Linnæus University
Sweden

Master Thesis

The Current Effects of Post-Covid-19 on Leadership in Terms of Workforce Development

The Importance of The Role of Leadership in Developing The Workforce in The Health Care Sector in Post-Covid-19
Case Study: Mörbylånga Municipality, Kommun

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Abstract:

This thesis explores the challenges associated with developing the health care workforce in a Swedish municipality in the post-Covid-19 era. And it explores leaders' perspectives on workforce development. The study uses semi-structured interviews and thematic analysis to uncover key themes and gain insight into the challenges and opportunities these leaders face. The results reveal major challenges associated with the shortage of manpower and the difficulty of attracting and retaining new employees. The results of the thesis reveal also many important aspects that need to be worked on to develop the healthcare workforce in Sweden.

The most important of which are long-term strategic planning, recruitment and retention strategies, data-based decision-making, developing communication between leaders and employees and various levels and departments within healthcare institutions, coordination and cooperation with other institutions and government agencies, work. In addition to the importance of life-work balance, promoting a culture of education and continuous development. The findings of this thesis provide valuable insights for policy-makers and operating leaders in Swedish municipalities, particularly in the healthcare sector, with regard to developing strategies to meet workforce needs. This thesis also provides a knowledge base for future research by providing a contextual understanding and theoretical and practical knowledge in relation to workforce development in the field of healthcare.

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Chapter1: Introduction

This chapter aims to provide the reader with a broader understanding of the chosen topic. In the "Introduction" section, we will provide a brief explanation about the current situation related to the long term consequences of post-Covid-19. And what are the challenges in terms of workforce development facing companies and institutions today, after more than three years of the spread of Covid-19. And we highlight the important role of the exceptional role of effective leadership at this stage in regard to workforce development. Furthermore, the problem and the purpose are identified and research questions are developed. The theoretical concepts are then addressed, and outline of the thesis structure will be provided. In Sweden, the healthcare sector with all its divisions is considered one of the largest service sectors in the country, of which municipalities are mostly the responsibilities for this sector which employs thousands of workers. And this sector still suffers from several problems, especially with regard to the development of the workforce after the Covid-19 pandemic.

1.1 Background

International conflicts such as the war in Ukraine, fluctuations in the oil and energy market, the development of digitization, migrations towards Europe, the continuing effects of the Covid-19, the fear of the emergence of new pandemics and the continuous technological development. All these factors that we are witnessing today have created a state of uncertainty, as every day may witness a development or change at the economic, social, security, health and political levels. All these accelerated global transformations lead to the restructuring of the labour market and leadership styles. As institutions and companies work to adapt to long-term changes and retrain workers to adapt to these changes and ensure effective productivity.

The first outbreak of the Corona virus was in Wuhan, China, in December 2019 had the greatest impact on the work of companies and institutions. Since then, the virus has spread

worldwide, bringing with it many challenges and problems that have affected millions of people around the world (Gozgor G, 2021). The pandemic has led to economic stagnation and uncertainty for many organisations and companies around the world. This certainly affects the processes of developing work teams and developing tools and methods of work of work teams (Williams, 2020). To prevent the spread of the virus, governments enforcing restrictions on everyday physical activities, schools, offices, restaurants, and theatres, were shut down, forcing people to work, study, and practically do almost everything from home (Onyeaka et al, 2021, P: 4-6).

One of the most important challenges posed by the pandemic is that many companies and institutions are forced to work remotely and communicate via the Internet. Consequently, institutions and companies had to struggle to maintain a certain level of productivity and cooperation, and thus this led to the application of new technologies, work methods, and leadership tools to maintain the cohesion of the work team. Problems related to the supply chain also appeared, which in turn led to a shortage of important goods and materials needed by institutions and companies operating in various fields (Onyeaka et al, 2021). Thus, leaders have had to work to adapt to the changes that evolve every day and ensure a stable supply chain. The pandemic also brought with it very large economic and financial problems that cannot be summarised in several pages. We consequently see sharp discontinuity between their impact on labour markets before and after the pandemic (Lund et al, 2021). And the challenges posed by the pandemic with regard to health, public safety and employee safety cannot be forgotten. The pandemic forced organisations and companies to implement certain preventive policies to prevent the spread of the pandemic, and this in turn affected the effectiveness of these institutions (Altman, A S, 2020).

Today, more than three years after the onset of the Covid-19 pandemic, there are still many challenges facing governmental and non-governmental organisations and companies. We may not be able to identify all of these challenges because they may differ according to the context, place and nature of the work of each institution or company. But in general,

we can say that these challenges that we are still observing and that may continue in the future include several aspects such as:

A- Uncertainty: According to the International Labor Organization (ILO, 2021), many companies and institutions are still suffering from a state of economic, social and administrative uncertainty. Although the world has recovered to a large extent from the Covid-19, there is still a state of uncertainty regarding the future. As the pandemic led to the loss of more than 255 million jobs, recovery from this matter may be required until the end of the current year 2023 (ILO, 2021). At the same time, this state of uncertainty led to an increase in the demand for labour in various fields, such as health care. There are also other problems related to the supply chain, as the pandemic has led to major problems globally. For example, according to a report issued by McKinsey & Company (2020), the pandemic revealed widespread defects and problems worldwide with regard to supply problems and the dependence of companies and institutions on individual suppliers instead of expanding and diversifying supply networks to ensure flexibility and continuity of work.

B- Cybersecurity risks: The spread of the pandemic and the health concerns that accompanied it led to the spread of a culture of remote work and thus the increasing reliance on digital platforms.This opened the door for some to launch cyberattacks that could disrupt the work and effectiveness of some institutions, which in turn affected the performance of the workforce(Ponemon Institute, 2020). At the level of Sweden, Sweden witnessed many electronic breaches that disrupted the work of many government and private institutions. The efforts of cyber security institutions in Sweden increased by 90% after the spread of the Covid-19 (Försvarsindustriföreningen, 2021). In the health care sector in Sweden for example. According to a report by the National Cyber Security Center (NCSC), health care organisations in Sweden are at risk of cyber-attacks due to the sensitive information that health care organisations contain (NCSC, 2020). In the same context, many institutions and companies are still struggling to develop secure digital platforms. This is in order to keep pace with technological development and to improve its operations at the internal and external levels (Deloitte, 2020).

C- Management of the workforce:

As for the biggest challenge still facing many institutions and companies, it is the management of the workforce. Therefore, the development of organisations, the development of employees and leaders at the individual and collective levels has become more important than ever. This topic has formed a point of attraction for many academic researchers. Where many companies have had to lay off a lot of employees after the spread of the Covid-19, and some companies have had to adapt to remote work. While some companies are still suffering from a shortage of manpower and a lack of experience and problems related to the development of the workforce (SHRM, 2021). This is the focus of our thesis "development of the healthcare workforce in Sweden".

Workforce management problems include many dimensions related to managing remote work, mental and psychological health of employees, managing, retaining expertise, diversity, equality, inclusion and skills development. In terms of training employees, Covid-19 has accelerated the adoption of fully digitised approaches to create the best of in-person learning through live video and social sharing (Agrawal et al, 2020). For example, phone call meetings, video call meetings, or some other distance working methods were not used that kind of often before. As the Covid-19 led to employees feeling exhausted and stressed, and thus decreased production efficiency, especially the virus has a serious impact on the health and safety of organisations (Didem Ş et al, 2022).

Therefore, organisations need to take relevant measures to reduce the impact of Covid-19 on their organisations. Work conditions can have negative or beneficial effects on the safety, health, and well-being of workers (Peters et al, 2022). It was reported that 78% of employees around the world were negatively affected by the consequences of the pandemic (World Economic Forum, 2021). That is why many companies seek to address these problems after the end of the Covid-19 by ensuring the psychological and mental health of employees, ensuring their well-being and developing their skills (Perrone et al, 2021).

Most academic researchers emphasised the importance of creating a culture of development and continuous learning to acquire new experiences and competencies that contribute to enhancing the effectiveness of companies in the future (Holmes et al, 2021). Reports indicate that there is a strong tendency for companies to retrain and refine workers' skills in a sustainable manner and in line with global changes, especially after the spread of the Covid-19 pandemic. However, most reports indicate that many institutions and companies do not work sufficiently to develop the expertise of low-skilled workers due to economic costs (Mahboubi P and Mokaya M, 2022).

According to a report by PWC (pwc, 2021), 77% of CEOs believe that the lack of experienced employees threatens the future and viability of organisations. The Covid-19 has also highlighted the importance of diversity and equality within an organisation. Where many employees feel isolated and disconnected due to the instructions related to combating the Covid-19. Therefore, companies and institutions in the post-Covid-19 world tend to enhance their employees' sense of belonging and promote the values of fairness, equality and developing the skills and experiences. This helps them adapt to continuous changes, face challenges and ensure the quality and effectiveness of work.

A survey was conducted in 2021 that included many leaders and executives, where 53% of them stressed the importance of supporting, refining and developing the skills of their employees in order to ensure the effectiveness of institutions and companies (Deloitte, 2021). Workforce development, as a concept, has evolved to become a culture of development at the individual and collective level that affects the culture of organisations and encourages learning and the acquisition of more experiences (Bersin, 2018). Many discussions have emerged about the long-term post-Covid-19 effects, especially at the level of employees and leaders. Most of these researches reached common results, the most important of which is that in order to get rid of and recover from the consequences of post-Covid-19, leaders must develop the strategy of decision making and strengthen communication methods, show support and empathy, be flexible, listening to the opinions

of workers, show optimism and support and develop work teams and its organisation (Brownlee, 2020).

Majority of these challenges referred to above can only be overcome through effective leadership capable of guiding institutions and companies in times of uncertainty and constant change. As D, Auria and Smet (2020) argue that the leaders need during a crisis is not a predefined response plan but behaviours and mindsets that will prevent them from overreacting to yesterday's developments and help them look ahead. Reports showed that successful leaders are the ones who were able to show the ability to adapt to the post Covid-19 era, we mean the leaders who enjoy flexibility, intelligence, and confidence. These skills were a major actor in overcoming institutions and companies post-Covid-19 obstacles (Deloitte, 2020). Especially that employees expect trust, transparency from their leaders, effective communication, discussing decisions with them, and showing empathy (Edelman, 2021). Therefore, the way of communication in an organisation will change after Covid-19. Thoughtful, frequent communication shows that leaders are following the situation and adjusting their responses as they learn more (D'Auria & Smet, 2020).

It is also expected from successful leadership in the post-Covid-19 world to encourage innovation, refining the skills and experiences of employees at all levels and work to develop work teams (McKinsey, 2021). And that is in order to promote rapid problem solving and execution under high-stress, chaotic conditions. Therefore, leaders organise a wide network of teams and contacts that help make the right decisions in the post-Covid-19 era (D'Auria & Smet, 2020). This is consistent with the claim of Tantum C et al (2015) that the most important factor in developing work teams and making the right decisions in times of uncertainty is effective leadership. This includes strengthening the balance between work and the personal lives of employees, developing skills of employees and providing incentives and compensation (Pwc, 2021). Especially that showing empathy, transparency and open dialogue with employees are essential factors for overcoming internal or external crises in organisations and companies (Amy, C, 2020).

1.2 Problem discuss

Like many countries, Sweden is still affected by the long term consequences of post-Covid-19. Especially with regard to institutions working in the field of health care and providing health services to the elderly. Since workers in this field work long hours, these institutions suffer from many challenges for a long time even before the spreading of Covid-19 (Löfgren E, 2018). Qualitative training is critical, especially in the wake of Covid-19, to improve employee quality and safety. And that is in order for capacity building around cross cutting skills (Zemmel et al, 2022).

In recent years, many articles have discussed the issues of post-Covid-19 effects, and how they affect workforce development in general, and in particular in Sweden. Where Svaleryd, H (2020) stresses the importance of developing effective policies for the development of the workforce in the labour market in general, with the aim of addressing the effects of Covid-19. She argues the importance of investing in the workforce by developing its skills through training programmes, with the aim of adapting the workforce to the constant changes due to the effects of Covid-19.

Likewise, for Calmfors L and Seim A (2020), they stress the importance of the role of workforce development through development programs and expertise development in order to adapt to the post-Covid-19 world. However, we note that There are gaps in how to recognize these challenges, and how to build effective long-term strategies to address them. Therefore, we seek, through the "Mörbylånga kommun" case study, to explore the current and long-term effects resulting from the Covid-19 pandemic in regard workforce development in the healthcare sector, and to discuss the role that effective leadership must play in addressing these effects.

In Sweden, municipalities constitute autonomous entities with independent structures and fiscal frameworks. Although these municipalities are not under the direct authority of the state, municipalities are bound to adhere to national laws and guidelines, and are expected to cooperate with state entities in select domains. The municipalities finance their

operations through local taxes and fees, in addition to governmental grants and subsidies (Rattsø J, 2010).

Municipalities in Sweden have a broad responsibility for providing a variety of services and functions at the local level. Education: Municipalities are responsible for providing pre-schools, primary schools, secondary schools and adult education at the local level. Infrastructure: Municipalities are responsible for providing and maintaining infrastructure such as roads, water and sewerage, sanitation and waste management. Building permits and environmental issues. Culture and leisure: Municipalities are responsible for providing cultural and leisure activities, such as libraries, sports facilities, cultural centres and events. Business and work: The municipalities also work to create a good local labour market and support local companies (SKR, 2023). Health care and social support departments are one of most departments affected by long term consequences by Covid-19. And this department is responsible for providing health care and social support for the elderly, people with disabilities, children and young people and other people who need support. This can include aged care, home care, medical care and rehabilitation.

Since the beginning of the Covid-19, most municipal institutions in Sweden are seeking to develop their policies in order to recover from the consequences of this Covid-19 era. As they seek to invest in the development of digital platforms and infrastructure and develop the workforce skills. And that is in order to facilitate remote work within a safe environment and speedy business execution and increased adaptability to new business methods. Most municipalities also seek to improve the work environment in order to ensure employee job satisfaction and retention then can ensure their employees mental and physical health (Bergström, L. 2021).

Despite the concerted efforts made to rebound from the effects of Covid-19, municipalities in Sweden continue to grapple with the challenges of workforce development. Whereas most sectors in the Swedish market still need to develop the workforce and improve the skills of workers in order to meet market changes (Holmberg A, 2021). The healthcare

sector in general is in great need of workforce development, and this is the main objective of this paper. It is an exploration of the long term consequences resulting from the Covid-19 pandemic with regard to workforce development and how effective leadership should work to counter these consequences and develop the workforce in the healthcare sector.

1.3 Purpose

The aim of this thesis is to explore the current and long term consequences of post-Covid-19 for workforce development in one of Swedish's municipalities "Mörbylånga kommun". We focus on the leadership's efforts to develop the workforce in all departments in general, and in the health care "Elderly care" departments in particular. We are exploring the importance of the role of effective leadership in developing the workforce in the municipality in order to meet the market changes. We also provide suggestions for leaders to develop future strategies to address the problems associated with workforce development in the healthcare field.

In this paper, we examine a specific case, which is the municipality of Mörbylånga. Where healthcare organisations experience many problems in the post-Covid-19 era due to the burnout of health care workers caused by the overworked workload during Covid-19 (Hancock & Padhi, 2023). So, there are several objectives for this dissertation, the main objective is to study and provide a deeper understanding about the ongoing post-Covid-19 effects on workforce development in general. What are the post-Covid-19 consequences that affect the level of employee effectiveness and workforce development. What role is leadership supposed to play in workforce development and how should this be done? In addition, this paper highlights the importance of flexibility and enhancing communication in the leadership of government institutions and between leaders and employees to ensure the continuous development of the level of efficiency of employees, and to ensure the development and competence of leaders.

We argue in this paper that regardless of the leadership style, effective leadership is the main and most important factor in developing and improving the performance of institutions in general and the development of the workforce in particular. Especially in the post-Covid-19 era. As developing the performance of the workforce requires a higher level of flexibility, communication, motivating employees and developing their skills. Where this thesis contributes to identifying the best tools and strategies based on evidence and deep analysis that leadership may adopt to improve the level of productivity, promote a positive culture within the institutions of healthcare, and develop the workforce in general. We will be able through this thesis, to provide theoretical concepts and practical results that may be applicable in other institutions. Thus, this thesis will help the municipality of Mörbylånga, and other governmental or non-governmental institutions, to develop new leadership and management methods that contribute to enhancing productivity, enhancing employee satisfaction, and increasing their efficiency.

1.4 Research question

Main question: What are the main current challenges of post-Covid-19 facing the leadership in Mörbylånga municipality in terms of workforce development (Health care sector)?

Sub-question: What is the important role the leadership is supposed to play in the municipality of Mörbylånga with regard to developing the workforce in post-Covid-19 era and how (Healthcare sector particularly)?

1.5 Thesis outline

This thesis is divided into six main chapters. This thesis started with an introduction section. In the second chapter, we provide an extensive explanation of the theories and theoretical concepts that discussed the issues of manpower development and leadership strategies. The third chapter provides an extensive explanation of the tedious methodology in collecting and analysing data, and we discuss the challenges and ethical and

methodological considerations. In the fourth section, we explain our findings through the collected primary and secondary data. Then, in the fifth chapter, we discuss and analyse this data and review the main findings that we reached and compare them with previous researches that studied workforce development. Then we conclude the thesis in the last chapter, which is the conclusion. Where we briefly review what has been done and what are the results we reached to answer the thesis questions and point out the most important things to remember and to include in future studies.

Chapter 2: Conceptual Background

This part of the paper provides a base on this research, using sufficient information from existing literature, to explain the long-term effect of Covid-19 on workforce development, and the theoretical background to the research topic in terms of literature by outlining the theories and concepts used throughout the study. Secondly, it presents the theoretical background for the following sections that are considered as key factors: post-Covid-19, Transformational leadership, workforce development, flexible leadership and servant leadership. It then outlines the impact of Covid-19 on the workforce and its impact on the healthcare area.

Throughout the research, we identify reliable and relevant sources for research that is related to and supportive of our goal. The literature has been compiled through previous academic work, including past investigations, hypotheses, and studies that have been gathered through Google Scholar, Linne University Library, ScienceDirect, Science journals and some particularly pertinent news with their literature search. For this study, a qualitative research technique is necessary since it enables the authors to compare primary and secondary data. Additionally, a clearer understanding of certain patterns may be gained, aiding in the drawing of conclusions.

Also, through this section, we can provide several critical points in the development of this paper. Through this section, we can provide a conceptual framework in order to define the broader academic context by clarifying the relevance of studies and theories related to the aim of this thesis. Thus, understanding the importance of the research question and its potential contribution to providing a deeper understanding of a complex phenomenon which is how to develop the workforce in the health care sector in Sweden after Covid-19 pandemic and the role of leadership in that. We can also, through this section, define and clarify basic concepts, theories and terminology, which are central to this thesis. This helps build a common understanding between the researcher and the reader, ensuring that the discussion and analysis in subsequent sections are clear and understandable. This helps us as researchers to establish the theoretical framework that will guide the study, ensuring that this thesis is based on clear scientific concepts.

Through this section, we can show the extent of our experience and knowledge as researchers of the literature and theories relevant to the objective of the thesis. This, in turn, helps establish the credibility of the paper for the reader. We also present a general review of the literature that discussed workforce development in the post-Covid-19 era in general. We try to focus mainly on the Swedish context. We identify some gaps that will be covered in this thesis or may be future research projects.

In Addition, a critical review of previous research helps us develop our awareness of the problems and gaps in our study (Saunders M et al, 2019, p: 72-74). Through this, it is possible to show the extent of our understanding of the topic and our scientific position within the broad context of the topic. In this case, we are exploring past and current studies that have addressed workforce development issues in the post-Covid-19 era in general. The goal of the literature review is not only a brief study of pertinent research but also an in-depth analysis of previous research so that we may compare and contrast them. Thus developing a strong argument for our aim of the research, covering gaps not previously noted, and forming the basis upon which the research is based (Ibid: 75-78). We seek to provide a systematic literature review in order to conduct an organised search to identify

all studies relevant to the main research question. Then we select the appropriate literature based on specific criteria to ensure a broad discussion of workforce development in the post-Covid-19 era (Ibid: 110 -111).

2.1 Workforce development

From the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) standpoint workforce development means ensuring that capable and effective public workforces are equipped to face new policy challenges and greater uncertainty. So workforce development can include reskilling employees, employee well-being, encouraging and motivating employees, organisational flexibility, psychological and health problems for the employee, remote work, work-life balance, sick leave, and so on. There are many other challenges that will be studied in more detail. And by examining the long-term effects of post-Covid-19, leaders can determine the most effective ways to manage the workforce. Like the point OECD made, recruitment systems, continuous learning, internal mobility, and career development are all tools that can be used to develop a workforce with the needed skills.

Therefore, there are multiple methods through which workforce development programs may be implemented, such as apprenticeships, career counselling, job search aid, and continuing education. Workforce development emphasises human development and increases morale, retention, and efficiency. If organisations ignore the people who contribute to their business, they face a risk of losing talent that may develop and adapt to their organisation (Wooll, 2021).

First of all, workforce development may increase productivity. Training and professional development can help people become more productive and successful in their jobs, which will improve business productivity and competitiveness. Leaders may increase the productivity and effectiveness of their workforce by investing in the skills and knowledge of their employees. Employees can learn new skills and information that can help them do

their jobs more successfully when they have access to training and development opportunities. Employees that are more prepared to handle their jobs and responsibilities can be more productive. Additionally, workforce development can keep employees abreast of emerging market trends and technological advancements, allowing the company to remain competitive. As a result, employees can innovate and develop since they are better equipped to spot and seize new chances.

Second, workforce development can build relationships that can reduce turnover. Simply having personal relationships enhances their work satisfaction and increases the probability that they may not resign (Marzullo, 2018). Strengthening the relationships between employees and their leaders through workforce development can assist lower turnover. Leaders can show their dedication to the long-term success of their employees by supporting their skills and career development. Leaders can additionally promote a culture of learning and development throughout the company. Employees are more inclined to stick with their bosses and experience a feeling of loyalty to the organisation when they feel respected and encouraged in their professional objectives. This results in decreased attrition rates and cheaper hiring and training expenses for new hires (Ibid).

Additionally, workforce development assists employees in acquiring new abilities and information that will enable them to execute their jobs more successfully, which can boost job satisfaction and engagement. Overall, making investments in workforce development can benefit both organisations and their employees, fostering stronger relationships and a more reliable and engaged workforce. In addition, workforce development also can promote economic growth. Workforce development initiatives that cannot be taken into account are similar to road trips without a driver in that they will not get far (Selsky, 2023).

Third, workforce development assists employees in acquiring fresh information and skills, which is essential for remaining competitive in a shifting environment. Leaders promote innovation and competitiveness, and therefore economic growth, by giving employees the resources they need to succeed. Workforce development keeps the employees capable of

handling future technology advancements or skill requirements (Wooll, 2021). In general, workforce development is crucial for companies that wish to maintain their competitiveness, entice and keep skilled workers, and adjust to shifting consumer needs. Businesses may increase productivity, efficiency, and profitability by investing in their employees, which also results in a more engaged and content workforce.

Many researches and institutions such as CIPD (2021) emphasised the importance of developing the experiences of employees or students with regard to digital and technological experiences and e-learning platforms in order to develop the performance of institutions in the post-Covid-19 era. However, many institutions still suffer from a weakness in integrating technical tools into their institutional activities, which may negatively affect the performance of workers. Likewise, many researchers emphasised the importance of institutions developing employee experiences in order to adapt to the variables of the world of post-Covid-19. This is in order to manage these variables in a better way. Al-Emadi and Al-Abdullah (2021) argue the importance of investing in refining the skills of employees in various institutions and companies. This is in order to ensure the continued competitiveness of these institutions in a rapidly changing business environment. On the other hand, Sultana R (2022) argues that developing employee skills and investing in workforce development gives companies an advantage in terms of interacting with market demands. It helps adapt to new business models, improve job satisfaction and improve employee well-being.

2.2 Strategic planning for workforce development

Employers adopt workforce planning as a technique that anticipates labour demands and strategically places people, frequently with the use of innovative human resources technology (Sutner, 2017). Workforce strategic planning is not only a process but also helps organisations identify and address their current and future human resource needs to achieve their business goals. Because workforce strategy involves assessing an

organisation's current workforce, as well as predicting future workforce needs, and strategies whether to develop new strategies or retain and how to develop talent.

In the past, training programs have been the main method utilised in workforce development to gain specialised skills. But nowadays, effective strategies include providing mentoring and coaching programs, training and educational opportunities, and forums or webinars for employees to discuss best practices (Campbell, 2022). When evaluating the effectiveness of workforce development plans, human resources are frequently employed. Even these initiatives frequently have a significant beneficial effect on workers' engagement, job satisfaction, retention, and sense of belonging.

When considering the long-term goals of the organisation, workforce planning will be divided into several steps progressively deeper planning. The key steps involved in workforce strategic planning include: considering the long-term goals of the organisation, finding future skills gaps, preparing for different scenarios, asking for external advice, planning, monitoring and adapting. Considering the long-term goals of the organisation: The purpose of strategic workforce planning is to make sure that the employees of an organisation are capable of achieving its corporate objectives. It is possible to need support from the C-suite, line managers, finance, and operations in addition to HR (Verlinden, 2020). An organisation can better align its employees with its long-term goals and increase the likelihood of its long-term success by adopting these methods into its workforce planning initiatives. Finding future skills gaps: Developing talent by identifying future initiatives not only fills talent gaps but also helps organisations stay ahead of future skills gaps. Additionally, it makes it easier for the organisation to establish beneficial alliances with other industries (Ibid).

Preparing for different scenarios: The emergence of Covid-19 has been unpredictable in recent years. Therefore, organisations need to make timely adjustments and make preparations for various accidents in the future society. Instead, HR should start looking forward today through strategic workforce planning and come up with a combination of

attrition, retiring, upskilling, and re-skilling to prevent significant waves of layoffs in the future (Ibid). So in strategic workforce planning organisations need to train their employees so that they can potentially reduce layoffs and increase organisational demands and also allow employees to take on different roles within the organisation. Seeking outside counsel to assist you throughout a portion of the process, hire a consultant or someone who specialises in strategic workforce planning (Ibid).

Select professionals with a solid reputation and relevant expertise in an organisation's industry. Be receptive to fresh perspectives and be prepared to modify your plans if necessary. By getting outside counsel, you can gain insightful knowledge and novel viewpoints to enhance workforce planning efforts. Monitoring and adapting: To make sure that the organisation's objectives are being realised and that it is responding to changes in the internal and external environment, monitoring and modifying workforce planning is necessary. Since workforce planning is a continuous process, it's crucial to continually review and modify the plan to keep it in line with the organisation's objectives and requirements. Organisations may make sure they have the right people with the proper skills and abilities to fulfil their long-term goals while also adjusting to changes in their organisational environment by monitoring and modifying their workforce planning.

There are also benefits to workforce planning. Is the process of aligning an organisation's human resource requirements with its strategic goals and objectives. By using strategic workforce planning, it may anticipate the abilities and personnel it will require in the future and create strategies to eventually balance the requirements of the organisation with the availability of vital people (Keenan, 2019). Workforce planning can allocate resources more effectively, help organisations optimise human resource allocation, and ensure the effective use of resources. This will not only retain talent, and help the organisation grow, but also increase productivity and thus increase employee welfare. Organisations can invest in their employees and improve productivity by using workforce planning to identify skill gaps and training needs. Employees can contribute more to the organisation and enhance performance by acquiring the necessary skills and competencies. Workforce

growth strategies are established to enhance both employee achievement and career development while also assisting organisations in scaling and prospering sustainably (Campbell, 2022).

One of issues related to strategic planning is the importance of employee participation in organisations and companies, in order to develop employees' sense of belonging, to improve productivity and loyalty to the organisation, and to ensure that employees remain at work. Kewalramani Ariana Roy (2022) argues that the pandemic has had a significant impact on employee engagement, and that organisations need to adopt new strategies to maintain employee engagement in the post-Covid-19 era. Their study indicates that companies that prioritise employee engagement are more likely to retain and develop their talented employees to deliver better, long-term job performance.

Similarly, Andrlić B et al (2023) indicate that employee engagement is important for improving productivity and increasing employee well-being, especially in the post-Covid-19 era. They point out that this may be achieved through several methods and strategies such as mentoring programs, team building activities, and open channels of communication between leaders and subordinates. Spektor Y (2022) also points out that employee engagement is important in order to develop employees' sense of belonging to the organisation and the team through regular communication and social interaction.

Spektor Y (2022) explores the factors that influence employees' sense of belonging. The authors emphasise the positive relationship between developing employees' sense of belonging, employee well-being, and improving job performance. The authors emphasise the role of organisational culture in shaping employees' sense of belonging. We believe that these recommendations provide a basis for institutions and companies seeking to enhance their employees' sense of belonging, especially in the post-Covid-19 era. Overall, workforce planning is a critical process that can help organisations optimise their human resources, improve productivity, reduce costs, and mitigate potential risks.

2.3 Leadership approaches

In this section, we discuss different leadership approaches that may form the basis for understanding how leaders in Mörbylånga municipality engage with employees in order to overcome obstacles affecting the development of the healthcare workforce in the post-COVID-19 era.

2.3.1 Transformational leadership approach

A management concept known as "transformational leadership" pushes and motivates employees to come up with fresh ideas and enhance existing processes in order to advance the success of an organisation in the future (Needle, 2021). The focus of transformational leadership is on inspiring and encouraging employees to realise their highest potential and achieve common objectives. Leaders that exhibit this style of leadership are those who have a distinct vision, a lot of excitement and energy, and the capacity to persuade others of their vision. By giving people a sense of meaning and purpose, pushing them to do more than they ever believed possible, and empowering them to take responsibility for their work, transformational leaders inspire and motivate their teams. They furthermore offer specialised assistance, coaching, and feedback to aid in the development of employees.

Transformational leadership is crucial because it concentrates on the organisation's long-term goals rather than its short-term challenges. Transformational leaders advocate coaching and team development rather than a strict leadership style (Needle, 2021). The effectiveness of transformational leadership, for instance, has been established in a range of contexts, including business, education, and politics. According to Needle (2021), transformational leaders may raise motivation and productivity, improve employee happiness, and increase whole organisational performance. One of the main purposes of leadership is to inspire people to constantly accomplish and surpass their goals, while transformational leadership focuses more on motivating employees.

Others need to have a captivating vision for the future of their team if transformational leadership is to be successful (Herrity, 2022). The motivation of suitable employees is the first requirement for transformative leadership. This strategy aims to motivate both leaders and employees in the same way, in addition to inspiring them. Additionally, it may help transformational leaders see their own worth and inspire their employees to make changes by gaining their trust. The significance of emphasis on the organisation's overall vision and long-term objectives is a further argument raised by transformational leadership. Transformational leaders are able to inspire and encourage their employees to work toward a shared objective by keeping their attention on the big picture. As a result, the sense of purpose and meaning at work is elevated leading to higher job satisfaction and engagement. Additionally, by keeping a focus on the broad picture, transformational leaders can identify and resolve structural problems and difficulties that can impede an organisation's development. To overcome these obstacles, they are able to create novel ideas and solutions, which enhance the organisation's overall performance.

In the context of talking about leadership styles, reference must be made to some literature that discusses the importance of leadership style for the recovery of institutions from the consequences of post-Covid-19. Author Porkodi . S (2022) provides a comprehensive review of leadership strategies in the world of post-Covid-19. The writer stresses the importance of effective and flexible leadership that is able to adapt to post-Covid-19 variables. This relates to leaders' ability to manage uncertainty and make quick decisions. S, Porkodi referred to the importance of transformational, servant and authentic leadership. Where he pointed out the importance of leadership that prioritises empathy, cooperation, and employee support, in addition to providing long-term visions in line with the future. The article also referred to the crucial role in terms of enhancing the psychological and mental health of the employees and building trust between the leader and the subordinates. This is related, in one way or another, to the role of leadership in shaping organisational culture and values within the organisation in order to recover from the consequences of post-Covid-19. This therefore requires ethical leadership. When facing external challenges such as the Covid-19 pandemic, motivating employees and focusing on the big picture are

important for transformational leadership because these strategies help create a sense of direction and purpose and motivate employees, and enable leaders to identify and solve systemic problems and challenges.

2.3.2 Flexible leadership

A leadership approach known as flexible leadership may be adjusted to meet the requirements and conditions of various situations. It comprises a leader's ability to modify their leadership style in response to the wants and requirements of their team, the objectives of the organisation, and the shifting external environment. Gary (2008) explains it is a strategic leadership theory that includes an emphasis on the necessity of influencing three important factors that affect a company's ability to create performance: efficiency, innovation, and human capital. In addition, flexible leaders are able to establish a strong connection with their employees, communicate clearly, and inspire and encourage their employees to accomplish shared objectives. According to Gary (2008), effective leaders are looking for behaviours and initiatives that complement one another and are more likely to have positive consequences than negative ones. They are receptive to criticism and prepared to modify their leadership style if necessary. This type of leadership is especially helpful in complicated and dynamic contexts where the capacity to change course rapidly is essential to success.

A successful flexible leader also needs to have particular characteristics. The first is empathy, flexible leaders with empathy can not only understand the needs of employees but also pay attention to other relevant working abilities. When leaders develop empathy, they can understand the personal emotions of their employees. Jennifer, et al (2022) explain that this is both an ability and a skill: though some people are more naturally inclined to be able to recognize others' emotions, this ability may also be developed with practice and concentrated effort. Second, through flexibility, leaders can adapt their leadership style and approach to the current situation based on the needs of their employees. This also increases the ability to adapt to change. Elizabeth (2018) concludes

that increasing flexibility as a leader requires being open to experience and embracing learning opportunities in any situation. When leaders become more flexible, they often become more effective. It takes time and patience to become a flexible leader. Katarzyna Mikolajczyk (2022) has also made many recommendations in order to overcome most of the challenges that have arisen in the post-Covid-19 era. The most important of which is providing leadership as an agile approach to employee development by focusing on continuing education for them and developing their technical and functional skills.

Therefore, flexible leadership is an important form of leadership strategy. Leaders must be able to modify their plans for the organisation immediately in response to changing circumstances. In order to create an effective team, it is also vital to make the appropriate modifications considering each employee's unique advantages and disadvantages in order to suit their demands. Agile leadership is crucial because it enables leaders to be helpful, responsive, and adaptive, which makes teams more productive and engaged. A culture of creativity, cooperation, and continuous improvement may be established inside an organisation by a leader who adopts flexible leadership, which can eventually result in increased success and development.

2.3.3 Servant leadership approach

The pandemic has led to the emergence of many problems related to rapid change in the labour market, uncertainty, digital transformation, and an increase in unemployment in some sectors and a shortage in other sectors such as health care (Brynjolfsson et al, 2020; Alon et al 2020). This, in turn, led to an increase in psychological and health stress and a state of uncertainty for employees (WHO, 2020). So, we think that there is a greater need for a servant leadership approach in many institutions operating in various fields around the world, especially in the field of health care in Sweden.

The servant leadership approach emphasises the importance of leaders sharing tasks with employees and showing empathy in order to enhance performance and enhance a sense of

belonging. The term servant leadership was first coined by Robert K. Greenleaf (1970) article "The servant as leader". It is a leadership approach that emphasises the importance of a leader prioritising the needs of others and fostering a culture of cooperation, support, and trust. Where Robert discussed the importance of leaders in the organisation acting as servants in order to motivate and support their followers and thus perform better. This includes empathising with employees, sharing leaders with employees in tasks, listening to them, supervising, and adhering to principles of work and growth in order to enhance performance and enhance a sense of belonging (Greenleaf 1970).

In this case, the basic principles of servant leadership may be effective in such crises. Whereas, focusing on psychological and emotional support for employees may play a crucial role in the development of job performance for employees, especially since the epidemic has led to a state of anxiety and stress (Pfeffer, 2020). Servant leadership also emphasises the importance of leaders promoting continuous communication, particularly in order to enhance employees' trust in their leaders and to enhance collaboration (Bartik et al 2020). Leaders are supposed to prioritise the constant communication of their followers and their participation in decision-making (Greenleaf 1970). The commitment of leaders to the continuous development of their followers is an important aspect of the principles of servant leadership. As the leaders' investment in the growth of the skills of their employees helps the organisation to adapt to any internal or external changes or crises that may arise, and thus a greater ability to adapt and a higher competitive ability (Greenleaf, 1970).

When talking about the Swedish context in the post-Covid-19 world, Sweden has a long history of servant leadership and decision-making based on consensus and egalitarian values that are in line with the principles of servant leadership Organisational culture in Sweden promotes balance, clarity, and public interest (Lid Falkman, 2020).

Chapter 3. Methodology

In this chapter we provide an explanation about the details of the methodology chosen for data collection and analysis. In addition, we will talk about the thesis's goal, the research technique, and the study design. We will also discuss the ethical implications and issues raised by the theory. In this section, we will go through methodological constraints, anonymity, secrecy, credibility, transferability, confirmability and case study in general.

3.1 Method

This thesis presents a case study of a qualitative study on a quasi-governmental organisation which is Mörbylånga municipality in southern Sweden. Where this organisation operates within a wide geographical scope and its tasks include several social, health, service, cultural, educational and other responsibilities (Mörbylånga kommun, 2023). In this thesis, we focus on studying the consequences of post-Covid-19 in terms of workforce development and examining the efforts of leaders in the municipality regarding the role of leadership in developing the healthcare workforce in the post-Covid-19 phase. Therefore, we conducted interviews with a number of responsible leaders in the municipality and from different levels and sectors. Where these interviews were the main source of data. The aim was to collect data from the various job levels in the municipality. It is best to provide an in-depth exploration and analysis of the case of Mörbylånga municipality. The interviews helped us understand the basic meaning and perspective of the individuals involved in the case rather than focusing on quantitative or statistical data. Secondary data were also used through reports issued by the municipality and through articles or other sources (Saunders M et al, 2019, p: 148-149).

Where the case that will be studied has been identified, and it is, as we indicated earlier, "Mörbylånga Municipality " and the research questions that will direct the investigation and data collection have been identified. The participants in this research were also identified, and they are a certain number of leaders who have experience and information that will help us in the data collection and analysis process. Where they were able to

present their own vision and viewpoints, and this opened prospects for future relevant research. The number of participating leaders were 5 especially since the goal of this thesis is to understand the obstacles related to workforce development in the healthcare sector that still persist more than three years after the start of the Covid-19. And the role of leadership in this case, Which in turn affected the development of the workforce and the welfare of employees. We also analysed such organisational documents and articles such as strategic plans and job descriptions. Therefore, collecting data from leaders from different levels and listening to many points of view enriched this thesis and made it more reliable and valid.

3.2 Research philosophy

This type of research is related to the non-positivist philosophical position, position of interpretivism, phenomenology. It is a position that rejects the idea that cognitive truth is only related to testing, observation, or analysis of statistical empirical data. Scientific research is not always subject to measurable data or information. But it may be subject to a deep exploration and interpretation of human experiences and subjective interpretations related to the research objective (Saunders M et al, 2019, p: 148-149). This is related to the main research question, where the subjective experiences of leaders working in Mörbylånga municipality play a crucial role in exploring post-Covid-19 impacts in terms of workforce development. Because when studying a particular social phenomenon, objective data does not have a single meaning, but rather we interpret the data within a specific frame of reference (Alvesson and Sköldberg, 2018 p: 7-8).

3.3 Research approach

In our study, we did not have a specific theory that we can build our thesis based on. Instead, we discussed and applied a variety of theoretical ideas, such as the significance of transformational leadership, the strategic planning of the workforce, the value of effective communication in raising workforce and employee job satisfaction, and the significance of flexible and adaptable policies. This was done in an effort to present a thorough,

inclusive, and motivating examination of the significance of leadership in the growth of the workforce in the post-Covid-19 era, regardless of the type of institution or organisation.

In this context, abduction is the ideal approach in this type of research, because it gives us a wider space to move between data and theoretical concepts. Instead of moving from theory to data "deduction" or data to theory "induction" we move between deduction and induction (Saunders M et al, 2019, p: 155-156). That is, we combined the method of induction and deduction. We notice a clear fact after the end of the Covid-19, which is the difficulties that many institutions and companies still face with regard to developing the workforce. Thus ensuring their survival and the development of their level of production. Therefore, building this thesis based on several theoretical concepts helped us discover new facts that help us reach more accurate results.

Therefore, we relied in this thesis on preliminary experimental data and we will use secondary data as an analysis of organisational documents such as strategic plans and job descriptions. That is in order to broaden our understanding of potential outcomes in terms of workforce development and employee satisfaction. We identified and explained the interpretations related to this case within a comprehensive conceptual framework and thus built a theory on the importance and how to develop the workforce in post-crisis periods (Saunders M et al, 2019, p: 155-157). Especially since there are several previous studies on workforce development. And this helped us develop our understanding of the subject and analyse the data holistically (Alvesson and Sköldberg, 2018: 5-7).

The decision to use the abduction strategy for data analysis and my process for creating a theory that can offer a theoretical framework to help organisations and businesses come up with strategies for improving workforce and employee welfare. There are dozens of strategies, however the following are the most significant ones: First, adopting a particular strategy enabled us to make more informed choices regarding the structure and layout of the research. Second, it helped us in considering study techniques and methodological decisions that will benefit us and, more importantly, those that will not. For example, if

you are particularly interested in understanding why something is happening, rather than being able to describe what is happening, it may be more appropriate to undertake your research inductively rather than deductively. Finally, knowing our research approach helped us adapt research design and methodology to address limitations. Thus, it helped us to frame a hypothesis through our ability to access data and provides a comprehensive understanding of the research topic (Saunders M et al, 2019, p: 156).

3.4 Time horizon

Regarding the time horizon of this study, it is not cross-sectional as it focused on exploring the long-term post-Covid-19 consequences of workforce development in one specific municipality, Mörbylånga kommun, and aimed to provide a deeper understanding of how the Covid-19 is affecting the workforce in general and healthcare employees "Elderly care in particular". This paper examined a specific case and highlights the importance of effective leadership in developing the workforce to face market changes in times of uncertainty. The study also aimed to contribute to identifying the best tools and strategies that leadership in institutions and companies may adopt to improve the level of productivity, promote a positive culture within the institution, and develop the workforce in general, which can be applied in other institutions. Therefore, the time horizon of this study is longitudinal, with an emphasis on long-term outcomes and implications (Ibid: 212).

3.5 Data analysis (Primary data)

The data in this thesis was based on two sorts of data, primary data and secondary data. The goal was to attempt to grasp this subject on a more in-depth level. This paper is more unbiased and comprehensive because of the diversity of the data. The main source of information was structured interviews with municipal officials and leaders in Mörbylånga. The secondary data consisted of articles, reports, documents and findings issued by Mörbylnga Municipality that discuss the theoretical ideas related to this thesis, such as the significance of transformational leadership, the significance of effective communication,

employee motivation, strategic planning, among other ideas and steps taken in order to develop workforce and skills of employees in Mörbylånga municipality.

Regarding primary data, we were organising semi-structured interviews with a number of leaders in Mörbylånga municipality. This is with the aim of collecting data on the effects that are still ongoing in the post-Covid-19 period, with regard to the development of the workforce and reskilling employees in the health care sector. We applied a subjective approach where we organised and developed general questions about the issue and then went into a more specific area with regards to the main research goal which is to understand the post-Covid-19 effects on workforce development and reskilling employees. Also, through this approach, we avoided falling into the objective approach. As we were not just looking for answers to certain questions, we were trying to expand our understanding of this issue by discussing the views of leaders on this issue. As researchers, we interacted with the opinions of the participants in the interviews with the aim of building meaning to these discussions and in order to ensure that our questions and ideas that we discussed with the participants are consistent with the main objective of the thesis (Saunders M et al, 2019, p: 434-436).

In the semi-structured interviews that we conducted, we relied on a predetermined list of topics depending on our philosophical assumptions related to the research objective (Ibid: 437-438). Where we systematically discovered data related to the research topic through each participant individually. This allowed us to compare respondents' responses to issues related to workforce development (Ibid: 437-438). This type of data collection method allowed us to explore topics more fully through evolving questions and digging into details during the conversation.

The aim of these questions was to give the participants a wide space to express their thoughts and points of view. In order to make sure that the leaders participating in this paper can present their ideas and perceptions smoothly. And to ensure that we reach specific data related to the main research objective, broad questions were asked, which

helps the participants to provide explanations and answers that are consistent with their views and their own ideas about the consequences of post-Covid-19 in terms of workforce development and reskilling employees. Based on these answers, more limited questions were developed and mainly related to the development of the workforce in the post-Covid-19 era.

This helped us avoid influencing participants' ideas and gave them the space to provide clear statements related to workforce development. This helped us also in developing the research objective and developing the theoretical concepts related to this paper. Where these questions and the points that are focused on were mainly related to the theoretical concepts on which this thesis is based (Ibid: 437-438). And by that we explored in an interpretivist way the factors influencing the development of the workforce in Mörbylånga municipality. This approach allowed us to discuss the views of the participants in this paper and discuss new ideas that emerged during the interviews. Especially since the topics that were discussed in the interviews were not derived from a specific theory that is being tested, and therefore we did not deduce the data as much as we interpreted it.

These semi-structured interviews were conducted during the period from 1st April 2023 to 15st May 2023. These interviews were conducted with a number of leaders in Mörbylånga municipality ranging from 4-8 leaders. And as we mentioned earlier, the main focus was on the health services sector and care for the elderly. Especially since this sector has suffered and is still suffering from many challenges in the post-Covid-19 period, especially with regard to the lack of manpower, its development, and ensuring the well-being of its employees.

Most of these interviews were conducted face to face or through video call. Given the nature of this study, exploratory and interpretive. In addition, a lot of the literature that discusses this topic was reviewed in the recent period, with the aim of formulating the aim of the research and formulating the type of questions that are asked in the interviews. This helped us to avoid misunderstandings and to ensure that the interview questions are clear,

smooth and easy to understand for the participants. And to ensure that these questions are related to the research objective and easy to understand, they have been discussed with a number of fellow students at the university in advance.

Some may argue that the data collection method through interviews is not the best way to address a research question related to the post-Covid-19 consequences for workforce development. Some may claim that the quantitative research method is better and allows for the study of a large number of companies and institutions and to provide correct statistical results. This may be true, but in our case, we studied an organisation that has more than 1,200 employees. This institution provides various services, including health, culture, education, tourism, social services, infrastructure, and others. And in the department that we focus on studying, which is the health care department, more than 346 employees work daily in a geographical area of 667 square kilometres (Mörbylånga kommun, 2023).

Thus collecting data through interviews through an in-depth case study is a good way to provide a broad and in-depth understanding of the post-Covid-19 consequences for workforce development. It is a widely used research method in universities and research centres. In the book of Saunders M, et al (2019, p:434-489), the book provides a broad explanation about the importance of data collection through interviews and how to expand and develop questions during interviews in order to reach the data required to answer the research question. In our case we had informal and unstructured discussions with a number of leaders and employees in Mörbylånga municipality. This is in order to explore the general position of this organisation with regard to the post-Covid-19 consequences in general, and through this, research questions related to the development of the workforce in particular in the post-Covid-19 period were developed.

The author Saunders M, et al (2019, p: 445) also stresses the importance of developing personal communication between the researcher and the participants in the interviews in order to ensure the satisfaction of the participants and their desire to participate in these

interviews. And thus ensuring their desire to provide data that serve the purpose of the research. And this is what was worked on during several months before the interviews took place. We contacted several leaders in the municipality of Mörbylånga and discussed the idea of research with them and ensured their desire to provide data on this subject.

In order to avoid misunderstanding, we recorded the face-to-face interviews in order to listen to them again and translate them correctly. We wrote down the answers. Especially since most of the interviews were conducted in Swedish, which is not our mother tongue, and therefore care was taken to translate them correctly and literally.

Therefore, we believe that data collection through interviews is an ideal way to answer the research question. First, as this method enables us to collect deep and detailed information, and enables us to develop our questions to reach the most important details. Secondly, through interviews we can gain access to the unique perspectives and real-world experiences of leaders regarding workforce development. This may be better than other data collection methods. Third, interviews explore sensitive issues and details that may be difficult to explore through other research methods. Finally, we will be able to apply the results of this research to similar cases in context. There are many related aspects with other cases at the level of other municipalities in Sweden and perhaps in other regions.

3.6 Secondary data

Secondary data is data that includes articles, reports, news, newspapers, documents and many other secondary data (Saunders M, et al, 2019: 438-441). It is true that the primary data were collected through interviews in this thesis, but the primary data was supported by secondary data, including reports issued by the Mörbylånga municipality administration on workforce development and employee rehabilitation, news reports and previous interviews with leaders working in the municipality.

It was qualitative secondary data related to the plans and projects undertaken by the municipality to develop the municipality's manpower and refining workers' skills. Some of this data is publicly available over the internet and some is obtained through permission to access it. So it was important to obtain this data in an academic and legitimate way through permission by Mörbylånga municipality to access it in order to support our primary data obtained through interviews (Ibid: 340). Secondary data such as reports, decisions issued by Mörbylånga municipality supported our argument, and served as a benchmark for comparing the primary data obtained through interviews with leaders with practical steps and decisions made by the municipal administration regarding workforce development. This helped us to notice obstacles and practical steps in terms of workforce development.

3.7 Data analysis

After collecting data through semi-structured interviews, we analysed this data through a thematic analysis approach. According to Braun and Clarke (2006:78), it is an ideal method for qualitative analysis. In particular, it is not linked to a particular philosophy and offers a logical, flexible and structured approach to the analysis of qualitative data. Because it helps to absorb large amounts of data, and facilitates the process of merging relevant data and then identifying the main topics. Thus, producing an objective description of this data, testing theoretical concepts based on this data, and then drawing conclusions. This approach is adopted because it generally fits a case study in an exploratory manner and allows us to discover new details and insights through data analysis (Saunders M et al, 2019, p: 651-652).

The thematic analysis approach is also an ideal method to avoid being influenced by the personal biases of the researcher while analysing the data. As we seek to explore the post-Covid-19 consequences for workforce development and what important steps leadership should take in this context. Objectively analysing data is an appropriate method for

analysing data collected from semi-structured interviews as it helps in gaining deeper insights into the data and providing new and profound conclusions.

This approach includes several steps during the data analysis process that will be explained further. First, the transcription where we transcribed the dialogues that took place in the semi-structured interviews accurately and verbatim. This means that it is important to record the interviews audio and re-listen them and write them down if possible, and this ensures that we coordinate the data effectively and can be analysed. Secondly, familiarisation and this process includes identifying themes and data related to the research objective. This includes reading written texts and identifying patterns and important and common data. This provides the basis for subsequent steps in the data analysis process.

Then we did the coding in the third step. Coding is a process by labelling words and phrases related to specific categories and related to workforce development in particular. This includes analysing words and sentences related to the workforce development process, with the aim of focusing and discovering the long-term consequences of post-Covid-19, and what practical steps the municipality is taking to develop the workforce and overcome these obstacles. Where we encoded certain phrases and words related to the main concepts of this paper, such as: workforce development, re-skilling of employees, strategic planning, employee welfare, and training courses. And through this we created meaning for these coded words. Then we collected symbols and similar words that are related to the search goal. This helped us identify broader themes and patterns in the data and identify common concepts found in the data (Ibid: 650 - 660).

Then, in the next step, we analysed this data through the use of common categories and concepts that were previously collected. Then, common and related themes were compared and identified, and these common themes were objectively analysed. And in the last step in the data analysis process, we interpreted the data that have been identified, compiled and compared, where we could then interpret this data and draw conclusions based on the analysis. This includes compiling the results of the data that have been interpreted and

identifying the effects resulting from this data and how it interacts with the main research question. These interpretations are based on the data available to us, rather than personal biases and their effects. We presented the results of analysing this data in a neutral manner and discussed it objectively, away from any interpretations or personal positions. This opens the way for future research that has not yet been shed light on (Ibid: 650-660).

3.8 Methodological limitations

During data collection and analysis, we encountered many limitations that may have affected, in one way or another, the study process. Previously, with the beginning of the spread of the pandemic, most companies and institutions were not working in a traditional way, and this affected direct communication with leaders. But today, after three years of the spread of the Covid-19, most of the restrictions that were previously imposed with regard to direct communication have been cancelled. This positively impacted the data collection process as it helped us to meet many leaders in Mörbylånga municipality directly and talk to them about the healthcare workforce development processes, the challenges they face and future plans for a more flexible workforce development and effectiveness. Especially since Sweden did not impose strict restrictions like other countries regarding communication and work (Davies G and Roeber B 2021).

In the same context, we were very careful that this data be objective and independent. Where we stressed and took into account the importance of not mixing the personal positions of us as researchers or participants in the interviews with the objective data that is presented. This is in order to avoid any bias in data collection. We were very keen to build a friendly and objective relationship with the research participants in order to ensure that the participants are willing to provide their experiences and information regarding the development of the workforce in general. This is to ensure accurate data is obtained and to ensure that there is no pressure on the participants in the data submission process. These interviews were personally planned by the researchers, and emails were exchanged with the participants to ensure their desire to participate in this research. They were also

discussed in advance and informally about the headlines related to the subject of the research, which helped us and the participants to form a general framework for the purpose of the research and the type of data that we want to collect.

Where most of the interviews were conducted personally and face to face, and some of them were conducted through video communication, but all these interviews were recorded in order to listen to them again and write down the information. Participants also had the opportunity to add any ideas or information that we may have overlooked during the discussion and to ask questions. This is to ensure the accuracy of the data we collect and to ensure the ethical validity of this paper.

One of the limitations that we encountered during the data collection process is the language factor, as all data were conducted in Swedish, which is a second language for us as researchers. But it is a common language between us and the participants, so we were keen to record the interviews and translate them verbatim to avoid any misunderstandings or restrictions regarding expression and understanding of the questions. We were also keen that the questions we asked were impartial and objective and away from factors that might negatively affect the leaders or their relationship with the municipal administration. This is to ensure that the answers given by leaders are honest and detailed rather than short answers.

Geographical factor was one of the limitations we encountered in the data collection process. The leaders' offices in Mörbylånga are spread across several small towns over a geographic area of more than 660 square kilometres in the south of Öland. This prompted us to move between several offices north and south of the municipality. However, this factor did not negatively affect the data collection process, but it affected the time factor which is already limited. We faced constraints related to the time factor and resources, as we had to organise these interviews and collect, organise and analyse data within a limited period of several weeks. We also had some difficulty getting interview appointments with a number of leaders working in Mörbylånga municipality. This is due to their

preoccupation with a work schedule full of tasks on a daily basis, and some of the emails that we sent were never answered for unknown reasons, and this increased the time pressure in the data collection process. This may have an impact on the amount of qualitative data to be collected for the study. Therefore, we were keen to distribute and organise work in a more flexible and effective way to bypass resource constraints and time pressure.

3.9 Methodological Consideration

We took into account many important methodological considerations. An important methodological consideration in this paper is transferability. Due to the nature of this case study paper, Mörbylånga municipality. It is important to ensure that the findings of this paper can be applied to other organisations or contexts related to workforce development, especially after facing external challenges such as pandemics. Ensuring transferability involves several steps related to the contextual description. It provides a general description of the context in which the research was conducted, including the data collection process, information about the organisation and leaders involved, the location, and any relevant cultural or social factors. This helps the reader understand the context in which the research was conducted. Which in turn helps the reader to determine whether the findings of this paper can be applied in other contexts (Creswell and Miller, 2000).

Power imbalances: As researchers, we are the ones asked questions to participants, so we often had more power in the relationship and control of the interview. This may make the participants feel uncomfortable. Therefore, we took care to take several steps during data collection in order to reduce this feeling of power imbalance. These steps include providing a sense of confidence and comfort for the participants, giving them a wide space to express their ideas, allowing them to ask questions and inquire about any topics related to research, data or confidentiality, and we responded to their concerns.

Analytical rigour: One of the ethical considerations in the data analysis process is analytical rigour. It is related to the validity of the thesis emanating from the interviews.

This is to ensure that these results are accurate, objective and free from biases. This may involve using a structured approach to coding and analysing data in an orderly and systematic manner. Analytical accuracy is a key factor in establishing the credibility of qualitative research, especially research (Braun and Clarke 2006).

Sampling Strategy: Patton (1999) argues that sampling strategy is a major factor in determining transferability in qualitative research, particularly in interviews. It helps ensure that search results are transferable in other situations. That is why we were keen, in the interviews that we conducted, to interview a number of leaders of various middle and high levels. This is to ensure accurate data that answers our research question.

Data saturation: it is also an important consideration in determining the transferability of a dissertation from interviews. Where the researcher is supposed to be keen to collect all the necessary data to answer the research question and present the results, conclusions and recommendations. This helps ensure that research findings are comprehensive and can be applied in other similar contexts (Morse, 1995).

Reflexivity: to avoid running the risk of bias, we kept in mind the principles of reflexivity. Where these principles helped us to recognize our role as researchers and avoid bias in the process of data collection and analysis. Reflectivity involves a critical examination of a researcher's personal attitude and how his or her values and beliefs influence data analysis. This is very important in explanatory qualitative research because the researcher's cognitive perspective or position is an essential part of the process of interpreting and analyzing the data and the subjective interpretations of the interviewees (Finaly, L, 2008: 209-230). As the reflectivity helps the researcher to develop his understanding regarding his attitude and personal biases and work to reduce them. This includes a high level of self-awareness and critical consideration of assumptions and biases during the data collection and analysis process. This helps the researcher to be more transparent and less biased regarding his own views, and thus this helps to improve the reliability of the research results.

3. 10 Ethics Considerations

The researcher is supposed to abide by many ethical principles during the research. This applies to all stages of research. It includes choosing a topic, avoiding bias, impartiality, and analysing data in an academic manner. Taking into account the ethical concerns and issues that may arise from the research (Saunders M et al, 2019, p: 263). Due to the type of study that focuses on a specific organisation, Mörbylånga Municipality, and to ensure the integrity and validity of this paper, we were keen to adhere to several ethical points, especially during the data collection and analysis process, the most important of which are: integrity, fairness and open-mindedness.

We emphasised our responsibility towards the leaders involved in the research, and we assessed the risks or impacts that might arise from this paper. Therefore, we have taken care to ensure that no one is coerced or embarrassed to provide data. This is a guaranteed right for the participant to withdraw or refuse to participate in providing data (Ibid: 268-270). We had earlier several informal discussions with some leaders and staff in Mörbylånga municipality in order to ensure that the leaders working in the institution agreed to provide the necessary data for this paper. We also emphasized the right to maintain objectivity and impartiality in data collection or analysis. We have committed ourselves to the right of the participants to remain confidential and not to reveal their identity, unless they wish to do so. We were careful not to disclose any personal information that might affect them or their relationship with the institution in which they work (Ibid: 264-266).

And since most of the data we collected in this paper is from personal interviews with leaders in Mörbylånga municipality. This means that we are also in contact and personal interaction with the participants. Therefore, we were keen to refer to these principles and adhere to them. We also talked to participants about these principles to ensure they are not disturbed or unfairly exploited. We also stressed the importance of the participants feeling

comfortable and confident that this data will be used in an academic way. And we emphasised our keenness after sharing any personal information without their permission. As indicated earlier, adherence to ethical principles is extremely important during all stages of research development. This is related to the data analysis stage. We are committed to maintaining objectivity as a vital ethical principle. This includes not selecting certain data and ignoring other relevant data, not distorting the true meaning of this data and analysing the data in an objective manner far from any bias (Ibid: 272-275). This mainly depends on the integrity of the researcher. As the bias or lack of integrity and objectivity directly affects the distortion of the research results and the questioning of the recommendations that are presented (Ibid: 272-275).

Chapter 4. Findings

In this section we review empirical data obtained through interviews with leaders and managers in the municipality of Mörbylånga. These are five main interviews that were conducted with the leaders, in addition to informal and unstructured meetings that were conducted orally with some employees working in the municipality. This is in order to expand our understanding of the situation and factors associated with the development of the workforce, and to form a general understanding of all aspects that should be focused on in the data collection process. Where we seek in this section to display the most important key themes that we have identified through our analysis open coding work.

However, we will impartially present some basic experimental data obtained. In this section, we review information about the personalities who were interviewed (after obtaining their permission) and their job positions, and their visions about the most important obstacles that the municipality faces with regard to the development of the workforce in the post-Covid-19 era. We will impartially present their role as leaders in addressing these obstacles, and what their vision and suggestions are for the future. We will also feature their suggestions on the importance of leadership styles in workforce

development. These empirical data will be supported and compared by comparing their compatibility with the secondary data which is a set of documents and decisions issued by the higher levels of Mörbylånga municipality.

4.1 Case study

Case 1. Ann-Katrin:

In the first case, we interviewed Ann-Katrin online in order to answer a number of questions about workforce development in Mörbylånga municipality, and about the role of leadership in this. Ann-Katrin works as a general social manager. She has been in this position for four years and before that she was director of operations.

Case 2. Sofi:

In the second case, a video interview was conducted with Sofi. Sofi is an operations manager in the healthcare sector and she previously worked as a development manager in the municipality. It was an interesting meeting with Sofi, where we discussed many important points related to the aim of the thesis.

Case 3. Torborg:

The third interview was with Torborg, who works as a manager in the recruitment department, and previously worked as a section director since 2016. Torborg works through its division on recruitment and to solve the problems of absenteeism of employees working on permanent contracts. This is done by providing replacement healthcare personnel to cover shortages in manpower and to cover employee absences of up to 14 days. Where the task is to secure temporary employees instead of employees who are absent from work.

Case 4. Beatrice:

In this interview, we had a long conversation with Beatrice, who works as the Head of department of a nursing house of Mörbylånga Municipality. She describes herself as a

first-line leader, as she is in direct, almost daily contact with staff, nurses, and the elderly. She worked for many years and she has good experience in managing and leading teams.

Case 5. A leader（Leader 5）:

In the fifth case, we interviewed a leader working in a healthcare centre in Mörbylånga municipality. We do not wish to mention the name based on the desire of the leader, so we can call it Leader 5. The leader in case 5 worked as a department manager for several years. We have discussed all points related to the challenges that are still going on, three years after the spread of the Covid-19 pandemic. We also discussed post-Covid-19 healthcare workforce development in Mörbylånga municipality.

Table1: interviews data

Case Study Participant number/ Title	Management Level	Experience	Specific Role
Case 1: Ann- Katrin General social manager	Upper level	Good experience as a social manager and 4 years as operations manager.	We mainly discussed its role in strategies for Workforce development, continuing education and training, the role in retaining new employees, and mechanisms of communication and cooperation with department managers and teams.
Case 2: Sofi operations manager	Upper level	Good experience as an operations manager	We discussed the plans to face current and future challenges. Her role as Operations Manager, and the communication with department managers and employees, development strategies, leadership and decision making.
Case 3: Torborg A head of the staffing department	Upper level	Good experience as a head of the staffing department. And worked as a head of a department in the municipality since2016	We discussed post-Covid-19 challenges, recruitment and development strategies, leadership and decision-making methods, incentives, support and communication.
Case 4: Beatrice director of a health care centre	Middle level	Good experience as a head of a department in the municipality for years. And worked as a manager in other municipalities.	We discussed her role as a leader in direct contact with employees, development mechanisms, confidence enhancement, expertise development, support, leadership styles, flexibility, challenges and future visions.
Case 5: Leader 5 Team manager in Healthcare department	Middle level	Good experience as a Team manager in Healthcare department	We discussed her role as a leader in direct contact with employees, development mechanisms, confidence enhancement, expertise development, support, leadership styles, flexibility, challenges and future visions.

4.2 key themes
4.2.1 Current and future challenges

Through interviews with leaders, we were able to identify several key themes related to workforce development. The most important of these issues is the problems associated with the shortage of manpower and the ability to retain employees. Where Ann- Katrin confirmed that: "*The biggest challenge is to provide an experienced workforce that is able to cover the need. Unlike many work sectors, the health sector in Sweden always needs experienced health personnel who are able to deal with all cases*". She pointed out that this problem is not mainly related to the spread of the Covid-19 pandemic, but it was exacerbated further during and after the pandemic. This is consistent with Sofi, who in turn emphasised that the biggest challenge facing the municipality, especially the healthcare sector, is the lack of manpower. "*The municipality may face many challenges, but the biggest challenge they face is the lack of workforce in the field of health care, and the increasing demand for new and qualified employees. This problem existed even before the spread of the Covid-19 pandemic, but it exacerbated further after the epidemic*".

Torborg and Beatrice emphasised the same challenges, and stressed the importance of addressing them. Torborg: "*The main problem, which is still going on three years after the spread of the Covid-19 pandemic, is the lack of cadres and employees, especially employees with competencies and expertise in the field of health care*".

Beatrice: "*The biggest challenge with regard to the development of the workforce is the problems related to the ability to provide a sufficient number of experienced employees and work to retain them*".

Cybersecurity challenges were also mentioned. With the spread of the pandemic, the municipality worked to develop its business by developing digital platforms, and this made it a target for several cyber attacks. Many institutions and companies in Sweden in general, and in the municipality of Mörbylånga in particular, have been subjected to several cyber

attacks that have affected, in one way or another, the job performance of these companies and institutions. These attacks may have been carried out from within Sweden or by foreign parties.

Sofi: "*we are used to facing such challenges, for example we were subjected to a cyber attack recently, which in turn affected the mechanism of work of the technical system in the municipality, but this did not significantly affect the mechanism of work on the ground*".

Beatrice: "*The cyber attacks that Sweden is exposed to permanently. This helped us test our readiness as managers and employees to face external challenges and our ability to adapt to changes that may arise all the time*".

4.2.2 Demographic and geographic factors

And by discussing the reasons for the challenges associated with the lack of manpower, most of the leaders indicated that the main reason for the exacerbation of this problem is the demographic challenges, and perhaps the geographic ones.

With regard to demographic challenges, Ann-Katrin indicated that the number of sick and elderly people increased at the expense of the number of newborns and young people who are able to work. "*The demographic trend with more elderly people and fewer professionals is the reason*". And this is what Sofi confirmed as well: "*it can be said that we are facing a difficulty in the demographics, as the number of elderly people increases, while we do not have a sufficient number of employees who are able to work*".

There are also geographical challenges represented by the spread of some health care centres in remote areas. This may affect the desire of those who wish to work to go to these

centers.Sofi: "*we suffer from a shortage of manpower in health care centres in the south of the island, due to the geographical distance*".

4.2.3 Leadership approaches and decision making

During the interviews, leadership approaches in the municipality, particularly in the healthcare sector, were discussed. Leadership approaches in Swedish municipalities may differ according to context, priorities and some other factors. However, all municipalities, including Mörbylånga municipality, have several key aspects in common. Where the municipality is subject to a municipal council that is formed through political and partisan elections. It is responsible for setting priorities, budget, long-term strategies and other decisions at the local level. This leadership enjoys decentralisation, consensus and collaboration among stakeholders including the municipal council, citizens and local organisations (Mörbylånga kommun, 2023).

And that is what Torborg confirmed: " *With regard to making decisions, it depends on the type of decisions. The municipality is subject to a political apparatus. It may be decisions issued at the highest levels, and in this case our role as managers and leaders is to explain these decisions to employees and discuss any points that are not clear. With regard to small decisions related to work, they can be discussed and all points of view can be heard in order to ensure effective job performance and provide ideal health care for the elderly and patients"*.

But when going more narrowly it relates to the discussion of the relationship between leaders and employees and leadership styles in the healthcare sector. We can identify several approaches that are used in leadership and decision-making as what Ann-Katrin said: " *We all work in a politically controlled organisation and sometimes they have made decisions that we all have to implement. Likewise, it can be with laws that are added or changed and that we have to comply with, but if it is other decisions that we can influence,*

we see that it should be raised in the respective working group". So, we could identify the basic leadership approaches that are implemented in healthcare sector:

1- Transformational leadership: Where leaders in health care centres are interested in motivating employees and promoting the concept of dialogue and discussion. This is with the aim of inspiring employees, encouraging creativity, and forming a common vision that drives work towards the best, and this is what most leaders confirmed through interviews. Sofi said: " *We as leaders work with the control department and deal with employees in the field of health care based on the principle of trust. Where we sit with employees and department managers and talk about ways to develop and motivate employees*".

Beatrice: "*We also work to enhance employees' sense of belonging and that they are an essential part of the group. Therefore, as a leader in this department, be sure to listen to everyone. And the distribution of responsibilities and making employees motivated* ".

2- **Flexible leadership:** Leaders adapt work to external or internal conditions. This is done in accordance with the objectives of the municipality and the common interest, as most of the leaders emphasised through interviews their work to strengthen their relationship with their employees, form a common vision, and promote the principles of flexibility and adaptability to ensure employee satisfaction and enhance ability to deal with challenges that may arise.

Sofi: " *we work to enhance the principle of trust in employees in order to enhance their feelings of their ability to take responsibility and contribute effectively to work, as we give them authorization to plan work programs and tasks in accordance with Circumstances. We also encourage open and continuous dialogue between employees and managers*".

Torborg: " *The leadership style in the municipality did not differ in general from before or after the epidemic, but it can be said that we continuously listen to the opinions of employees on how to develop workers' skills, improve the work environment, and address problems that may arise*".

3- **Servant leadership:** Where leaders, especially leaders in the middle level, emphasised the participation of employees in some tasks and personally supervising the work. In addition to enhancing performance, a sense of belonging and team spirit, by listening carefully to employees and discussing their problems and ways of development.

Beatrice: "*I am keen to listen to the concerns of the employees, and I am used to creating a dialogue with each employee individually in order to strengthen the relationship between the leader and the employee. He listened seriously to the employees' problems, suggestions and concerns. This is in order to create a spirit of cooperation among all and to create a feeling among the employees that the leaders care about them and their opinions and suggestions*".

Leader 5: " *I supervise the daily tasks personally, and sometimes I work side by side with the staff, especially when there is a significant shortage of staff numbers. This enhances team spirit and enhances everyone's sense of belonging to the organisation*".

4.2.4 Workforce development

By discussing the future visions of the leaders in Mörbylånga municipality, several strategies were identified that the leadership is working on in order to develop the workforce. Among the most important themes identified in this area are:

1- Flexibility and adaptation: Most of the leaders in the interviews emphasised the ability of leaders and employees in the healthcare department to adapt to the changes that may arise, through flexibility in prioritising, setting plans, and the mechanism for their implementation. Where tasks and programs are distributed flexibly in accordance with external and internal conditions. And in a way that guarantees effectiveness and employee satisfaction. The ability of leaders and employees to adapt to these challenges during and after the spread of the Covid-19 virus has been tested. That is what Beatrice confirmed by saying: " *Today I am an essential part of the work on a daily basis, and therefore I am integrated with the employees in the daily tasks".* Sofi: " *The employees are also able to set daily plans for the tasks they work on, in order to provide a flexible work environment. Employees can submit a suggestion about their monthly work schedule in order to ensure a balance between work and personal life*". And this corresponds to Leader 5: " *We deal with flexibility regarding the distribution of tasks, the development of work schedule. Leave and absence issues. And we have proven our ability to adapt to the changes that may arise through our experience during the pandemic and by working during cyber attacks that affected computers and means of communication*". Ann-Katrin: " *There is a certain flexibility, but it is always the needs of the business (the eldries) that govern - it is for their sake that we are at work and for them to have their needs met*".

2- Building trust, belonging and managing stress: Through the interviews, we were able to identify one of the most important factors associated with workforce development. This is done by enhancing the sense of mutual trust between employees and their managers. And that is through the work of leaders side by side with employees in the worst circumstances. And through continuous communication and discussion of any problems

or points of view. And this corresponds to Beatrice: " *Also, being the leader of a health care centre and in direct contact with the staff, I was not working remotely or from home. But I am keen to work alongside the staff. This, in turn, creates a sense of trust and belonging among the employees*". And likewise for Ann-Katrin: " *All managers have a responsibility for their employees to promote the feelings of trust, belonging*". Sofi: "*we sit with employees and department managers and talk about ways to develop and address problems, and we work to enhance the principle of trust in employees in order to enhance their feelings of their ability to take responsibility and contribute effectively to work, as we give them authorization to plan work programs and tasks in accordance with Circumstances. We also encourage open and continuous dialogue between employees and managers*".

3- Training and continuing education: Training and development of expertise were defined by promoting the principle of continuous education at the level of leaders and employees. Most of the leaders emphasised the provision of educational courses related to health care, mental and physical health, keeping pace with technological development, and enhancing the experiences of leaders. This is to ensure the provision of good performance at all levels in the field of healthcare. Where Beatrice told us that: " *We provide training courses continuously to develop the level of competence of employees and develop their expertise. We provide courses on how employees deal with the elderly and patients with dementia. We offer courses on public order and ensuring the mental and physical health of employees. We also obtained financial support from the government in order to develop the expertise of employees who wish to complete their academic education in the field of health care. Where I have two employees who work at 50% and study as nurse assistants during the rest of the week and receive a full salary of 100%*". And it is the same for Sofi who confirmed that: " *With regard to developing the expertise of employees, the municipality offers study courses as a nurse assistant related to health care, and we have started this since 2020. Where employees who wish to continue their studies in the field of public health, they receive every week two days of pay in order to continue their studies.*

We also offer courses related to the physical health of employees, such as how to transport patients, and courses on personal and general hygiene for employees and the elderly. We also provide courses for employees who work permanently in order to train on the new digital platforms that we are working to implement in the municipality". Likewise for Torborg who said: "*We are committed to providing continuing education courses for employees every year. This is in order to ensure their continuous education and the development of their expertise. The municipality and government support we offer courses on physical health, and we offer training courses for nurses and nurses' assistants*".

2- **Appreciation and rewards:** All the leaders in the interviews emphasised the importance of appreciation and rewards for employees in order to ensure their continuity and ensure the provision of the best health and social service. Where the leadership in the municipality is working to provide compensation, logistical support, and attractive job offers to ensure the attraction of more health care employees and to ensure the retention of experienced employees. Where Sofi said: "*We also offer many incentives to encourage work. For example, we suffer from a shortage of manpower in health care centres in the south of the island, due to the geographical distance, and therefore employees wishing to work there can obtain travel compensation and can work at 85% while they receive a full salary 100%. Workers who work more on weekends can also work 30 hours a week instead of 37 hours. And we offer to all employees financial support to participate in gyms and sport centres*".

And Torborg confirmed the same thing: " *We also offer many incentives that help motivate employees. For example, healthcare workers who work in geographically distant centres receive full salary for 85% of the hours worked. And employees who work in several different centres around the municipality get five extra days off every year. In addition to transportation and driving compensation. This is one way to motivate and attract more employees, especially since we suffer from geographical problems related to the*

distribution of health care centres over long distances around the municipality". Ann-Katrin: "*we have introduced a new working time agreement for those who work there, which means that you work 85% but receive a full-time salary*".

Chapter 5. Discussion

In this section we will present and analyse the data that will help us answer the thesis questions. Where we will discuss several aspects related to the challenges facing the municipality in the post-Covid-19 era. What are these challenges that are still ongoing? What are the most important challenges associated with workforce development? What is the role of leaders and leadership in addressing these challenges? We will discuss the relationship between leaders and employees. Most of this data is issued by people (leaders) who work in leadership positions in the centres and departments of the municipality spread over a wide geographical area. This data will therefore be supported and compared by secondary data, which are news, reports and documents issued by Mörbylånga Municipality. At the end, we will review the results and offer suggestions for developing mechanisms to address the challenges associated with workforce development in the post-Covid-19 era.

5.1 Mörbylånga municipality "kommun"

In order to have a deep understanding of the reader, and in order to avoid any misunderstanding regarding the nature of the institution we are studying. In this section we provide a brief overview of the Mörbylånga municipality. What is this institution, and what are its departments and structure?

Mörbylånga municipality constitutes an autonomous entity with independent structures and fiscal frameworks. Their responsibilities encompass a diverse range of services and

activities. Although not under the direct authority of the state, municipalities are bound to adhere to national laws and guidelines, and are expected to cooperate with state entities in select domains. The municipality consists of several structures and departments that cooperate with each other. According to the report issued by the municipality (Mörbylånga, 2023).

1- The municipal council:

It is the highest decision-making body in the municipality. The full council makes decisions on major issues of principle and importance. It can be, for example, about goals and guidelines for business, budget, taxation and other financial matters. Every four years, the residents of the municipality decide who will sit on the municipal council. The 43 seats are distributed among the various political parties according to the number of votes in the municipal elections. The municipality is governed by a coalition composed of the Social Democrats, the Center Party and the Left Party.

2- Electoral council:

The Electoral Commission carries out municipal functions in general elections to Parliament, the District Council and the Municipal Council, in elections to the European Parliament and in the implementation of referenda. Every year the municipal auditors review all the activities carried out by the councils and committees. Auditors assess whether operations are being managed in an appropriate and financially satisfactory manner.

3- Municipal council:

The municipal council is the leading political administrative body in the municipality and is appointed by the municipal council. The Municipal Council consists of 13 members and 9 substitutes. The municipal council is specifically responsible for managing and coordinating the activities of the municipality, as well as for financial and budgetary matters. Other tasks of the Municipal Council are:

- Supervising the activities that take place in municipal companies and municipal associations.

- Coordinating the work on formulating the comprehensive objectives of the municipality.

- Ensuring the implementation of the municipal council's decisions in a timely manner.

The Municipal Council Working Committee shall prepare matters for the Municipal Council and, on behalf of the Municipal Council, closely follow all activities for which the Municipal Council is directly responsible.

4- Social committee:

The social council is responsible for the duties of the municipality in accordance with the Social Services Law, the Health and Medical Care Law, and what the law provides for the social council. The Social Committee consists of 9 members and 5 substitutes. The Social Council is responsible for municipal health care, disability care, elderly care, the operation of various forms of social service accommodation and HVB homes, family counselling, budget advice, and individual and family care.

5- Community building council:

The community planning council is responsible for the tasks of the municipality in the planning and building system as well as in the field of environmental protection and health. In addition, the council deals with issues regulated by the Alcohol and Tobacco Act and is responsible for providing maps. The community development committee consists of 9 members and 5 alternates. The community planning board work committee should prepare things for the community planning board.

6- Culture and growth council:

The Culture and Development Committee should focus on development issues and how the areas for which the Culture and Development Committee is individually and collectively responsible can contribute to the growth of the municipality. The Council for Culture and Growth is responsible for entertainment issues, labour market issues, cultural

activities, cultural schools, as well as infrastructure, which includes the areas of water, sewage, district heating, streets, roads, parks, public places, ports, and real estate.
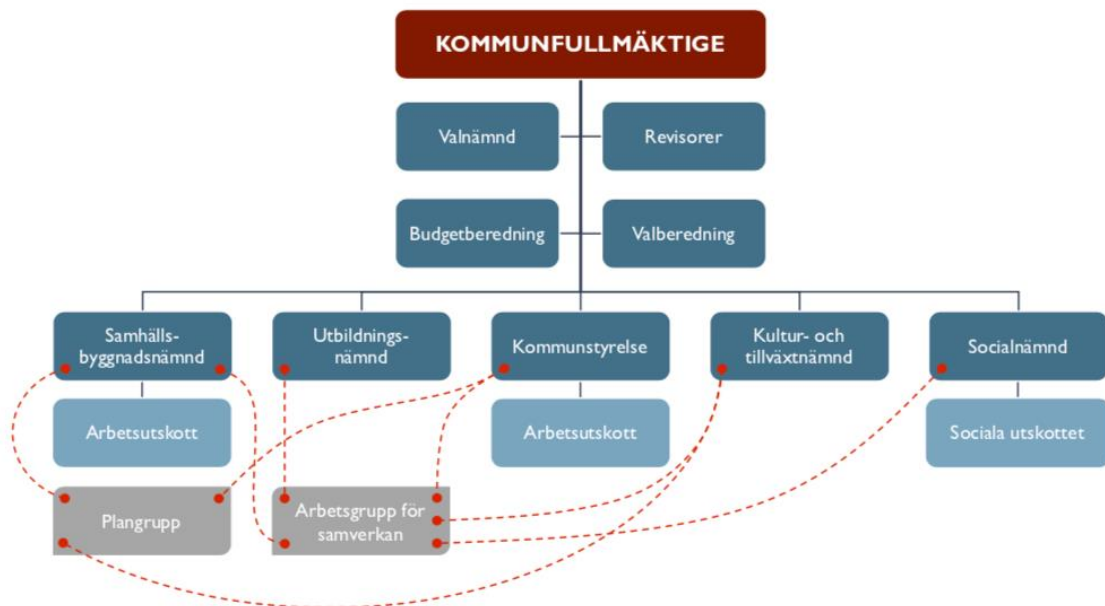
Bilden visar Mörbylånga kommuns politiska organisation. De röda streckade linjerna förklarar vilka nämnder som medverkar i plangrupp och arbetsgrupp för samverkan.

Table 2: Mörbylånga Kommun Organisation

5.2 Current challenges

In this section, we will discuss the most important challenges that were discussed with the leaders. Through this we will develop the discussion to explore the sources of these challenges. Then, in the following sections, we will discuss solutions, the role of leadership, and suggestions. As we mentioned earlier, we discussed with the leaders the challenges that have emerged or increased at the municipality level in all its departments

after the Covid-19 pandemic. Most of the leaders indicated that there are two common challenges at the municipality level as a whole and at the level of health care departments in particular.

They are mainly, the lack of manpower, or the lack of experienced health cadres to cover the municipality's need with regard to providing health and social services to the elderly and the sick. The other challenge is related to frequent cyber attacks that affect the operations that are conducted through computers, archiving systems, information preservation, and the development of work programmes, plans and strategies. Ann-Katrin stressed during the meeting that the biggest challenge is the lack of manpower, as she said: " *The biggest challenge, regardless of covid, is the supply of skills for elderly care. The demographic trend with more elderly people and fewer professionals is the reason. Above all, we have a shortage of staff in care for the elderly, and the greatest shortage is at home care in southern Öland*". She also referred to challenges related to cyber-attacks, which in turn is related to the digital development that the municipality is working on. Therefore, the increase in digital development means an increase in the possibility of cyber attacks, as she said: "*We have had to train for various crises and can see that we have a fairly good preparedness, most recently with the cyber attack which did not affect operations to any great degree*".

Likewise for Sofi, she confirmed during the interview that they suffer from a major problem related to the lack of experienced manpower. Unlike many business sectors that have an abundance of employees, the health sector in Sweden in general and in Mörbylånga municipality in particular suffers from this shortage. This is an old challenge from before the emergence of the Covid-19 epidemic, but it was exacerbated further during and after the epidemic, as she said: "*The biggest challenge we face is the lack of manpower in the field of health care in general, especially experienced workers, and the ability to retain employees. It can be said that we are facing a difficulty in the demographics, as the*

number of elderly people increases, while we do not have a sufficient number of employees who are able to work".

Both Torborg and Beatrice mentioned the same challenges associated with manpower shortages and frequent cyber attacks, which prompted the municipality to develop more secure digital platforms. Torborg said: "*One of the most important difficulties we faced at the beginning of the pandemic was the uncertainty. This concern also led today to a more shortage of health care staff*".

Likewise for Beatrice, where she emphasised the continuity of suffering in dealing with problems related to the lack of the required number of experienced and competent employees to cover all cases or needs, as she said: "*After the spread of the epidemic and until today, we still suffer from problems related to the lack of a sufficient number of employees who are able to cover the need of health care personnel*". She also referred to difficulties related to external challenges represented by cyber attacks. Where Beatrice confirmed that work on the ground was not significantly affected by these attacks. But these attacks affect the work that needs to be done through digital systems and computers "*The cyber attacks that Sweden is exposed to permanently helped us test our readiness as managers and employees to face external challenges and our ability to adapt to changes that may arise all the time. Such as working without the Internet and without computers or mobile phones and means of communication. We have already succeeded in managing the business well and in the worst conditions*".

All of this data issued by the leaders is consistent with the annual report issued by Mörbylånga Municipality (Mörbylånga, 2023), where the report indicates the importance of addressing the biggest challenge, which is the need to attract a greater number of employees and workers. The municipality is working on developing strategies to attract more employees. According to the report: "The employees are the municipality's biggest

and most important resource. The strategic and continuous work with the psychosocial, physical and organisational work environment must be in focus so that it is stimulating, healthy and developing to attract more people to work in Mörbylånga municipality. Competition is high for the workforce and the work of being an attractive employer for both existing and new staff must be intensified." Of course, these challenges were expected for us, as most of the literature and studies indicate the existence of these challenges and their exacerbation after Covid 19. The SCB, Statistics Sweden (2022) indicates that there is a significant shortage of experienced nurses and healthcare personnel in Sweden, especially in the recent period. Likewise for the results of the research conducted by Rosenbäck R, et al (2022).

Similarly with regard to cyber attacks; According to reports issued by the Swedish state television channel SVT on 20 December 2022, it was confirmed that there have been cyber attacks on Mörbylånga municipality. Where Mörbylånga municipalities are still struggling to get their IT systems up and running after the hacker attack. Where two municipalities on Öland Mörbylång and Borgeholm discovered the IT attack and that data had been copied from the municipalities' servers. According to Jonas Månsson, there are many different reasons why a municipality can be hacked. One type of attack, which hit Kalix municipality earlier in 2022, are so-called ransomware attacks. Then the hackers lock the computers, and then blackmail the victim. Another possibility is hacker groups, which act on their own initiative or on behalf of a foreign power. They can send out hordes of bots trying to get into hundreds of thousands of systems – and steal data where they succeed (SVT, 2022).

According to the municipality manager in Mörbylånga, Ann Willsund: *crisis management was activated when there were indications of "some type of external influence in our IT environment". This led to the internet connection being turned off, which means that Mörbylånga's website and email are down. The cyber attack also affects other systems*

that are used in the municipalities' operations. "During the night, our staff worked on this and we were able to establish that we had an attack. We have thus gone from handling an incident to handling a crisis situation. Here it is important to save lives. In healthcare, you have to work more manually, for which there are routines (Lindström K, 2022).

Thus, after identifying data related to emerging challenges after Covid-19. By comparing and coding the data issued by the leaders, in parallel with the data, reports and documents issued by the municipal administration and media reports, we can conclude two main results: The biggest challenge for Mörbylånga municipality in the post-Covid-19 era is to address the shortage of healthcare workers. And adapting to the changes that arise in the post-Corona world. In addition to another challenge, which is the development of secure digital platforms that are able to protect data and information from cyber attacks, especially since these attacks were repeated several times in just one year. This prompts us to delve deeper into the analysis and evaluation of the strategies adopted by the municipal administration in addressing these challenges.

5.3 The role of leadership to address these challenges

As we indicated earlier, regardless of the specific leadership style that is followed in governmental, semi-governmental or private institutions and companies, we argue that effective leadership plays the main role in the development of the workforce in general and in the field of health care in particular. Where it is able through its strategies to maintain and develop its employees and attract new employees. Also, effective leadership is supposed to be able to manage the recovery after three years of the pandemic, especially since the health care sector in Sweden in general has witnessed multiple disruptions and challenges. In order to meet these challenges, we analyse the extent to which the leadership in Mörbylånga municipality can adapt to changes and analyse the extent of its commitment to supporting its workforce. Through the data we have obtained, we analyse the role of leadership in Mörbylånga municipality based on several key leadership strategies that are implemented to support workforce development.

5.3.1 Leadership and communication

What we are trying to find out, by analysing empirical data, is the role of leadership in Mörbylånga municipality in terms of workforce development. In Swedish municipalities in general effective leadership is considered important to ensure the welfare and sustainability of society. Elected officials, leaders, and municipal employees collaborate to meet the local needs of each district.

By reviewing the reports issued by the municipality of Mörbylånga, it appears that this institution is based on democracy and election in the selection of its officials. Thus, a democratic structure encourages leaders to engage in open dialogue with employees and other leaders. This is confirmed by the municipality's guidelines.

"*Everyone who works in Mörbylånga municipality is an employee, including leaders and managers. As a leader, you not only take responsibility for your assignment, but also for the whole of the workplace and the employees you lead. The decisions that leaders make are based on creating citizen benefit and you as a leader have a conscious strategy to create a sustainable organisation. In that work, you as a leader understand the importance of open and clear communication where you value and contribute to dialogue with your employees. Both in terms of purpose, goals and evaluation of your decisions and the goals of the business*" (Mörbylånga Kommun 2023).

Through primary and secondary data, it seems that the municipality is doing its best to make its decisions in a consultative manner, not only with employees and leaders, but with society in general. This is done through various communication channels such as public meetings, online platforms, and surveys. This participatory approach reflects the values and aspirations of society and employees. This certainly applies to the healthcare department. The leadership in the municipality is also committed to sustainable development, as the leaders affirmed through meetings that they are committed to strategic

planning that is compatible with sustainable development. Where the municipality cooperates and coordinates with other municipalities and authorities through collaborative networks to exchange experiences, address common issues, and provide long-term visions.

The leaders also revealed through interviews their pivotal role in managing change and progress within the organisation. This is done by inspiring and motivating healthcare workers. And by providing clear visions and high standards in terms of enhancing employees' self-confidence and encouraging them to innovate and raise their ideas and questions, and by promoting work as an integrated team. And this is what Beatrice expressed by saying: *I am keen to listen to the concerns of the employees, and I am used to creating a dialogue with each employee individually in order to strengthen the relationship between the leader and the employee. I listen seriously to the employees' problems, suggestions and concerns. This is in order to create a spirit of cooperation among all and to create a feeling among the employees that the leaders care about them and their opinions and suggestions.*

Where she confirmed that they delegate responsibilities and independence to the employees working in the health care department in accordance with the principles of work. And this helps employees to enhance the feeling that they are valued and that their opinions help in the development of work and that they have a pivotal role in the team. The leaders confirmed that the leadership in Mörbylånga municipality emphasises the involvement of employees in decision-making related to the health care department, especially if these decisions are at the level of employees and interaction with the group. While some decisions are made in higher decision-making circles, the role of leaders in the health care department is to explain these decisions to employees and make sure they are understood.

With regard to making decisions, it depends on the type of decisions. The municipality is subject to a political apparatus. It may be decisions issued at the highest levels, and in this case our role as managers and leaders is to explain these decisions to employees and discuss any points that are not clear. With regard to small decisions related to work, they can be discussed and all points of view can be heard in order to ensure effective job performance and provide ideal health care for the elderly and patients (Torborg).

Most of the leaders interviewed also emphasised ethical leadership principles. This is linked to transparency, integrity and accountability. We have also observed through the empirical data we have collected that leaders in Mörbylånga municipality consider leadership to be the cornerstone of effective governance and development of the healthcare workforce. Most of the leaders we interviewed expressed the importance of servant leadership as a model for employee empowerment and support. This, in turn, enhances employees' confidence in their leaders. It reinforces the idea that the leader works to advance the interests of his employees. Where Beatrice expressed, for example, that she is always in work centres and in direct contact with employees. Where it deals with employees as people and not as employees performing job services. Where she said: *I am keen to listen to the concerns of the employees, and I am used to creating a dialogue with each employee individually in order to strengthen the relationship between the leader and the employee. I listen seriously to the employees' problems, suggestions and concerns. This is in order to create a spirit of cooperation among all and to create a feeling among the employees that the leaders care about them and their opinions and suggestions. This motivates them to work better and creates a feeling that I, as a leader, care about them as people, not just as employees performing job duties.*

These results are in some way consistent with the findings of the research conducted by Imeli G and Johan I (2021) at Jönköping University. They concluded that effective leadership in the healthcare sector is the most important factor in developing team

performance and promoting innovation and creativity, especially when leaders embrace the spirit of teamwork and promote trust and dialogue. Thus, we notice that leaders care about the principles of empathy, listening, and psychological and moral support, and this in turn enhances trust between employees and their managers and enhances the values of teamwork. Indeed, we have noticed through unstructured dialogues with some employees in the health care department in Mörbylånga municipality that many employees are trying to develop their experiences, and are interested in continuing to work in their centres due to their good harmony with their managers. This, in turn, helps retain experienced employees.

5.3.2 Flexibility and adaptation

One of the advantages of leadership in Mörbylånga municipality is flexibility, especially in the healthcare department. Leaders consider leadership flexibility to be a critical approach to addressing uncertainties and rapid changes in the world. Where leaders emphasised their ability to adapt to the changes that may arise, and this is what was worked on after the emergence of the Covid-19 pandemic. Where Beatrice expressed that they are leaders who are open and ready to deal with any changes. This is because they realise that technological progress and demographic changes in the municipality require them to be flexible and embrace innovation and creative ideas, organised communication and rapid response at the level of leaders and in the relationship between leaders and employees.

All of the leaders we interviewed shared that the post-Covid-19 challenges, especially in terms of workforce shortages in healthcare, were not expected to be so difficult. This, in turn, necessitated an adaptive leadership capable of being flexible and adapting to external challenges, including crisis management, providing an efficient workforce, cooperation, teamwork and being able to overcome challenges that may appear unexpectedly, such as cyber attacks. Where the leaders confirmed that they are working on developing their experiences as leaders and also help the employees to develop their skills constantly, as

this in turn helps them to make quick and difficult decisions in proportion to the surrounding circumstances. The leaders tested themselves and their capabilities through several experiences that the organisation went through. And when talking about the ability to adapt and flexibility to external challenges. These results are similar to the research conducted by Skagerström J et al (2023), where they confirmed that the healthcare sector in Sweden and the leaders were able to deal with a lot of stress during and after the epidemic. And that thanks to collective cooperation and the flexibility of the leaders and their ability to adapt, they were able to overcome these pressures and enhance teamwork and team spirit.

An example of this is the municipality's embrace of digital development, as the pandemic has accelerated the adoption of technological development in managing work in health centres. Where the leaders had to arrange remote meetings and enhance Internet and communication services, and this in turn reduced a lot of time, effort and costs. At the same time, the municipality's institutions were subjected to several cyber attacks that caused damage to information systems and digital platforms, and despite this, work continued on the ground in the best way.

The cyber attacks that Sweden is exposed to permanently helped us test our readiness as managers and employees to face external challenges and our ability to adapt to changes that may arise all the time. Despite these risks, we were able to do business in the best possible way. This is thanks to the presence of highly qualified employees in the field of healthcare. And because there are alternative plans for us as leaders to manage the work in the worst conditions that we may witness. And because of our ability as leaders to work calmly and rationally even if we are in the middle of a storm. We have already succeeded in managing the business well and in the worst conditions, and therefore I believe that we are able to adapt to the changes that may arise, and I believe that we are able to overcome any expected challenges that may arise in the future. This reflects the true ability of

employees and leaders who have proven their ability to adapt to any unexpected circumstances or changes that may arise at any time (Beatrice).

The leadership in Mörbylånga municipality has been able, through its flexibility, to strengthen cooperation and partnership with other institutions. As facing challenges requires joint action. Beatrice confirmed that in the health care department, they coordinate with secondary and popular schools and labour institutions in order to introduce the jobs available to them and encourage young people to work and develop their expertise. This comes in the context of providing an efficient workforce.

5.3.3 Building trust and managing stress

Through interviews with a number of leaders in the healthcare sector, key themes emerged that highlighted the importance of building trust between leaders and subordinates, and managing stress through cooperation, empathy, and competence. Topics of individual stress management and organisational strategies such as workload distribution were discussed. And by analysing interviews with leaders in Mörbylånga municipality, it appears that building trust and managing stress is one of the main pillars of workforce development. Recurring patterns, themes, and recommendations related to building confidence and stress management were identified. The interviews revealed several strategies that leaders use to build trust with employees. They include:

1- Communication:

This helps in strengthening relationships within the team, and this is what all leaders emphasised. Where Beatrice mentioned: *We also work to enhance employees' sense of belonging and that they are an essential part of the group. Therefore, as a leader in this department, be sure to listen to everyone. And the distribution of responsibilities and make employees feel that they are able to take responsibility and work effectively within the team and that every employee is an essential and important part of the work.*

2- Cooperation and distribution of effort: As Ann-Katrin mentioned :

Our Mörbylånga model is an example where the employees of eldercare employees plan the operations themselves. It requires that everyone takes responsibility and that the group is mature for it. I think you have to work with the group process and be open about what strengths and weaknesses you have and make the most of it. If I feel unsure about dealing with some patients or demented, maybe someone who is good at it should help you to take care of those patients. And that is in order to distribute the stress. Where the team cooperates with employees, distributes tasks in a collective manner so that this does not create additional pressure on any individual.

3- Transparency and accountability:

As all leaders emphasised the importance of exchanging information with the aim of creating a supportive work environment so that colleagues can coordinate with each other, rely on each other, and exchange experiences. This helps him manage stress and individual effort in an effective way, and balance work and life and build trust. *We as leaders work with the control department and deal with employees in the field of health care based on the principle of trust. Where we sit with employees and department managers and talk about ways to develop and address problems, and we work to enhance the principle of trust in employees in order to enhance their feelings of their ability to take responsibility and contribute effectively to work, as we give them authorization to plan work programs and tasks in accordance with Circumstances. And that is In order to manage efforts and distribute them in an effective way, we avoid psychological and physical pressure on individuals and help us manage stress* (Sofi).

All participants in the interviews emphasised the development of support systems within the institution, such as employee assistance programs, expanding their experience with technical and health systems, and enhancing their sense of belonging. These statements are in line with the municipality's operational directives and principles, as the municipality's administration emphasises these principles and strategies related to building

trust among all employees and managers and managing stress in an effective manner. *As a leader, you ensure that your employees understand their importance to the organisation, their mission and society. You make others feel important and involved. Your leadership style contributes to the achievement of the business's goals. You show the trust you have gained as a leader by being a committed role model and guide in our organisation. Curious, present, coaching, supportive and caring. responsive and have confidence that your employees can and want to succeed in their assignments. It is also important that you show them this* (Mörbylånga Kommun 2023). In the same context, with regard to building trust and managing stress, the study conducted by Holmberg I and Petrelius P (2020) revealed that leadership that is able to enhance trust as a leadership style and skill is more capable of managing chaos, continuous changes, and managing stress. And a study conducted by Santoso N et al (2022) revealed that Flexible/transformational leadership plays an essential and important role in overcoming the challenges posed by the Covid-19 pandemic. This is done by encouraging employees to tell their ideas and questions, and enhancing employee participation in decision-making and drawing up strategies that are in line with the interest of all.

5.3.4 Training and developing expertise

In this section you will explore one aspect that leadership in Mörbylånga municipality plays in relation to the development of the healthcare workforce. It is to support continuing education, vocational development, counselling programs and organisational support in order to develop employee skills. Through an in-depth exploration of leaders' experiences and perspectives regarding employee training and development, we can note several key points.

1- A culture of lifelong education, where the leaders emphasised the importance of promoting a culture of education and continuous development within health care institutions. This includes sharing knowledge, enhancing skills and creative thinking.

2- Mentorship programmes, as this allows for the establishment of a relationship between new employees and those with expertise, where the experienced ones direct their colleagues, which facilitates the transfer of knowledge.

3- Education platforms and resources, where the leaders stressed the importance of providing training courses and cooperation with educational institutions, online platforms, books and magazines related to public health.

Where the municipality allocates resources and time to develop the expertise of employees. This includes scholarships related to nursing and public health. The municipality, in cooperation with the government, provides a budget for employees who wish to pursue their academic education in the field of nursing and public health. Where employees can work at 50% capacity, complete their education the rest of the time, and receive full salaries.

As Sofi confirmed :*Where employees who wish to continue their studies in the field of public health, they receive every week two days of pay in order to continue their studies. We also offer courses related to the physical health of employees, such as how to transport patients, and courses on personal and general hygiene for employees and the elderly. We also provide courses for employees who work permanently in order to train on the new digital platforms that we are working to implement in the municipality*.

For example, at the health care centre that Beatrice runs, she has ensured that many of her staff work part-time and complete their education as nurse's assistants: *We also obtained financial support from the government in order to develop the expertise of employees who*

want to complete their academic education in the field of health care. Where I have two employees who work at 50% and study during the rest of the week and receive a full salary of 100%.

The leadership in Mörbylånga municipality also provides educational courses for new employees, and these courses are courses related to medicines, hygiene, public health, physical and mental health, and training on the digital platforms used by the municipality in managing information and plans related to public health. Torborg: *We are committed to providing continuing education courses for employees every year. This is in order to ensure their continuous education and the development of their expertise. The municipality and by government support we offer courses on physical health, and we offer training courses for nurses and nurses' assistants. We also provide support for employees wishing to complete their academic studies in the field of health care as nursing assistants.*

And this is confirmed by all the leaders. This is an advantage that adds real value to leadership efforts in workforce development. As Mörbylånga Municipality considers itself as a learning organisation :

(A learning organisation – learning employees)

Wanting to move positions, wanting to find new ways of working and getting more people to take more responsibility and initiative to create the best workplace, requires constant development and constant learning. In Mörbylånga municipality, we want to learn new things and we want to make use of all the great knowledge that exists in the organisation. We do this best by sharing what we know, what we have learned and what we believe. By, for example, working together with colleagues from other businesses, we can find new ways of working that create even more citizen benefit. We all own our own development through our curiosity, our commitment and our desire to grow. We are curious and take advantage of our colleagues' innovative ideas and dare to test them. We are creative in our problem solving and see challenges as opportunities for development. Digitization is

an important part of this for us and we want to find new opportunities to work more digitally (Mörbylånga kommun, 2023).

5.3.5 Recognition and rewards

An important aspect of the leadership in Mörbylånga municipality is recognizing the work of employees and providing incentives, with the aim of promoting a positive work environment and attracting more employees willing to work in the healthcare field. Where recurring patterns and themes were identified within the interviews.

Among the most important of these aspects are:

1- Thanking and appreciating the employees for their motivation and improving their performance, as the leaders recognized the importance of the impact of rewards in creating a positive work environment. One of these aspects is providing financial compensation to employees who postpone their summer vacations to other times after the summer period. This helps in reducing the gap associated with the shortage of manpower. And this was confirmed by all the leaders who were interviewed. The leadership in the municipality also offers a sum of money as a gift to every employee who nominates someone who wants to work in the field of health care. In the interview in Case No. 5, the following was emphasized: *We provide financial compensation to employees who work on permanent work contracts, in exchange for postponing their summer vacations to other times. This helps us provide staff to cover our needs during the summer vacation period, and we also provide a gift, which is a sum of money for each employee who nominates a new person to work in our departments in all health care centers around the municipality.*

The municipality also provides many incentive work programs, for example, the leadership in the health care department provides free shoes and clothes to workers, and it

also provides financial support to employees to participate in sports clubs and physiotherapy centers.

We also offer many incentives that help motivate employees. For example, healthcare workers who work in geographically distant centers receive full salary for 85% of the hours worked. And employees who work in several different centers around the municipality get five extra days off every year. In addition to transportation and driving compensation. This is one way to motivate and attract more employees, especially since we suffer from geographical problems related to the distribution of health care centers over long distances around the municipality (Torbotg). Mörbylånga municipality's leadership also offers full-salary job offers with 85% working hours, as well as more days off for nurses and nurses assistants who work on weekends.

Employees who work more on weekends can also work 30 hours a week instead of 37 hours (Sofi). And the municipality guarantees the payment of compensation for sick leave or injuries and guarantees compensation for maternity leave or paternity leave. The leadership in the municipality is also working on making offers to sign permanent work contracts for temporary employees who have a certain number of hours or who wish to continue working, especially after they have gained good experience.

The leaders also emphasized some challenges and considerations in implementing systems of appreciation and rewards to ensure justice and fairness in the distribution of salaries, recognitions and rewards, aligning appreciation and rewards with the organizational and strategic goals of the organization. This is in line with the guidelines of the municipality, where one of the decisions states the following:

In Mörbylånga municipality, the purpose of salary setting is that it should be transparent, clear and fair with the aim of stimulating the development of both the business and the

individual as well as contributing to the achievement of the business's goals. The salary setting must contribute to a positive relationship between salary, motivation and a good result for the employee. The guidelines should also be a guide for managers in their responsibility to handle salary issues. The salary policy is part of the municipality's long-term work to develop a clear structure and salary policy to retain and recruit employees. Together we create the best workplace.

A prerequisite for us to succeed in this is that everyone who works in Mörbylånga municipality has a consensus on how we, as employees, work in the municipality, what expectations exist and that we understand and feel responsibility and know our rights, obligations and opportunities in the workplace. As an employee, you are an indispensable part of what creates a sustainable and socially beneficial organization.

However, despite all the efforts made by the leadership in Mörbylånga municipality, it still suffers from the problem of a shortage of manpower in the field of health care. This raises many questions about ways to develop leadership strategies in order to provide a sustainable solution to this problem.

Chapter 6. Conclusion

In this section, we summarise what has been done in this study, and review the main results of this study. In addition to the knowledge contribution we may make through this thesis. We also make some suggestions for future research that may be related to our thesis.

6.1 Key results

The main goal of this thesis was to explore the main current challenges that have arisen or exacerbated in the post-Covid-19 era. In this study, we focused on the challenges associated with workforce development in the healthcare sector in one of Sweden's

municipalities, Mörbylånga. At the beginning, we discussed from a general perspective the most important challenges that have arisen and exacerbated in the post-Covid-19 era. Where we briefly discussed the problems associated with uncertainty because of constant changes in the world, cyber attacks, especially since many companies and institutions have increased their dependence on digital platforms after the Covid-19 pandemic. This made them targets for cyberattacks, and we also discussed the exacerbation of workforce development problems, particularly in the healthcare sectors in Sweden.

Unlike many companies that laid off a large number of their employees after the Covid-19 pandemic, the healthcare sector in general, and in Sweden in particular, suffers from a shortage of trained manpower. We have therefore tried to answer a key question related to the current challenges related to the development of the healthcare workforce in Mörbylånga municipality. We also tried to explore the role that leadership is supposed to play in addressing these challenges.

Through semi-structured interviews with leaders working in the healthcare sector in Mörbylånga municipality, and through thematic analysis of these interviews and comparison with other secondary data, we developed our understanding of the challenges around workforce development. But before delving into the analysis of interviews and secondary data, we discussed several theoretical concepts that formed the theoretical and conceptual basis of our study. This is with the aim of developing the reader's understanding of the importance of discussing these concepts. We discussed concepts related to workforce development, strategic planning, and leadership approaches such as transformational, servant, and flexible leadership. We also discussed later the methodology we rely on in collecting and analysing data, and we discussed the limitations that we faced in this thesis.

In this study we have developed an understanding of the external challenges that affect organisations and companies, particularly in relation to the healthcare sector. And as an answer to the main question related to exploring these challenges that have emerged in the post-Covid-19 era with regard to workforce development. It became clear to us that the most important challenges that are still continuing in the health care sector in Sweden are two main challenges:

The first is that the increasing reliance of institutions and companies on digital platforms has made them the target of cyber attacks that, in one way or another, affects the performance of the workforce and information management. However, it was clear from the interviews that thanks to the efforts of the leaders and the competent employees, these attacks did not significantly affect the job performance of the workers.

The second and most important challenge was the shortage of trained personnel who are able to work in the field of health care. The leaders made it clear that this problem is not new. However, it worsened further during and after the Covid-19 pandemic.

When discussing the sub-question related to the role of leadership in addressing the challenges of developing the workforce, several main results emerged from these interviews.

First, the importance of strategic planning, coordination and collaboration was emphasised by leaders. The stakeholders realised the importance of long-term planning and coordination with other institutions such as educational institutions and government agencies to ensure support and attract more employees in the healthcare sector.

Secondly, the interviews showed the importance of the main role of the principle of continuous education at the level of employees and even leaders. This is in order to adapt and keep pace with the rapid changes that are taking place, whether at the level of technology, digital systems, or medical research. This is with the aim of promoting job advancement for all, and ensuring the existence of an efficient workforce.

Third, all leaders in the municipality highlighted the importance of developing recruitment and retention strategies. Where they emphasised the importance of attracting a larger number of employees and enhancing their affiliation and job satisfaction. This is through continuous communication, discussing any work-related problems, and providing them with incentives.

Fourth, the interviews revealed the importance of making decisions related to workforce development and filling gaps related to staff shortages through accurate data. Leaders in interviews indicated demographic problems, with the number of old and sick growing faster than the number of young people able to work. Therefore, demographic and social trends, resource allocation and gap identification are necessary factors in effective planning.

Fifth, one of the important aspects that leaders work on in order to develop the workforce is to enhance communication with different departments, leaders and employees. Where leaders in the municipality pointed out the importance of encouraging communication and dialogue, which in turn helps to uncover gaps and develop solutions. They also pointed out the importance of instilling confidence in employees and enhancing their sense of their ability to assume responsibility.

6.2 Contributions and future research

In conclusion, this thesis emphasises the complex and multifaceted nature of workforce development in healthcare in Sweden. Several points have emerged that must be worked on further in order to address the challenges of manpower development and address the shortage of qualified personnel. Where the importance of strategic planning emerged, cooperation and coordination at the level of departments within the organisation and with other institutions, promoting the principle of continuous education for employees and leaders, developing recruitment and employee retention strategies, making decisions based on accurate data, enhancing communication at all levels, flexibility and adaptation with changes.

All these results provide valuable insights to decision makers and policy makers in healthcare organisations. It also provides valuable insights for leaders working in these organisations to meet current and future needs. In particular, we believe that the results of this thesis may be applicable to a large number of municipalities and health care institutions in Sweden, especially since most of them suffer from problems related to the development of the workforce (Rolander, R 2020). Future studies can build on the basis of this study and can explore in depth some aspects or search for additional issues that may arise in the future such as:

Contextual understanding: This thesis focused on the healthcare sector in Mörbylånga municipality, this study provides a contextual understanding of the challenges of workforce development. Future studies could replicate the design in other municipalities or countries.

Policy development: This thesis provides practical insights for policy makers in healthcare organisations with regard to workforce development. Future studies can explore the effectiveness of interventions or initiatives undertaken by decision makers. And with the rapid development of technology, there is a growing need to promote the principle of

continuing education. Future research can investigate the effectiveness of lifelong education models, and study the impact of technological development in the field of continuing education, career advancement, job satisfaction, and workforce flexibility in general.

Integration of perspectives: This study focused on the perspectives of leaders working in the healthcare sector with regard to workforce development. Future studies can expand and incorporate the perspectives of staff, patients, and other relevant stakeholders. This can provide a diverse and comprehensive understanding of health care workforce development issues.

Longitudinal research: In this study, we provide a quick overview of the challenges and strategies for developing the healthcare workforce in the post-Covid-19 era. Future studies could use long-term research designs to examine the evolution of the workforce over time, taking into account changes in policies and practices. This provides valuable insights into the long-term impact of changing interventions and policies.

Long-term workforce planning and coordination: Research could delve into the importance of long-term planning and coordination between healthcare organisations, educational institutions, and government agencies. This could examine the impact of collaborative efforts on workforce development, including strategies for forecasting future workforce needs, identifying skill gaps, and implementing measures to ensure an adequate supply of healthcare professionals.

One aspect that caught our attention during the study was that all of the leaders interviewed were female. When we asked Beatrice about this point, she pointed to cultural, social and historical reasons that affect the orientation of women in Sweden towards certain fields of

work. This point may be interesting for examining the relationship between gender and leadership / interests.

Overall, this study contributes to future studies by providing a basis for further exploration of the challenges, strategies, and outcomes of workforce development in the healthcare field. This study can be used for comparison and development of future studies.

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Appendix

Appendix Interview questions (In English bellow)

NOTE: These were just the main questions, which in turn led to a lot of discussions and subsidiary questions. Since the interviews included multiple aspects and points, we dealt with other aspects related to the goal of the thesis.

1- Vad är din befattning (jobb position) och hur länge har du arbetat i den tjänsten?

2- Vilka är de viktigaste utmaningarna som du fortfarande står inför som chefer eller ledare sedan starten av Corona-epidemic, när det gäller kommunikation, samarbete, flexibilitet, beslutsfattande och arbetskraftsutveckling och varför?

3- Varför tror du att dessa utmaningar fortfarande pågår fram till denna tid efter mer än 3 år av spridning av covid-19?

4- Har du ställts inför eller står du fortfarande inför utmaningar relaterade till bristen på mänsklig arbetskraft? Jag menar, på din avdelning har du brist på arbetskraft och hur kompenserar du denna brist?

5- Vilka är kommunikation mekanismerna mellan er som chefer och de anställda som arbetar på vårdavdelningen? Och skilde sig kommunikationsmedlen i kommunen efter Corona Pandemin?

6- Finns det några problem med kommunikationen mellan dig och de anställda? och tror du att det är lätt för anställda att ha kontakt med dig?

7- Om du/ni som ledare gör några förändringar eller nya beslut relaterat till arbetet, hur tar du/ni beslutet? Och lyssnar ni på arbetarnas/ personal åsikter innan du fattar beslut?

8- Finns det flexibilitet i att organisera arbetsscheman för personal så att de passar deras livsförhållanden, och hur gör ni denna flexibilitet för att säkerställa arbetstagarnas tillfredsställelse?

9- Om ni står inför en ny yttre kris som liknar covid-19-epidemic, tror ni att chefer och arbetare kan övervinna en sådan kris, och hur?

10- Efter covid-19-krisen, arbetar ni som ledare med att utveckla kompetensen hos arbetare inom hälsosektorn, och hur?

11- Hur motiverar du arbetet för att prestera bättre på jobbet, erbjuder ni några belöningar eller materiell eller moralisk motivation?

12-Står kommunen inför ekonomiska utmaningar efter covid-19 och hur påverkar det medarbetarnas nöjdhet?

13- Vilka metoder tycker du bör arbetas mer med för att utveckla arbetslaget (workteam)

14- Vilka metoder tycker du bör arbetas mer med för att säkerställa medarbetarnas trivsel och tillfredsställelse?

15- Vad tror du är viktiga faktorer för framgång i teamarbetet?

16- Vilket stöd behöver dina anställda efter Covid-19?

17- Arbetar Mörbylånga kommun med att utveckla digitala plattformar för att underlätta arbetet i kommunen och tycker du att Corona Epidemin hjälpte positivt på detta område?

18- Finns det några lärdomar eller insikter som du har fått som ledare efter erfarenheter från covid-19 som du kommer att föra vidare i dina framtida strategier för arbetskraftsutveckling?

19- Vilka råd har du till andra ledare som vill navigera i utmaningarna med arbetskraftsutvecklingen under och efter pandemin?

In English

1- What is your position (job position) and how long have you worked in that position?

2- What are the main challenges you still face as managers or leaders since the start of the Corona pandemic, in terms of communication, teamwork, flexibility, decision-making and workforce development and why?

3- Why do you think these challenges are still ongoing up to this time after more than 3 years of the spread of covid-19?

4- Have you faced or are you still facing challenges related to the shortage of human labor? I mean, in your department you have a shortage of manpower and how do you compensate for this shortage?

5- What are the communication mechanisms between you as managers and the employed staff who work in the health care department? And did the means of communication in the municipality differ after the Corona pandemic?

6- Are there any problems with communication between you and the employees? and do you think it is easy for employed staff to have contact with you?

7- If you as a leader make any changes or new decisions related to work, how do you make the decision? And do you listen to the opinions of the workers/staff before making decisions?

8- Is there flexibility in organizing the work schedules of staff to suit their living conditions, and how do you make this flexibility to ensure employee satisfaction?

9- If you are facing a new external crisis similar to the covid-19 epidemic, do you think managers and workers can overcome such a crisis, and how?

10- After the covid-19 crisis, do you as leaders work to develop the skills of workers in the health sector, and how?

11- How do you motivate workers to perform better at work, do you offer any rewards or material or moral motivation?

12-Is the municipality facing financial challenges after covid-19 and how does that affect employee satisfaction?

13- Which methods do you think should be worked on more to develop the work team

14- Which methods do you think should be worked on more to ensure employee well-being and satisfaction?

15- What do you think are important factors for success in teamwork?

16- What support do your employees need after Covid-19?

17- Is Mörbylånga municipality working to develop digital platforms to facilitate work in the municipality and do you think that the Corona Epidemic helped positively in this area?

18- Are there any lessons or insights that you have gained as a leader after experiences from covid-19 that you will carry forward in your future workforce development strategies?

19- What advice do you have for other leaders who want to navigate the challenges of workforce development during and after the pandemic?
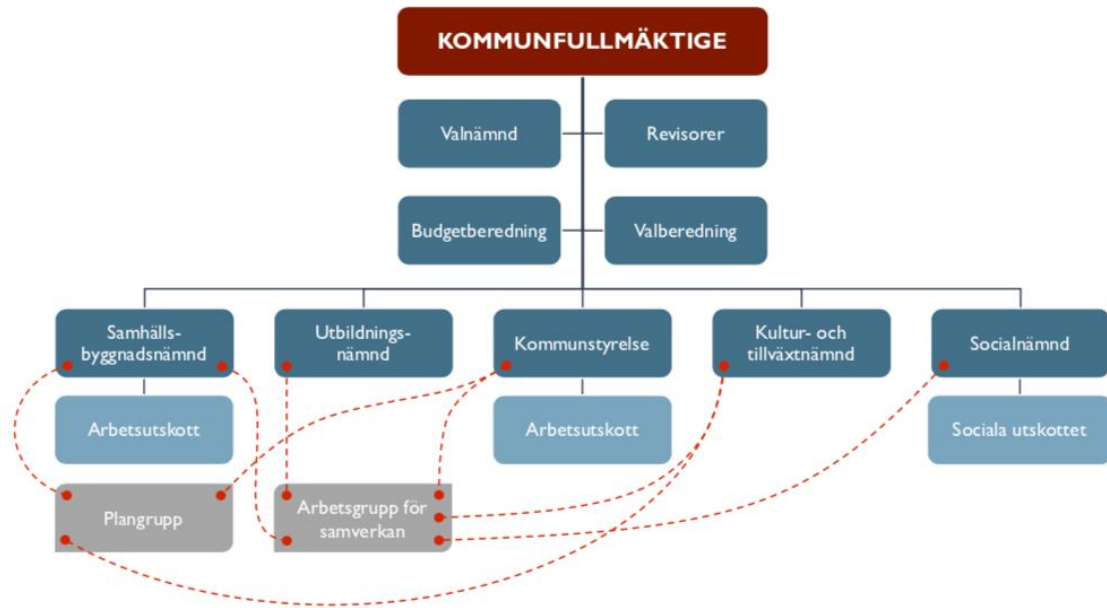
Tables

Table 1 Interview Data

Case Study Participant number/ Title	Management Level	Experience	Specific Role
Case 1: Ann- Katrin General social manager	Upper level	Good experience as a social manager and 4 years as operations manager.	We mainly discussed its role in strategies for Workforce development, continuing education and training, the role in retaining new employees, and mechanisms of communication and cooperation with department managers and teams.
Case 2: Sofi operations manager	Upper level	Good experience as an operations manager	We discussed the plans to face current and future challenges. Her role as Operations Manager, and the communication with department managers and employees, development strategies, leadership and decision making.
Case 3: Torborg A head of the staffing department	Upper level	Good experience as a head of the staffing department. And worked as a head of a department in the municipality since2016	We discussed post-Covid-19 challenges, recruitment and development strategies, leadership and decision-making methods, incentives, support and communication.
Case 4: Beatrice director of a health care centre	Middle level	Good experience as a head of a department in the municipality for years. And worked as a manager in other municipalities.	We discussed her role as a leader in direct contact with employees, development mechanisms, confidence enhancement, expertise development, support, leadership styles, flexibility, challenges and future visions.
Case 5: Leader 5 Team manager in Healthcare department	Middle level	Good experience as a Team manager in Healthcare department	We discussed her role as a leader in direct contact with employees, development mechanisms, confidence enhancement, expertise development, support, leadership styles, flexibility, challenges and future visions.

Table 2 Mörbylånga Kommun Organisation

Bilden visar Mörbylånga kommuns politiska organisation. De röda streckade linjerna förklarar vilka nämnder som medverkar i plangrupp och arbetsgrupp för samverkan.