especially if you’re simultaneously trying to raise a family and all the weekly issues that follow from that. The concept of home office has in many ways taken a giant step forward since the start of the pandemic and the skepticism concerning the effectiveness of home office has in a way diminished.

Meetings within Plan Norway have exclusively been held via digital platforms and a lot of challenges and concerns have emerged from this. The employees especially emphasized the difficulties that follow from an interaction that’s been stripped from non-verbal communication. The use of video-meetings only includes the visual connection to some degree, but the placement of the camera in relation to the screen on laptops limits eye-contact between the participants. Therefore, there’s an exclusion of some of our senses that we usually rely on when communicating with colleagues and establishing relationships within our workplace. The

employees talk about this as one of the greater challenges that goes with home office and virtual meetings on screen. Uncertainties related to limited communication can eventually lead to an increase of mistrust. Despite that, trust is said to have been maintained, but undefined norms and deficient digital communication can be interpreted as a warning signal – when communication fails, this will eventually result in a decrease in trust (Julsrud, 2018). As a result, some employees articulate wishes for a better structure regarding digital meetings and a digital work environment.

An interesting aspect of the above findings is about improvisation and adaptation among the employees, in relation to the call for rules and norms. First, we see that people are customizable, improvising new ways to maintain productivity. They are creative and smart when managing to combine home office situations to family activities. Meanwhile, uncertainties lead to concerns, unease and discussions of establishing new norms. When we are unable to find a solution through improvisation and creativity, we seek rules and routines. We could interpret this ambiguity as a balancing act between autonomy and the need for governance. The employees need to find ways to do things themselves, but they also need clear expectations of accountability. To put it clearly, they continuously ask themselves – what are we doing? What is my role and my objectives? In some periods or cases autonomy is the key, while in others, governance is required.

5.2 Home office – the new normal?

Discussing the concept of home office, the opinions of the employees varied to some degree. Some saw home office as the new standard with fewer physical meetings at the Oslo office, while some wanted to return to regular work routines, similar to how it was before the pandemic, but with some modification of the rules. Many of the employees reflected positively upon a hybrid solution regarding home office as a well-suited way for Plan Norway to set the new work settings in a post-COVID era. This means that the workers themselves have an influence on where to work during the week and that they can divide their working hours between home office and regular office. The opportunity to be able to do both: to work in a quiet place during cognitively demanding tasks and save time and money on commuting regularly, in combination to actually commute to the office and attend physical meetings.

There is a common understanding that they need new rules, or guidelines on how they as a department should work after the pandemic. We can question if the need for guidelines concerns trust issues – can we trust that our co-worker is actually working from home, or does the management trust that their employees are working, or is it rather that the employees are concerned with others' conception of why they are working from home? When interviewing the employees, we did not get indication of mistrust within the PI department, or that the management did not trust their employees. We did however get feedback that they prior to the pandemic felt watched by their other colleagues if they worked from home. We did not get answers to why they felt watched, but we can discuss whether this can be related to trust. According to Julsrud (2018), trust through digital communication can become easier to maintain over time. This might be something that the department subconsciously has learned this past year, to trust each other without interacting in person. The home office rules previously required specific reasons to work from home, and the employees have suggested a modification of the rules and specific days where they all have to be in the office. The employees think it will give them more flexibility. Perhaps it also will give them a greater sense of autonomy and independence now that they and their managers know they work well and efficiently from home.

The benefits of sitting together with your colleagues in the same open workplace is the ability to ask “simple” questions to the colleagues sitting beside you, instead of having to send an email, chat or invite to a digital meeting. In that sense, we can say that the home offices have led to a longer distance between colleagues when it comes to smaller everyday work issues that are usually solved by simply walking up to your colleagues’ desk. At the same time, the employees that we have talked to say that they have learned a lot about working from home during the COVID-pandemic – knowledge that definitely should be implemented and taken advantage of after the pandemic. Such knowledge is, for instance, to use the Teams-chat function for quick questions, both work related and questions to meet a colleague for coffee, also when they are in the office together. It is as efficient as walking across the building.

5.3 Understanding informal arenas for interaction

As previously stated, the frustration regarding the use of digital tools has overarching effects on how we communicate and understand something. For example how it impacts the informal arenas for interaction or confusion when communicating with COs. By using the theoretical

framework of Weick et al. (2005) one can regard this situation as a lack of collective sensemaking. Whereas the physical work environment has standard/regular norms, the same sense of collective understanding seems to be lacking in the virtual work environment.

This is hardly Plan Norway's fault - the shift to a digital workplace happened quickly and drafting a common story or establishing collective sensemaking is not an overnight fix. The work of Weick et al. (2005) can help the organization to try to better handle the challenge that digital cooperation poses. As the three authors point out, it is about "*continued redrafting of an emerging story so that it becomes more comprehensive*" (p. 415). For Plan Norway this means gather data and opinions and continue to build on what is working and discontinue what is not. Speak about what needs to be done to better cooperate and constantly communicate. Section 4.1.4 included some opinions that were mentioned during the interviews that are worth re-mentioning: be clear about camera or microphone use, seek alternative digital tools for some occasions, introduce training, and broader dialogue with IT. We suggest Plan Norway to keep communicating between colleagues, teams and departments to continuously draft the image of what is going on and how they do things. Keep the interaction transparent so that the organization as a whole can use sensemaking to handle the uncertainties that digital cooperation poses. By opening this conversation across the organization we hope that Plan Norway are better suited to finding alternative solutions to informal arenas for communication and that the threshold for social chat can be somewhat lowered. Furthermore, we urge Plan Norway to keep discussing what feels unnatural with scheduled informal meetings and what tools or activities can be implemented to make the digital workplace better.

5.4 Challenges with digital cooperation

Based on the information obtained about Plan as an organization and from the feedback during the interviews, it is clear that both Plan Norway and the larger organization, depends on the globality of the organization and the communication that happens within it. And as pointed out in the theoretical framework of this report - the more complex and global the organization becomes, the more dependent one is on the concept of trust (Julsrud, 2018; Luhman 1979). As both Collins (2004) and Nohria & Eccles (1991) highlight in their work, communication is of essence when approaching the topic of trust. This poses a big challenge for the Plan organization: How does one maintain trust when face-to-face communication and interaction is limited? As previously noted in section 4.2.1, trying to handle the concept of informal arenas

could potentially help, but still, it does not solve the physical interaction and body language someone is able to express in the real-world. The concept of time was highlighted by the COs and one has to understand that when using digital tools the ability to form new bonds or relations will be slower. As Walther's (1995) work points out, it is possible to build relationships solely on digital platforms, but it will be a slower process. In the process of building a hybrid solution between pre-pandemic conditions and post-pandemic we have to underline that digital solutions will for the most part take more time.

If a project does not go as planned because of communication problems, this can take a toll on the overall trust between the employees. Therefore, trust is in a fragile position in times of pandemics and lockdowns since it is then considered more important than usual, at the same time as it is harder to achieve because of the travel restrictions. A sense of mistrust has in some way also taken place as the possibility to monitor and control has decreased. This can lead to situations where the employees at the program offices in a way act as interrogators, forced to ask lots of questions regarding details of the sort of information that otherwise could be transferred via a physical meeting, for example when traveling together.

Overall, the employees at Plan express that in order to do a good job - communication is vital. And since communication currently exclusively occurs through digital platforms, it has in some way been damaged. Especially the kind of communication that makes people get to know each other, referring to eye-contact, body language and other nonverbal cues that help form relationships of collaboration and trust. Trust is currently in part still maintained via digital platforms that's used by Plan on a daily basis. However, the employees express that collaboration, communication and trust would be a lot easier to build and maintain if physical meetings would be possible in addition to the daily digital communication. In that sense, to meet in person and to actually see each other as colleagues, extends the dimensions to where trust can be formed and anchored over time. This is also backed by the research by Morris et al. (2002). Small personal interactions can play a large role in trust, networking and ability to work together. Within Plan Norway this was also expressed during the interviews. As previously mentioned, veterans with years of experience and networks both internationally and internally at Plan Norway found it easier to maintain and collaborate with colleagues online compared to newer employees. Even a small personal interaction can immensely help (newer) employees out, especially if the organization approaches the future with a hybrid solution. Also

worth noting is that a single solution may not work for all employees, and that communication and interaction very often is individual or contextually dependent.

5.5 Is travelling a necessity for good cooperation?

Traveling creates ripple effects. It is important for the employees' motivation, and this affects the present and future employment in Plan Norway. The more employees they have will further increase the work capacity, and thereby expand the number of different perspectives on problem solving. Over time, this will benefit the efficiency and the results of the projects, and increase the number of people in the world that can be helped. In total, all these factors included in traveling influence the development of developing countries.

The consensus is that traveling is an important part of Plan Norway's work when cooperating with COs. It is not only important for the informal interactions that build bridges, create relations and eventually trust – it is also important for the sake of the project. The opportunity to see what is going on concerning the progress of the project. Many of the interviewees point out how important it is to be present, so they can prevent unnecessary mistakes and time delays. This is not easily fixed by just seeing the projects over video calls to prevent and solve problems when the internet connection has proven to be unstable.

On the other side, as mentioned in the analysis, some interviewees think it is manageable to still do a good job even though they travel less, especially with the technological advances that might come in the future. However, when dealing with the question of whether travelling is a necessity or not, with an optimistic mindset of great technological developments that can take place in our digital world, it is also important to be aware of countries' different paces of development. Relying on how things will change in the future from a Norwegian perspective might not be as relevant when cooperating with developing countries where the technological changes can be far behind.

The differences in development pace is further relevant when discussing a potential ending of the COVID pandemic period. Many countries are gradually gaining more control over the situation by keeping the infection rates low. This is in addition to being able to vaccinate more and more of the population. Unfortunately, this is not the case all around the globe. COVID-19 still poses an uncertainty factor, and many countries are not privileged to have a precise

vaccination plan. The point is that the infection and restrictions can ravage for a long time in many countries. This is something Plan must take into consideration when sending their employees into the field. No one knows how long it will take before we have a normalized situation globally. Quarantine after traveling, scepticism to vaccination and new epidemics or pandemics can be imagined to feel irrelevant for someone, but maybe demotivating for others. A vaccine may be enough to make someone feel safe to travel to a country with a higher level of infection and a lower vaccination rate. However, this could be daunting for others. Mandatory quarantine when arriving in Norway can be unproblematic for someone, but an issue for others. Traveling has been expressed to be a part of the interviewees' work motivation. Has this changed or not? And if it has, how can Plan help to find new sources of motivation? This should be kept in mind when dealing with the question of the necessity of travels.

This is the first time Plan International has been exposed to a disease that affects the whole organization at the same time and to such an extent. If a new epidemic or pandemic occurs in the future, what has Plan learned of the COVID pandemic when it comes to traveling restrictions and collaboration? How can they take advantage of their knowledge and new experiences if a potentially similar situation would arise in the future? To reflect upon and evaluate the learning outcomes post-COVID may be just as important as figuring out how to handle the situation while it is happening. It could be a great organizational advantage to reflect upon and evaluate this experience. Both with the leaders in the COs, and with the employees in the PI department.

5.6 Dilemmas regarding less traveling

Finally, in the discussion, we have chosen to include two dilemmas. The dilemmas have emerged through topics that the informants have talked about during the interviews. The topics have been interesting and thought-provoking for us, therefore we decided to take the discussion further and set up these dilemmas:

1. A global organization vs. local ownership and control
2. Project quality vs. project quantity

Monetary policy and the transfer of power from the north to the south have been a topic of discussion in the development aid industry for a long time. From the local partners' perspective, international organizations may be perceived as donors and those in control of the money. This

creates an asymmetrical power relationship between international organizations, like Plan International, and local partners or COs. Has the COVID pandemic had a positive or negative impact on this power relationship?

On one side, it can be questioned whether the distance between Plan Norway and the COs have become even greater, and the power difference even stronger. This suspicion is based on the personal relationships that have been weakened due to the travel restrictions. Physical interaction plays an important role in team spirit and feeling like *one* organization. On the other hand, it is important to create space for the local partners so they can take more ownership. COVID may have been a push for moving the decisions locally because of the travelling restrictions. However, when it comes to moving power from north to south and for decisions to be made locally, it is important to emphasize that international organizations should not withdraw completely and agree on everything. There must be a common understanding for what role the parties have, and at which phases the international organizations, and the local partners take control of the projects. The organization as whole works towards the same goals, but every part included should feel ownership to the project. The dilemma here is how and when to take and give control.

One interviewee said that aid organizations sometimes take on too many projects. The positive and negative consequences of this action should be discussed. If Plan Norway decides to save money and time on not traveling, there is “left over” money and time to be spent on more projects. This can serve a lot of benefits, like helping even more people in the world, providing salaries to the employees, or saving money from traveling for the opportunity to make even greater changes for those in need. However, there are also disadvantages with this strategy. If money and time saved from not traveling is used for even more projects, there is a chance of overestimating the work capacity. Since “overbooking” has been said to be a problem even before the pandemic, how will even more time and even more money available for other projects affect the ability to achieve goals in already established projects? Especially because of the already experienced challenges with digital communication. Will the result just turn out to be a lot of good beginnings and few good changes? The dilemma here is how to delegate time and money to projects based on quality vs quantity.

5.7. Summary of discussion

Suggestions for future actions

- Consider the concept of hybrid office since many of the employees enjoy working partly from home.
- Evaluate norms and structure regarding digital meetings and home office work. This could be done through the initiation of dialogue – “how should we behave when working virtually?”
- Keep up the use of already established digital tools, such as Teams-chat. This knowledge should be kept and taken advantage of in the future.
- Be innovative about the use of new digital tools, especially for informal communication.
- Be lenient with time when using digital solutions. Personal interactions can be particularly useful.
- Traveling is needed when a digital solution is not sufficient for the progress in the projects.
- Both employees’ motivation and necessity for project progression are relevant factors in future routines for traveling.

6.0 CONCLUDING REMARKS AND FUTURE ACTIONS

6.1 Concluding remarks

With the presentation of findings from our interviews with employees at the PI department we have analyzed and connected it to different organizational theories in order to answer *how the corona pandemic has changed the way Plan International Norway performs its tasks and what challenges and opportunities has this situation created in terms of communication and interaction*. We have throughout this report suggested possible actions the department can take in the future to improve their way of communicating and interacting with each other and COs.

In our findings we found that the shift to home office was hard and created confusion on how to structure a new digital workday. We learned that interviewees forgot to take breaks and worked in the late afternoon or evenings. However, through improvisation and sensemaking the employees enabled ways to comprehend new work settings and after a few months were better to separate work hours and family/private hours. There is an overall understanding that face-to-face interaction is vital in the sense of letting colleagues get known to each other. The physical meeting is understood as a more appropriate arena for the employees to build relationships and trust among each other. The informal conversations that take place in between the meeting agendas, by the coffee machines and during lunch breaks is of immense value for the work spirit. The informal arenas of communication have been harder to maintain or replace with the shift to an online workplace. We found that these arenas serve an important social functioning and impacts network and/or relations building, which again impacts the work and trust within the organization. Due to online interaction the lack of body language impacts the work process, and mainly in a negative way. For instance, some expressed that the digital meetings are strictly work related and leaves little room for informal chats. We discovered a lot of frustration around this new type of work relation, and especially from newly employed people who haven't met their colleagues or been to the CO to see the projects themselves. However, the lack of an informal communication arena also imposes a challenge, and opportunity. A new and more frequent online communication has maintained the trust to the process and people at COs. The possibility then exists in continuing to build on this trust to maintain a mutual bond post-COVID. Another positive side of working online is a better access and opportunity to watch more workshops, training, seminars, and conferences online.

The informal interaction from travelling to the CO is valuable, and it is important for the POs to be able to see the projects on their own to get a deeper understanding of the projects. We found that the improvisation that occurs on travel is a driving force for a dynamic project process and that travel is a motivation for several of the employees. The combination of less travels plus more frequent online communication, both work related and informal chats, could possibly limit the need for travels and increase the level of ownership over the work being completed.

6.2 Possible future actions

To continue improving the communication and interaction we have pointed out a few suggestions Plan Norway can consider implementing in their department. We suggest a combination of the work setting, a hybrid solution, with new clear rules or guidelines to when and how often it is acceptable to work from home. We believe it will reduce the question on why someone can work from home when others can't and will give the employees better flexibility and option to work in a quieter space with cognitive demanding tasks. The digital tools that already are in use should be maintained or increased. For instance, the use of Teams-chat for more informal or personal interactions, and use Teams-meetings for more frequent communication with the COs, but leave room for informal chats, not only work related matters. There are many digital programs that are more suited for informal chats/arenas that Plan Norway should consider using. We also suggest establishing common rules and norms for acceptable behavior in Teams-meetings. These new norms can be elaborated with the employees and what they expect of each other in virtual meetings.

Travel is valuable and an important part for several reasons. For the majority of the employee's travels are a big motivation which affects their work and eventually the projects. However, we see the possibility of reducing the number of travels a year and suggest to carefully consider who travels where. Travels to conferences, seminars and such can be reduced or filmed/live streamed so that it is more accessible for all. For the newly employed or for people working on newly established projects it will take a much longer time to establish trust or a good collaboration, and they should be a priority.

6.3 Further research

When conducting this study, we realized that there is little new research done on digital communication and interaction in international aid organizations. Since the pandemic had its outburst a little over a year ago, we assume and hope that there is research conducted right now. Prior to beginning this study, we discussed if culture is a factor when communicating and interacting digitally. By culture we did not talk about organizational culture, but individual and sociological culture. We concluded that culture would not be within the criteria for our assignment, but very interesting for further research.

Regarding possible further research it could also be interesting to see how the new way of cooperating can affect the projects in the long run. By that we mean if the organization reduces their amount of travels, not only to COs but also to seminars, and conferences hosted by their head office, and increase their digital meetings, how will that in the long run affect their projects and Plan Internationals work? With reduced cost on travels there is possibly an opportunity for Plan Norway to increase the number of projects, to work more effectively using digital tools and to align the members of the organization by the frequent sharing of information.

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Attachment 1

Insights from previous literature on the deployment of virtual team (adopted from Kilcullen et al., 2021).

Theme	Insights	Action items
Organization level		
Norm setting	Tip #1: Organizations should establish team norms in collaboration with team members at the inception of virtual teams, while reinforcing and revisiting them through its practices and policies.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increase engagement by contextualizing team member's efforts • Apply response policy to clarify communication expectations • Utilize team charter to ensure everyone's voices are heard
Performance monitoring	Tip #2: Organizations should engage in frequent check-ins to monitor performances and provide feedback. Where possible, these check-ins should be using technology such as video conferencing, to provide instantaneous feedback and empower employees.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure performance monitoring is not just the team leader's responsibility • Invest time to empower employees to set and monitor their own performance • Draw from technology for a quicker and more accurate performance monitoring system
Team level		
Leadership	Tip #3: Virtual team leaders should participate in training to quickly build the tools to act as change agents, reinforcing team norms and overseeing team members' processes.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Quickly invest in training to supplement team leader's skills • Team leaders should lead by example, promoting team norms • Be vigilant of team processes to recognize when early intervention is needed
Supportive mechanisms	Tip #4: Enact supportive systems (e.g., team charters, team building, and feedback) to better manage virtual teamwork while providing a psychologically safe environment.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reinforce and promote the use of team charter consistent with what was set by organizational norms • Draw from team-building exercises to build rapport and break barriers emerging from cultural differences • Provide a platform that is learning oriented where feedback and input are welcomed

Individual level

Communication	<p>Tip #5: Each individual in the virtual team, including the leader, should be held accountable regarding communication frequency, quality, timeliness, and content. Technology should be used to increase opportunities to contribute as well as promote closed-loop communication to avoid errors in information exchange.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hold individuals accountable for their contributions • Leverage from technology to establish good communication flow • Provide different modes of communication to increase accessibility
Flexibility	<p>Tip #6: While still defining clear objectives and plans, virtual teams should maintain flexibility to facilitate adaptation to changing conditions (e.g., allow for adjustment of work schedules and meetings to accommodate potential work–life conflicts).</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Be ready to adapt and reprioritize work as situations change and evolve • Consider team member’s home life to understand one’s constraints • Provide continuity in communication but also be mindful about other communication modes

Attachment 2

Interview guide

Informant code: (eks. A-U)

- Thank you for your participation. How are you doing today? (Introduction)
- We want, and hope, to assist Plan Norway to map how you changed your ways of work after the outbreak of the pandemic and what opportunities or challenges you may face by working differently.
- We would like to record this interview in order to work with the data sufficiently and analyze it thoroughly. This recording will be stored in a digital "storage hotel". Your contact information will not be stored in the same "storage hotel". Nobody will be able to track the answers to you. Is it okay that we record this interview?

Yes / No - Turn on the recording.

- Okay, the recording is now playing. Can you please confirm again that it's okay for you that we are recording this interview?

YES

- Thank you. We sent you a letter of consent. Did you understand the terms and conditions of the interview and are okay with them? YES
- We would like to emphasize that participation in this interview is voluntary, and your answers will be anonymous. Only the six of us in the project group and our supervisor will have access to your answers. Your managers or colleagues at Plan International will not have access to your replies in this interview, nor be able to track any information back to you. Your answers and your contact information such as your name are stored in two separate storage disks. Nothing in our final report will be trackable back to you as an individual.
- Do you have any questions before we start? Feel free to ask any questions during the interview.
- We estimate that the interview approximately will take 1 hour, and we would like to contact you again if we have any quick follow-up questions afterwards.

INTRO

1. How long have you been working at Plan International Norway?
2. What is your role and main task focus?
3. What education do you have?
4. Why do you work with Plan?
5. Have you worked in another department in Plan International, in Norway or abroad, or perhaps in another aid organization?

Our thesis (for the time being) is:

“In what way has the corona pandemic changed the way Plan International Norway performs its tasks, and what challenges and opportunities has this situation created in terms of interaction and communication?”

6. Do you have any immediate thoughts about the thesis?

Category 1: PROCESS AND LEARNING PERSPECTIVES / CHANGE OF ORGANIZATION

7. In what way has the corona pandemic affected your normal workday?
 - a. Positive and negative examples
8. What changes have you made regarding your work methods since the start of the lockdown in March and until now?
 - a. Do you have a lifehack for dealing with this work situation during this breakout/Is there something you have found useful to do to make the situation easier these days?
9. How has your use of digital tools changed after the pandemic?
 - a. What digital tools do you use? Example of programs you use?
 - b. Do you prefer some programs over others? Why?
10. What changes has Plan made in the way the organization works?
 - a. How has your experience been of implementing these changes?
 - b. (How has the follow-up from the leader been through these changes?)

- c. (Do you have any examples of previous major changes that Plan Norge has done?)
11. Which of these new working methods have worked and which have not worked?
- a. Examples
 - b. What have you learned from these changes?
12. Which changes do you hope will be maintained after the pandemic is over?
- a. Why?

Category 2: TRUST / CONTROL / COOPERATION PROGRAM COUNTRY

13. How has it been to work more digitally, (when it comes to cooperating with the program countries)?
14. In what way has it affected your cooperation with the Program countries?
- a. Do you have any examples?
15. In what way do you have to work with the Program countries to maintain your mutual trust?
- a. More frequent meetings digitally?
 - b. Other examples?
16. How do you think your colleagues in the Program countries have experienced the change in your working methods?
17. Do you think that the way you work and collaborate today is the correct solution in the long run? Why / why not?

CLOSING QUESTIONS

18. Do you have any thoughts about how you should work in the future?
- a. Collaboration with the Program countries
 - b. Economically
 - c. More climate-friendly
 - d. Money
19. Are there any functionalities with digital tools you use that could make a digital working day easier?

20. Would you like to continue working in a more digital way, as today, or would you like to work more like you did before the pandemic?
- a. Why?
 - b. How do you think Plan relates to digitization services after the pandemic?
21. “Monday morning miracle” - Imagine that a miracle takes place. Your dreams for Plan Norway AS A WORKING PLACE comes true overnight. What has changed and how does your work life look like?

Thank you for your time. Have a nice day!

Attachment 3

Participation in UiO research project

Prosjektforum - collaboration between UiO and Plan Norge

This is the formal question about your participation in our research project where the purpose is to map out and examine Plan Norge's challenges and opportunities as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. In this form we will provide you with information about the objectives of the project and what participation entails for you.

Purpose

The COVID-19 pandemic and the restrictions that followed has made cooperation between Plan Norge and international offices challenging. The purpose with this project is to examine the needs, possibilities and challenges that the pandemic has presented. We will look at the digital tools and routines used by Plan Norge in connection to the international offices of the organization. This includes problems which may have occurred within Plan Norges organization, but also how the cooperation across borders have been affected. The goal of the project is to examine how Plan Norge have handled the situation thus far, how it has affected the work between countries and possibly how other Norwegian organizations have made use of digital solutions during the COVID-19 pandemic.

This project is a part of the master's course Organization, leadership and work at the University of Oslo.

There is a possibility that one or several students of this project group will use data collected in this project in a master thesis. It is optional to participate in this and you will have an option to consent or refuse consent by responding by email to this letter. The only information about individuals that will be stored is information needed to conduct follow-up interviews at a later date. Personal information of any sort will not be included in any report. It will be stored securely then deleted.

Who is responsible for the research project?

The institute of sociology and social geography at the University of Oslo is responsible for the project, in cooperation with Plan Norge.

Why are you asked to participate?

We have in cooperation with Plan Norge, chosen to ask you to participate in this project to provide insights and information needed to prepare a report. We will interview approximately 15-20 individuals that work at Plan Norge, representatives from COs and representative(s) from Plan International.

What does participation entail?

- Participation in the project entails a 45-60 minute interview. The interview will contain questions about work methods, how your workday has been affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. Central themes are digitalization, routines and work methods.
- The interview will be recorded and transcribed, where any personal information about you will be anonymized and stored in accordance with laws and guidelines.
- It may be relevant with a follow-up interview at a later date. It is optional to participate in any follow up interview, and you will be contacted with a request if that is the case.

It is optional to participate.

It is optional to participate in the project. If you choose to participate, you can, at any time, withdraw your consent without giving a reason as to why you wish to withdraw. Any information from you will then be deleted. It will not have any negative consequences for you if you do not wish to participate or choose to withdraw at a later date.

Your privacy – how we will store and use information.

We will only use information for the purposes explained in this form. We treat the information with high confidentiality and in accordance with privacy regulations.

- Individuals with access to information given is: students in the project group, our supervisor, and programme coordinator.

- Names and contact information will be replaced with a code key, which is then stored securely in a separate document away from other data.
- The data we collect will be stored on a secure cloud service approved by the University of Oslo.
- Any personal information will be stored securely on a separate cloud service provided by the University of Oslo. This will be done in accordance to rules and regulations.
- Participants in the project will be anonymized and it will not be possible for others to recognize any individuals in the finalized report.
- Any personal information will be deleted at the end of the project. In the case where participants consent to have information stored for a potential masters thesis, the information will be deleted 30.06.2023.

What happens to your personal information when we conclude the research project?

Information gathered will be anonymized. Any personal information needed, like contact information, will be stored securely in accordance with rules and regulations until 30.06.2023 in the event that one of us is using this data for a master thesis. If you do not consent to have your information stored for a potential masters thesis, the information will be deleted after the project deadline 19. May 2021.

Your rights

As long as we store personal information, you have a right to:

- Know which personal information is stored about you and have a copy of the information provided to you.
- Have any personal information about you corrected.
- Have any personal information about you deleted.
- Send a complaint to «Datatilsynet» (Data protection authority) about the handling/processing of your information.

What gives us a right to handle your personal information

We handle your personal information based on your consent in this form.

On behalf of The institute for sociology and social geography at the University of Oslo, NSD – Norwegian center for research data AS – has assessed that the handling of personal information in this project is in accordance with privacy regulations.

Where can I find more information?

If you have any questions about the project, or wish to exercise your rights, please contact:

- The institute of sociology and social geography at The University of Oslo at Lars Erik Kjekshus (l.e.kjekshus@sosgeo.uio.no) or Tomas Berglund (kjberglu@uio.no)
- Our privacy representative: personvernombud@uio.no

If you have any questions regarding NSDs (Norwegian center for research data AS) assessment of the project, please contact:

- NSD – Norsk senter for forskningsdata AS at email: (personverntjenester@nsd.no) or by telephone at: 55 58 21 17.

Kind regards

Arne Bygdås

Erik André Thorsen

(Supervisor)

(Student)

To consent to participate in the project please respond to the same email you received this letter. You can consent by simply replying «I consent to participate in an interview relating to this project.» OR you can choose to voice your consent at the start of the interview.

If you consent to us storing your information for a potential master thesis, simply consent by replying «I consent to have my information handled until the end of the master thesis» OR voice your consent at the start of the interview.