A study of the impact of remote working on the organisational resources and capabilities of Sennheiser electronic GmbH & Co. KG. as a source of Sustainable Competitive Advantage

Research dissertation presented in partial fulfilment of the requirements
for the degree of
MBA in International Business Management

Griffith College Dublin

Dissertation Supervisor: Justin F. Keogan

Lisa Kane

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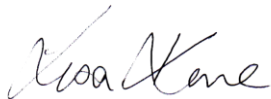
Candidate Declaration

Candidate Name: Lisa Kane

I certify that the dissertation entitled:

A study of the impact of remote working on the organisational resources and capabilities of Sennheiser electronic GmbH & Co. KG. as a source of Sustainable Competitive Advantage

submitted for the degree of: MBA in International Business Management is the result of my own work and that where reference is made to the work of others, due acknowledgment is given.

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Date: 26th August 2019

Supervisor Name: Justin F. Keogan

Supervisor signature:

Date:

Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to my family and especially my wife Maria for their love and support in my pursuit of knowledge.

"Knowledge is power. Information is liberating. Education is the premise of progress, in every society, in every family."

(Annan, 1997)

Acknowledgements

I would first and foremost like to acknowledge and thank my wife Maria, without whose love and support I could not have completed my master's studies. You supported me every step of the way, with immeasurable patience, I'll always be grateful.

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My fellow students (friends) who encouraged me to never give up – thank you!

Finally, to my family - I did it! 😊

Abstract

A study of the impact of remote working on the organisational resources and capabilities of Sennheiser electronic GmbH & Co. KG. as a source of Sustainable Competitive Advantage

Lisa Kane

In this study, it was demonstrated that the practice of remote working impacts the organisational resources and capabilities of Sennheiser electronic GmbH & Co. KG. These impacts influence the efficient deployment of resources and capabilities across several functions of the organisation and have shown to be a source of sustainable competitive advantage.

The research objectives of the study were designed to examine how remote working impacts a Sennheiser employees' ability to add value and their performance. By understanding the impact of remote work on the ability to add value and improve performance, I developed a nascent theory of how remote work impacts the emergence of distinctive capabilities or competencies which are argued to be sources of sustainable competitive advantage.

The study was primarily informed by a review of the literature on remote working and the resource-based view theories in strategy. The review of the available literature allowed the development of a conceptual framework to inform my approach to primary research. I developed my research strategy with an interpretivist research perspective. My qualitative data collection method was through semi-structured interviews. I chose to hybridize my research approach, pivoting from deductive to inductive. My approach to the primary data analysis had an inductive element which complemented the use of the conceptual framework, largely RBV related concepts, and allowed for more exploratory rather than descriptive findings to emerge.

The findings have shown that remote working impacted the ability of the participants to add value through additional flexibility e.g. better use of time or choice of workplace environment. This flexibility led to improved productivity and performance in cases where the behaviours or characteristics thought to be required as a remote worker were present. Traits like self-drive, discipline and entrepreneurship were recognised as characteristics congruent with good leadership and it was found that the inherent skills and capabilities derived from remote working have the potential to impact leadership competencies within the organisation. The distinctive capabilities of an organisation it is argued are a source of competitive advantage, the architecture innovation and reputation of a firm can all be sources of superior performance (Kay, 1995). The findings show that managers of remote workers recognise the deployment of remote resources as an efficient way to increase speed of response and closeness to the market. Informal relational structures such as a cooperative ethic between remote workers and management is shown to exist and there is a potential and casually ambiguous link to sustainable competitive advantage that is imperfectly imitable (Barney, 1991).

The research suggests that remote work practice and the management of remote workers is influencing the fabric of Sennheiser culture and management behaviours. There is evidence of efficiencies in deployment of resources across regions and improved performance. These effects on resources and capabilities it could be argued are casually ambiguous in their link to a sustainable competitive advantage for Sennheiser. I have therefore concluded additional research is needed to establish this link.

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1 Introduction

1.1 Overview

The research for this dissertation is concerned with the impact or influence the practice of remote working has on the organisational capabilities of the company I work for Sennheiser electronic GmbH & Co. KG. The aim of the research is to discuss how the resulting impacts are linked to the distinctive capabilities or core competencies of the organisation as a source of competitive advantage.

Remote working, teleworking, virtual working are words that describe the same phenomenon, the action of working away from an office environment and remote of direct management. This way of working has grown considerably in recent decades and many employed, like me, work remotely. I began working for Sennheiser in 2015, in a European sales management role. When I am not traveling around Europe to meet customers and colleagues, I work from a small Sennheiser office in Dublin and also from my home office. It is my experience of this type of working that has led me to research the topic further.

Through my research of the literature, I will highlight drivers of remote working, the impact of remote working, the resource-based view theory and sources of competitive advantage. Finally, I will discuss if Sennheiser can derive a sustainable competitive advantage from the impact of remote work practices.

In this chapter I will outline the justification for the research and my research objectives, finally I will set out the structure of the study.

1.1 Research Purpose

The purpose of my research is to study how remote work impacts the internal resources and capabilities that lead to competitive advantage within the Sennheiser organisation. The Sennheiser organisation has undergone an organisational development in recent years resulting in a prevalent use of remote work practices to support the new structure known as 'Connected Company'. Applying the resource-based view theory, I will critically examine how remote working impacts the internal resources and capabilities of the company.

1.2 Significance of the Study

The significance of the study is the potential to identify contributors to Sennheiser's competitive advantage. By researching how remote work practices impact the internal resources and capabilities of Sennheiser, my objective is to expose potential sources of sustainable competitive advantage within the organisation.

Sennheiser operates in the professional audio and consumer audio industry. It is one of the leaders in manufacturing of headphones, microphones and wireless transmission technology. Sennheiser has twenty-one sales subsidiaries and trading partners in more than fifty countries; its core business is the manufacture and the sales and service of its product portfolio. Part of Sennheiser's corporate strategy is; "to develop and expand leading positions in its business areas that also strengthen its core business." (Sennheiser, 2017). To achieve this, the company believes it must consistently focus on its customers and therefore concentrate on providing a "high-quality" and "efficient" product portfolio. One of Sennheiser's core competencies is its wireless transmission technology, which is developed and sold to market via its two business units or division's, the Professional Division and Consumer Division (Sennheiser, 2018). Sennheiser undertook a considerable organisational restructure in 2015. The result of which led to a number of employees working remotely. The organizational re-structure the fore mentioned Connected Company and resulted in the company decentralising product development and marketing responsibilities which until that point were driven largely by management at the decision centre and Head Quarters in Germany. Business Segments were created to focus on product development and end-user marketing, global sales and trade marketing channels created from which the product could be sold via B2B sales and marketing activities. This was a fundamental change in how Sennheiser had done business. Previously research and development and end-user marketing were driven by these functions located at the Head Quarters in Germany. The sales and marketing, operations, finance and human resources functions were the responsibility of the local subsidiary e.g. Sennheiser U.K., Sennheiser France. This inevitably resulted in a localised strategic approach. Connected Company was created to ensure that the organisation would "enhance focus on customer and end-user needs". Key drivers of this change was to introduce a "global approach to channels (customer focus) and business segments (end-user focus) – vs. today's territorial approach"(Sennheiser, 2014). This new organisational structure was further realigned in 2017 with the creation of two separate divisions, the Professional Audio division and the Consumer Audio division containing the segments and channels responsible for products developed and sold to the consumer audio or professional audio markets. Each division has full profit and loss accountability. In parallel to these organizational changes Sennheiser developed their Corporate Culture and created seven culture principals by

which the organization can measure how it functions and works together. These principals provide a benchmark and guidelines for all employees on how to approach their work within Sennheiser. This organizational structure and culture provide the backdrop and context from which I will examine remote work practices within the organization.

Figure 1: It's all about focus on the end-user needs: all together!

Source: (Sennheiser, 2014)

I will handle the various definitions of remote working in a later chapter, for now it is understood as the practice of a company employee performing their job at any remote location, without the need to be located at a desk in a company office. It also includes being physically remote of direct management and colleagues and/or team members. The practice is dependent on access to relevant technology i.e. laptop, smart device and communications software. Characteristics of a remote worker include; autonomy and self-motivation (McLennan and McLennan, 2007, pp. 42–55).

The practice of remote working has increased over the last decade in the EU and USA according sources such as the EU Statistical Agency and US Bureau of Labour Statistics. More companies are offering remote or flexible work options. In March of 2019 Amazon announced plans to hire 3,000 remote customer service jobs over twelve months (Hess,

2019). In the US, for example, it was reported by the US Bureau of Labour Statistics that 24% of American employees did "some or all" of their work from home during days worked in 2015. This is up from a 19% share of workers in 2003. It was also reported that workers in managerial and professional positions were more likely do some or all of their work from home (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2016). In the EU the working from home trend is also increasing. According to Eurostat:

"The percentage of employed persons in the EU who sometimes work from home has increased steadily over the years, from 7.7% in 2008 to 9.6% in 2017, although the figure in 2017 was down slightly from 2016 (9.8%)." (Eurostat, 2018).
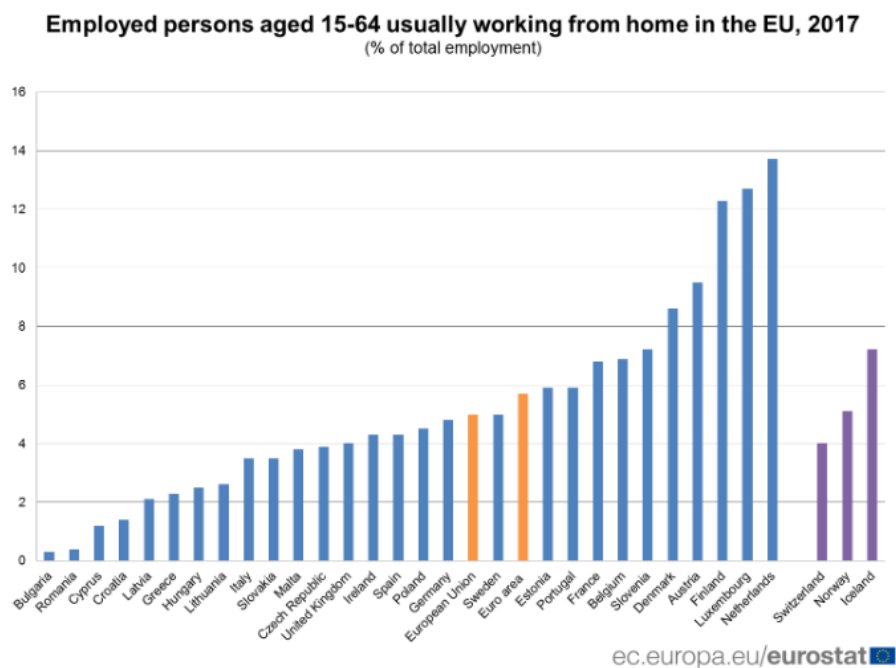
Figure 2:

Employed persons aged 15-64 usually working from home in the EU, 2017

Source: (Eurostat, 2018)

Developments in technology over the past 20 years has increased the ease by which employees can work remotely. At the Microsoft Ignite Conference 2018, an annual conference for IT professionals and developers, over sixty conference sessions were dedicated to its Microsoft Teams software. MS Teams is a tool designed to enhance the virtual working environment (Lardinois, 2018).

Despite the increase across the US and EU in flexible work, or work from home arrangements, not all Corporations are following the trend. For example, Yahoo CEO Marissa Meyer banned working from home when she became CEO in 2013. Citing, people are "collaborative and innovative when they're together" (Carlson, 2013). IBM, one of the first organizations to embrace teleworking in the 1970s went on to boast that nearly 40% of its 386,000 employees "have no office at all" decided to reduce its number of employees working from home (Useem, 2017).

There are mounting arguments suggesting remote work practice as a potential source of competitive advantage and research indicates that productivity and job satisfaction are higher when remote workers are compared with non-remote workers or traditional 'office-based' workers (McLennan and McLennan, 2007; Davidson, 2013; Bloom *et al.*, 2015).

The significance of this study is in how the impact of remote work on organisational capabilities can be a potential source of competitive advantage. By researching this in the context of the organisation I work remotely for, I will provide recommendations for practice of further research.

1.3   Research Objectives

The research objectives set out will underpin my overall research aim; to study the impact of remote work on the organisational capabilities influencing competitive advantage within the Sennheiser organisation.

1.3.1 Objective One

How does remote working influence the ability of a Sennheiser employee to add value?

1.3.2 Objective Two

How does remote working impact Sennheiser's organisational resources and capabilities?

1.3.3 Objective Three

How does remote working impact Sennheiser's employee performance?

1.3.4 Objective Four

How does remote work impact Sennheiser's ability to deliver a sustainable competitive advantage?

1.4   Structure of the Study

1.4.1   Chapter 1 Introduction

This chapter will introduce the reader to an overview of the research topic and how the phenomena of remote working has developed in recent decades. It will also outline the organizational context of this study, using Sennheiser electronic GmbH & Co. KG as the case from which I will base my research. I will also outline the purpose of my research and research objectives.

1.4.2   Chapter 2 Literature Review

This chapter will provide a critical review of the literature to date and intends to give the reader an insight into how remote working is defined, the drivers and effects of remote working, on both the organisation and employee and remote working trends. This chapter also seeks to review literature pertaining to the resource-based view of strategy and sources of competitive advantage. Finally, this chapter will outline the conceptual framework from which I will base my research methodology.

1.4.3   Chapter 3 Methodology and Research Design

This chapter sets out the research design and how the research was carried out, including the paradigm, methodology and methods of collecting data. It sets out the reasoning behind selection criteria and interviewing style. Details of the participants contributing to primary research are outlined along with issues with access and ethical issues.

1.4.4   Chapter 4 Presentation and discussion of findings

This chapter discusses and sets out the findings of the research. I assess the impact of remote working on Sennheiser's internal resources and emergence of distinctive capabilities that drive sustainable competitive advantage.

1.4.5   Chapter 5 Conclusions and Recommendations

This chapter will discuss the implications of the findings and contributions made. I will also discuss the limitations of the research and make any recommendations to further the research or future practice. This chapter includes a final conclusion of the research.

2   Literature Review

The aim of this literature review is to critically assess the literature that exists as it relates to the research objectives outlined in section 1.3. This review explores the resource-based view of strategy and how internal distinctive capabilities can be a source of sustainable competitive advantage. The literature review will also contain an examination of the drivers of remote work and the impacts on both the employee and organisation. The literature review is conducted under the following sub-headings, so as to relate directly to the research objectives:

- Overview of Remote Working trends

- Remote Work Drivers and Impacts (on employees and the organisation)

- A review of the Resource Based View and sources of competitive advantage

  - Resources

  - Capabilities (Reputation/Architecture/Innovation)

  - Sustainable Competitive Advantage

  - Performance

2.1   Overview of Remote Working trends

2.1.1   *Definitions*

Remote working, telework, distributed working, e-working, telecommuting and working from home - these are words and phrases used to describe the same phenomenon. They describe the actions of an employee who works from a location other than their company office. For the purpose of this dissertation I have adopted the terms; remote work, remote worker, remote working to best describe this phenomenon. I have also noted the comparative description offered by Kurland and Bailey. In their review of the literature they compare the transition from the traditional office-base employee to the remote working employee as:

- From face to face communication to telecommunication or ICT based communications.

- From on-site working to off-site or multiple site working.

- When working in team situations, from side-by-side collaboration to virtual teamwork(Bailey and Kurland, 2002).

These commonalities help to characterize the transition from office based to remote work.

The European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions (Eurofound), commissioned a report in 2010 which studied 'Telework in the European Union'. This report references the European Framework Agreement on Telework of 2002 which defines Telework as:

"Telework is a form of organising and/or performing work, using information technology, in the context of an employment contract/relationship, where work, which could also be performed at the employer's premises, is carried out away from those premises on a regular basis." (Welz and Wolf, 2010).

Other considerations defined in the literature include if the person is working part-time or full time, self-employed, the number of hours worked in and out of an office and if over-time is accounted for when working from home. For this study on remote working, I will study Sennheiser employees who work full time and perform some or all of their job remotely. Their roles will be based on 'information working' a term legitimised by Microsoft and defined by K.J. McLennan as a worker that; "creates, analyses, communicates, and/or uses digital information every day in performing their jobs."(McLennan and McLennan, 2007, p. 139). Virtual working and virtual team work are also terms I will use in this study of remote working. The term 'Virtual' will simply refer to the technological space that enables one to work as effectively from a remote location as one would from the company office (Davidson, 2013).

2.1.2 *Remote working trends*

The practice of working outside an office environment has been written about since the early seventies. In 1973 a book entitled 'The Telecommunications-Transportation trade-off, Options for tomorrow' by Jack Nilles was published. This is book addressed if telecommunications and computer technologies would replace portions of commuter traffic in the USA. Jack Nilles' proposed a solution that posited if Corporations established satellite offices, located outside main urban commercial and business districts, traffic gridlock would ease the congested city streets (Nilles and Carlson, 1973). Since then companies in the USA have been motivated to offer telecommuting options to their workers by Government mandate, with the 1990 congressional amendment to the 'Clean Air Act,' targeting organizations in US states with the worst air quality to reduce the number of employees commuting each day by 20 percent (Gray, 1997).

Fast forward thirty years and the prevalence of remote and virtual working has increased. Rapid changes in information technology has enabled this increase; the speed and reliability of broadband, the power of laptops and smart devices as well as improved security of data transfer allow information workers to work from, well, anywhere!(Gray, 1997; Bailey and Kurland, 2002; McLennan and McLennan, 2007).

There has arguably been a paradigm shift in terms of how information work is carried out today; how it's managed and where it can be executed. Technology is a key enabler of this shift, but in parallel society has changed its attitudes and habits with regard to how and where we work. Worker demographics have transitioned from baby boomers to Gen X, Y & Z forcing a transformation in the workplace. Globalization has enabled integration of national economies opening up new markets, know-how, innovation, resources and opportunities (McLennan and McLennan, 2007, p. 25). A telephone survey of more than 3000 manufacturing firms from 2012-2013 denotes that "the share of managers in the United States, United Kingdom, and Germany allowed to WFH (work from home) during normal hours is almost 50%, signalling that this is now a main-stream practice." (Bloom *et al.*, 2015).
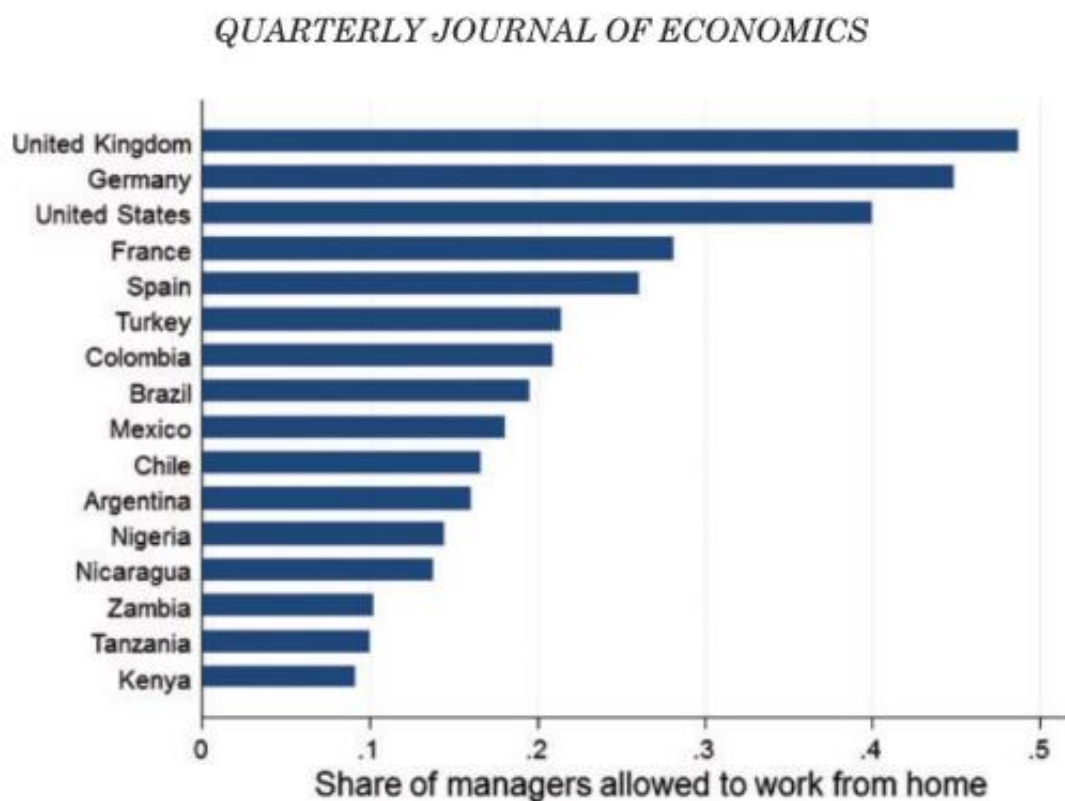
Figure 3: Share of managers allowed to work from home

Source: (Bloom *et al.*, 2015)

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However, companies like Yahoo and IBM, early adopters of work from home policies put the brakes on work from home practices in recent years. In 2013 CEO of Yahoo Marissa Meyer banned employee's from working from home. In 2009 almost forty percent of IBMs 386,000 global employees worked from home, however the company began to reduce those numbers in 2017 by recalling approximately 2600 of its marketing employees to commute to an IBM office (Wilkie, 2017). Global organisations have not whole heartedly embraced remote/flexible work arrangements.

Research indicates however that current and future talent have a positive view of remote/flexible work arrangements. The results of a survey of millennials (18-34-year olds) living in the UK employed in various roles and levels from a wide variety of corporations including Coca-Cola, Google, ITV, Microsoft, Sainsbury's and Saatchi and Saatchi, showed 55% of the respondents felt flexible working was very important. Figure 4 shows how the participants responded to their preference between working from home or an office.

WAYS OF working

Home						Office
	0% Home	4% More home than Office	23% Even mixture of both	66% More office than at home	8% Office	

Would you prefer to work from **home** or within an **office environment**?

Figure 4: Would you prefer to work from home of within an office environment

Source: (Millennial, 2015).

Of the 374 respondents of this study, work location and flexibility are important.

It could be argued that the generational gap existing between top executives of global organisations led by baby boomers (55-73 years old) and their future employees', millennials (23-38 years old) and Gen Z'ers, (7-22 years old) (Dimock, 2018).

could contribute to the divide in opinion on remote working. By 2020 millennials are expected to take up half of the global workforce. It is purported in the study "2015 AfterCollege Career Insight Survey" that 68 percent of American undergrad and graduate students want jobs where they can work remotely (Figure 5) (aftercollege.com, 2015; Wilkie, 2017).
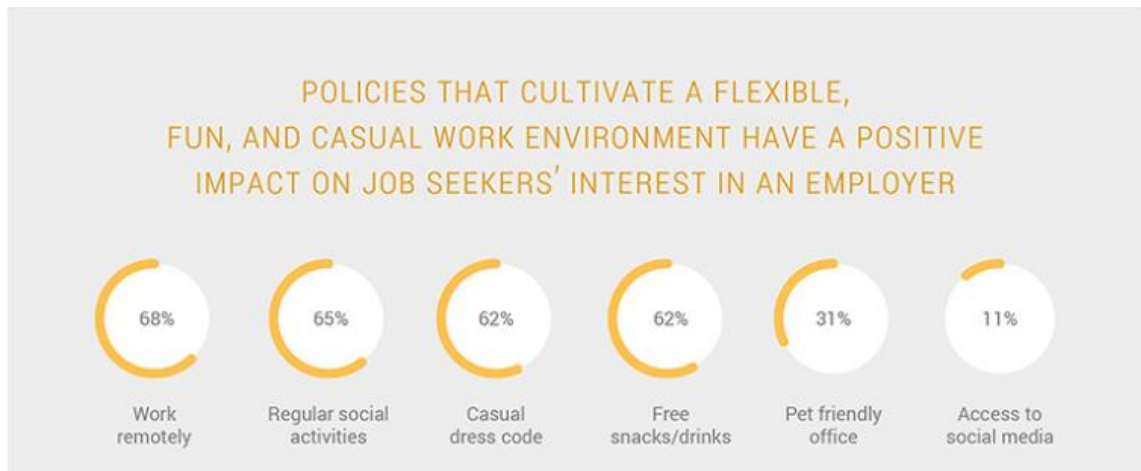
Figure 5:

Policies that cultivate a flexible, fun, and casual work environment have a positive impact on Job Seekers' interest in an employer.

Source: (aftercollege.com, 2015).

The World Economic Forum published its Insight Report; 'The Future of Jobs Report 2018" in September of that year. It references the Fourth Industrial Revolution and business leaders across all industries will be called upon to meet the challenges of this new era, accelerating change and innovation. The reports' key findings of the drivers of this change are, ubiquitous high-speed internet access, artificial intelligence, big data analytics, cloud technology and changing employment types. The respondents to the study have signalled their intention to engage workers in a more flexible manner, utilizing remote staffing (World Economic Forum, 2018). The Government of Ireland also produced its own report; "Future Jobs Ireland 2019 – Preparing Now for Tomorrow's Economy", in which it stated an ambition to "foster participation in the labour force through flexible working solutions" (Miranda, 2019, p. 120). The report acknowledged that flexible work solutions could provide a 'win-win' situation for employers and employees and notes that remote working could benefit the employer through 'greater attraction of workers from a larger pool of talent' (Miranda, 2019).

The trends indicate that for reasons of globalisation, demographics and technology remote working is and will continue to be a reality for both organisations and employees.

2.2 Remote Work Drivers and Impact

2.2.1 *Remote Work Drivers*

According to Bailey and Kurland's review of the existing literature until 2002, the historical concept of remote working includes both the supply (employer) forces pushing employees out of the office and demand (employee) forces drawing them to an alternative workplace, such as the home (Figure 6).
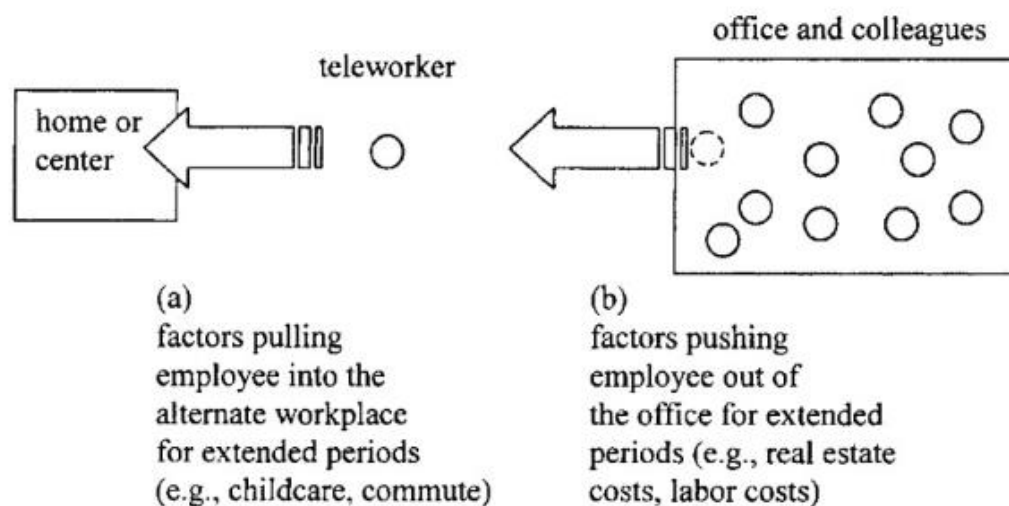
Figure 1. Historical conceptualization of telework

Figure 6: Historical conceptualization of telework

Source: (Bailey and Kurland, 2002)

Supply-Side/Employer Side

Since Jack Nilles' book positioning teleworking as a solution to traffic congestion there have been more studies on the idea that remote working or telecommuting can provide a sustainable and environmentally friendly alternative to traditional office space (Nilles and Carlson, 1973). One such study was of a public/private partnership in the State of California in 1991.

Many of the 300,000 inhabitants of the inland region of the State of California travelled to large urban areas like Los Angeles for work. A selection of private firms, the State and the

local transportation commission agreed to provide for the opening of 'tele business centre's in the region, to a) foster economic development by providing work centre's for those who travelled to the main urban areas and b) to ease traffic congestion and thus reduce air pollution within the State. The results of the study were mixed. While workers reported an appreciation for the ability to work at these remote work centres, the centres still suffered from low-occupancy rates. When the trial period ended very few of the private firms chose to continue offering the centres to its workers.

In his review of this initiative, Paul Gray observed in his article about workplace integration strategies in 1997, that one of the failures of the scheme was that it was promoted by the supply/employer side as a way to comply with air quality regulations, and did not promote the benefits of teleworking (remote working) to their workers. Despite the goal to reduce commuting there was comparatively little flexibility offered to the workers e.g. they were assigned particular days to work from the centres. In his article Grays view is that many of the organisations saw the implementation of these work centre's as a regulatory requirement that they must comply with rather than using the opportunity to promote work practices that could benefit the organisational development of the company and its workers. On review of this initiative one conclusion drawn was rarely are compliance activities integral to strategic business practice and that a demand side approach was needed, starting with the organisation understanding what is needed to "strengthen its competitive edge"(Gray, 1997). Gray argued that an integrated workplace strategy that sets out the organisational systems or sets of formal and informal practices, policies and idea's guiding the organisations work practices, would seek to retain the efficient use of resources to support a more effective way of working (Gray, 1997) .

Contrary to the regulation led telework study in California, a 'Work from Home' study of a randomized selection of call-centre employees of the NASDAQ listed Chinese travel agency C-Trip was carried out from December 2010 through August 2011 and published in an article by Bloom, Liang, Roberts and Ying in 2015. The study found that working from home led to a 13 percent performance increase, home workers also reported improved work satisfaction and employee attrition rate halved. The significance of this study is the organisation eventually rolled out the practice across the whole firm after learning through commissioning the experiment that, work from home improves performance and attrition rates, which dropped by 50 percent. This result surprised management and highlighted the extent to which working from home was valued by their employees (Bloom *et al.*, 2015) .

Ubiquitous ICT systems, and the burgeoning rollout of 5G internet connectivity means that technologically organisations have the capabilities to make remote working a possibility. However, the literature does not conclude that it is a driver of remote working but rather an enabler of remote working (Bailey and Kurland, 2002).

It is argued that critical success factors for the integration of teleworking practices are: management support, communication, and trust (Kowalski and Swanson, 2005). Teleworking requires management support for training, for example. It is necessary to have good communication skills and thirdly remote workers usually occupy professional position(s) and are measured on results based performance, therefore the work is based on "trust, self-direction, and self-control." (Karia and Asaari, 2016). This correlates with an earlier study were trust and control were cited as being a factor that influenced a company's decision in the adoption of telecommuting. This study carried out in the US reports managers who fear loss of control are more likely to favour telework arrangements for professional workers versus clerical workers because of the potential for increased employee productivity (Tomaskovic-Devey and Risman, 1993).

In a case study by (Davidson, 2013) he asks why firms miss the competitive advantage of virtual teams? He argues that dynamic capabilities and organisational agility are of paramount importance and key sources of competitive advantage. His research found positive associations between organizational flexibility, as a result of telework and a firm's performance(Sanchez, 2006). Davidson conducted a study of two organisations that introduced distributed remote team work (DRT) within their organisations. One of the cases was highly successful in its implementation and the other was not. Both cases consisted of 'mixed-mode' teams in which some of the team members were co-located and some worked remotely. The key differences between the cases are highlighted in Figure 6. A transformational leadership style, manager support for DRT and strategic reasoning for DRT as a key enabler are some of the key differences highlighted in the successful implementation case, referred to as 'Tesla'. He concluded that organisations should embrace virtual and distributed remote teamwork models to develop competitive advantage within their organisations and strive to make distributed remote teams a core competency in the manner by which Tesla adopted the practice to "unlock a new source of competitive advantage" (Davidson, 2013).

TABLE 1
SUMMARY OF KEY DIFFERENCES BETWEEN THE CASES

Observation Type	Trad-IT	Telsa
Line of business	Niche market in a sub-sector of the wider ICT market	ICT service for a telecommunications service provider
Organizational change	Acquisition by a larger firm and merger with several other groups to form a new division	Delocalization of work to an offshore office in an emerging nation; major market repositioning of the firm
DRT skills	Workers master the ICT technical skills, but their DRT soft-skills were limited	DRT was a de-facto core competency because of the line of business and the DRT experience of workers from the emerging nation
Worker characteristics	Tight-knit workers from a leading industrialized country used to TT	Majority of workers from an emerging nation that were highly skilled in DRT
Leadership/management style	Highly transactional; all decisions were centralized without any delegation of authority	Transformational; employees were allowed to make decisions in their areas
Reason to adopt DRT	Tactical; Telework was adopted to fill scarce-skill positions	Strategic; DRT was a key enabler for conducting work across multi-regional and transnational offices
Manager support for DRT	The manager was skeptical about DRT; the manager mediated and controlled the interactions amongst the members of different groups	The top executive planned work delocalization and supported DRT strongly; managers had a very high level of trust and proficiency in DRT; some managers led workers without ever meeting them face-to-face
DRT training	Limited ad-hoc technical support upon request	Vicarious learning, mentoring, and on-line training and documentation were widely available
Work schedules	all the workers were more or less in the same time-zone (time difference < 3 hours)	10.5-hour time difference that inverted the periods of work and rest; seamless and needs based work hand-off with phone calls or email

Figure 7: Summary of Key Differences between cases

Source: (Davidson, 2013)

The literature that drives the supply/employer side of remote working indicates that support for remote working should be accompanied by transformational leadership that supports autonomy and flexibility for its employees. Remote working within teams can become a core competency within an organisation, thus driving competitive advantage. Environmental factors such as reduced traffic congestion, caused by employees travelling to and from an office, is a driver of remote working however regulatory compliance should not provide the single motivating factor on the employer side. Remote working and integrated workplace strategies can form part of the strategic development of an organization. The C-trip experiment indicates that a large deployment of employees working from home correlates positively with productivity and attrition rates.

Demand-Side/Employees Side

Demand side or employee side drivers of remote work are identified by Kurland and Bailey in their review of the literature and encompass topics such as work-life balance, impact on job satisfaction, motivation and quality of working life (Bailey and Kurland, 2002).

A descriptive study by Miruna Sarbu in 2015 entitled "Determinants of Work-at-Home Arrangements for German Employees" studies individual data from 10,884 German

employees and argues that the determinants driving flexible work arrangements or work from home practice are consistent with other studies in that:

- The higher the level of education of employees, the higher the share of remote workers.
- The need for social interaction with colleagues at the workplace is a factor that negatively impacts remote working (Sarbu, 2015).

There are few studies measuring the impact on the employment relationship as a result of remote working. The challenges of remote working are referenced in the Oxford Handbook of personnel psychology which cites a paper by 'Harris' in 2003 which found the employer had let the employee down in terms of how they managed the transition into remote working and lack of ongoing support. This management support was found to be key in sustaining loyalty and commitment (Cartwright and Cooper, 2012).

2.2.2 *Remote Work Impact*

The impact of remote working on the employee or remote worker side is inconclusive, but research to date does point toward the lack of social interaction as a negative factor in employee adoption of remote work. Sarbus article cites "Mokhtarian and Salomon (1997) or Popuri and Bhat (2003) and Perez et al. (2004) as demonstrating "the need for interaction or teamwork with colleagues at the workplace are factors that reduce telecommuting." (Sarbu, 2015). This need for social interaction was a significant finding in the C-Trip study in China. The firm's management was surprised by the number of employees that were involved in the study who opted to switch back to the office from working from home. More than fifty percent of the volunteer group who chose to work from home switched their preference to working from the office primarily because of "feeling isolated and lonely at home" (Bloom *et al.*, 2015).

(Staples, Hulland and Higgins, 1999) link Self-Efficacy Theory to the management of remote workers in a virtual environment. Self-efficacy is defined as "the judgment an individual makes about his or her ability to execute a particular behaviour." The model they developed was tested amongst 376 remotely managed employees across 18 diverse organizations. The results indicated that "remote employees self-efficacy assessments play a critical role in influencing their remote work effectiveness, perceived productivity, job satisfaction and ability to cope." (Staples, Hulland and Higgins, 1999).

In Pinsonneault and Boisverts review of the literature on the impact of Telework on organizations and individuals, increased productivity and a higher quality of work is cited

as a positive impact of remote working. The findings of many of the studies reviewed by the authors are due to being remote and removed from disruptions that can be distracting in a traditional office environment (Pinsonneault and Boisvert, 2001; Davidson, 2013).

The literature indicates the drivers of remote working to date have been largely based on environmental factors such as reduced commute, leading to reduced congestion and air pollution but also by reduced costs as a result of less occupied office space. Factors driving employees are predominantly work life balance in nature. However, there are studies that show how the impact of working remotely or in virtual teams can increase productivity and worker job satisfaction. Management support of remote workers and transformational leadership style is key to delivering successful performances. The studies also show how the impact can be positive for an organisation, with increased productivity but a lack of social interaction may negatively impact employee motivation and job satisfaction.

2.3 A review of RBV and sources of competitive advantage

The resource-based view (RBV) argues that competitive advantage can be sourced from resources that an organization can access and exploit and not in the ability to manage the external environment, as theorised by Michael Porter in his 'Five Forces' framework. Porter theorises that the industry and environment are determining factors in a company's performance (Porter, 2004). The resource-based view assumes that resources are heterogeneously distributed across firms and that it can be difficult to imitate or substitute these resources. Because of the resource heterogeneity, some firms can have more resources which create value and lead to competitive advantage. These resources, are strategic resources (Barney, 1991; Collis and Montgomery, 2008).

The resource-based view asserts resources are tangible and intangible and when working together can create organizational capabilities that lead to competitive advantage. Tangible resources include financial and physical assets like property-based resources, intangible resources can be more difficult to assess but can include organisational culture, routines and processes, reputation and human resources (Clegg *et al.*, 2011). Organizational capabilities are skills and competencies which a firm combines to transform tangible and intangible resources into outputs, thereby creating value and meeting customer needs (Barney, 1991; Kay, 1995; Grant, 1998; Liang, 2013).

In his study of virtual teams as a source competitive advantage Philippe Davidson uses the Resource Based View as his approach because, he argues, an internal analysis approach

"maintains control over the process, over the outcome, and ultimately over the development of a competitive advantage squarely within the organisation." (Davidson, 2013).

I will use the resource-based internal analysis approach to analyse the impact of remote working on the resources and capabilities of the Sennheiser organisation.

2.3.1 *Resources*

Resources of a firm are said to be understood as inputs into the production of a good or service. Barney concluded that resources are distributed unevenly across firms and it is difficult to transfer productive resources from firm to firm. The V.R.I.N. framework was developed by Barney as a method of identifying **V**aluable, **R**are, **I**mitable and the **N**on-substitutability of a resource. He argues that only resources with these characteristics can be a source of competitive advantage (Barney, 1991). Identifying resources and looking for ways to economise or employ their use more efficiently can lead to the creation of additional value for the firm. Barney argues: "firms that do not look inwardly to exploit resources they already control in choosing strategies can only expect to obtain normal returns from their strategizing efforts"(Barney 1986 as cited in (Clegg *et al.*, 2011).

While tangible resources can be relatively easy to identify such as property or financial assets, intangible resources can be more difficult to identify and analyse. The resource based view asserts that by internally analysing the combination of valuable tangible and intangible resources, the capability of the organization to exploit those resources can position a firm for success and advantage over its competitors (Collis and Montgomery, 2008; Clegg *et al.*, 2011). Human resources are noted by Grant as the "productive services that human beings offer to a firm in terms of their skills, knowledge, reasoning and decision-making abilities"(Grant, 2009). Skills, knowledge, reasoning and decision-making capabilities contribute to the enhancement of value creating strategies - these valuable intangible resources when presented within a certain organisational context are rare, imitable not easily substitutable (Collis and Montgomery, 2008; Grant, 2009). It is also argued that distinctive human resources shape the core competencies that decide the basis on which a firm competes and the management practices, such as employee selection, training programs and work organization can help to build distinct competencies (Cappelli and Crocker-Hefter, 1996).

I will analyse the resources and capabilities of the Sennheiser organisation through my primary research, to fulfil the objective; How remote working impacts Sennheiser's organisational resources and capabilities?

2.3.2 *Organizational Capabilities*

"An organisational capability refers to a firm's capacity to undertake particular productive activity. " (Grant, 2009), or "an organizational ability to perform coordinated task, utilizing organizational resources, for the purpose of achieving a particular end result" (Helfat, 2003).

The capabilities of an organisation it is argued can be best thought of as the complex combination of intangible and tangible assets and their interactions which can also be referred to as organisational routines. A firm can generate 'Organization Rents' which are the economic profits that can be captured by an organization through its use of resources and capabilities (Amit and Schoemaker, 1993; Sanchez, 2006). There is much research available about how internal resources and capabilities of an organization can be a source of competitive advantage. This section will review how specifically 'distinctive capabilities' and 'core competencies' of an organization lead to value creating strategies, competitive advantage and superior performance.

The terms distinctive capability and core competencies are viewed as interchangeable terms describing the internal and fundamental attributes/characteristics that are distinct to the organisation and drive competitive advantage. The term core competency was captured by Prahalad and Hamel as capabilities that can:

- "Make a disproportionate contribution to ultimate customer value, or to the efficiency with which that value is delivered", and

- "Provide a basis for entering new markets"

(Prahalad and Hamel, 1990; Grant, 2009).

This focus on a firm's capabilities is also studied by (Teece, Pisano and Shuen, 1997) in their study of a firm's dynamic capabilities and strategic management. They emphasize an approach which develops management capabilities and 'difficult to imitate' organisational, functional and technological skills. They describe a difficult to replicate or difficult to imitate competence as a 'distinctive competence'. In order to pursue a resource-based approach a firm must focus on their internal distinctive capabilities and competencies to be the driving force and source of its competitive advantage (Kay, 1995; Teece, Pisano and Shuen, 1997).

John Kay agrees with Barneys analysis of markets where he purports that in an efficient market the opportunities available to one firm are available to all firms in that industry, but not all will generate a profit from the same opportunity.

In his book 'Foundations of Corporate Success', John Kay remarks:

"Value is added by developing a set of relationships which others are unable to make. A firm can achieve added value only on the basis of some distinctive capability – some feature of its relationships which other firms lack, and cannot readily reproduce" (Kay, 1995, p. 64).

Kay further argues that these distinctive capabilities can be sourced within the organisation's, architecture, reputation and their innovation capabilities. The architecture of an organisation rests in a network of 'relational contracts' that are established between the firm and its employees, suppliers and customers, or among a group of firms engaged in the same activities. The value of architecture, Kay argues, is in:

"the capacity of organizations which establish it to create organisational knowledge and routines, to respond flexibly to changing circumstances, and to achieve easy and open exchanges of information"(Kay, 1995, p. 66).

A system of relational contracts substitute what are largely unwritten rules underpinning the expectation of long-term relationships within the firm and its members. Kay further posits that it is in everyone's collective interest that an organisation has a strong but informal architecture allowing for sharing of information and for flexibility of response. This co-operative ethic can be a benefit to the firm but only in the context of re-iteration and reciprocation. Importantly, Kay notes: "If the structure of relationships which underpins corporate architecture could be formalised, it could also be imitated and would at that point cease to be a source of competitive advantage" (Kay, 1995, p. 77).

Three types of architecture:

- Internal: Between the firm and its employees and among employees

- External: Between the firm and its suppliers or customers

- Networks: Between a group of collaborating firms

The architecture of an organisation is said to add value:

- Through the creation of organizational knowledge

- Through the establishment of a co-operative ethic

- By the implementation of organizational routines

    (Kay, 1995, p. 68).

A good reputation can signal superior quality of a company's product or service. It signifies the characteristics and qualities that a customer can come to expect from a product that they could otherwise easily monitor themselves. John Kay argues there are many ways to, build, spread and maintain a reputation in a continuing market. Reputation can also be derived from an existing source of competitive advantage; such as innovation (Kay, 1995). In the case of Sennheiser, they innovated the world's first 'open' headphone (HD 414), the term open describes the feeling of openness and depth of audio when listening through these headphones. The headphones were first brought to market in 1968 and accessories for the product are still sold by Sennheiser to this day. It is a product that contributed to Sennheiser's reputation for quality and innovation in the field of audio (Guttenberg, 2017).

There are five types of innovation as argued by Joseph Schumpeter; new products, new methods of production or transportation, new sources of supply, new markets and new ways of organising business (Green, Agarwal and Logue, 2015). It is the latter the 'non-technological' ways of innovating through organisation of work, innovation as a source of reputational competitive advantage and the formal and informal internal structure that underpins the architecture or an organisation that will form how I examine the phenomena of remote work in Sennheiser.

John Kay further argues that creating a sustainable competitive advantage through innovation is "costly and uncertain" and "the process [of innovation] is hard to manage". The central characteristic of a distinctive capability is that it cannot be easily replicated which makes innovation a weak source of competitive advantage. He develops the hypothesis that it is often the distinctive capabilities based in architecture that allows a firm to generate innovation (Kay, 1995).

A study by (Karia and Asaari, 2016), in which the authors theorise telework is an emerging innovation capability which improves operational cost efficiencies, also suggest a link between telework and sustainable competitive advantage. The study of a case of a Malaysian construction firm revealed that the innovation capability was present in the improved technology implementation and also the focus on human resource acquisition with telework expertise to enhance their skill base and competency in the development of teleworking. The telework competence development focused on leadership, management process, customer demand, information and innovation capability. The study also revealed that teleworking leaders are innovative, effective and receptive and these leadership traits resulted in the firms' competitive advantage (Karia and Asaari, 2016). The authors of this

study conceptualise telework as an innovation capability that is enabled by a firm's 'technological and people' capabilities. The adoption of telework in Malaysia is at embryonic stage and therefore is not perceived as an emerging innovation capability.

Human resources and the management practices of personnel can be a driver of distinctive competencies as argued by (Cappelli and Crocker-Hefter, 1996), in their article 'Distinctive Human Resources Are Firms' Core Competencies'. Their study examined pairs of successful organisations competing in the same industry that appeared to have different human resource management practices. The article concludes that some organisations do not develop employee competencies from within but rather move quickly to seize opportunities through flexibility and make use of the outside market to take in new competencies. Organisations that have a dominant competitive position in the market rely on internally developed capabilities. The authors point to a 'natural equilibrium' of flexible and established-market firms and the challenge to change strategies dependant on going from an inside employment approach to an outside approach and in turn from flexible to established market business strategy. The authors further argue that the challenge of whether to change business strategy to fit human resource employment strategy and the question of why practices that appear to be 'best' in some firms never take hold across other businesses, remain. They posit that variety in employment practices can be a "source of distinctiveness and competitive advantage." (Cappelli and Crocker-Hefter, 1996).

Teece et al argue that it is the coordination and integration of organizational processes that derive distinctive capability from organizational capabilities; "Recognizing the congruences and complementarities among processes, and between processes and incentives, is critical to the understanding of organizational capabilities." (Teece, Pisano and Shuen, 1997).

Distinguishing the distinctive capabilities and competencies such as architecture, innovation and reputation that are impacted by the practice of remote working at Sennheiser is fundamental to my overall research aim.

2.3.3 *Sustainable Competitive Advantage*

The literature I have reviewed to date argues that through the exploitation of a firm's resources and distinctive capabilities a firm can create added value and a source of competitive advantage. A firm is said to have a sustainable competitive advantage when it implements a value creating strategy which is not simultaneously being used by its

current of potential competitors. Distinctive capabilities are the potential source of added value, and, according to John Kay, rest in the architecture, reputation and innovation capabilities of an organisation (Barney, 1991; Kay, 1995). In Barneys V.R.I.N. framework resources with the potential to hold a sustainable competitive advantage are said to be valuable, rare, imperfectibly imitable and non-substitutable. A resource is valuable when it enables a firm to implement strategies that improve its efficiency or effectiveness. A rare resource can be a mix of valuable resources because their combination creates a rare resource capable of providing a competitive advantage over competitors with common resources. Imperfectly imitable resources are argued to be so, because a firm possesses valuable and rare resources that cannot be obtained by competitors. Barney further argues that imperfectly imitable resources can be derived because the link between a firm's resources and its sustainable competitive advantage is 'casually ambiguous', in other words, when the link is poorly understood by competing firms, they cannot duplicate or imitate the strategies derived from the value creating resources. The unique historical conditions that give rise to a firms' ability to exploit resources, and the social complexity of a firms resources i.e. a firms culture, reputation and interpersonal relations all contribute to the imitability of a firms resources (Barney, 1991).
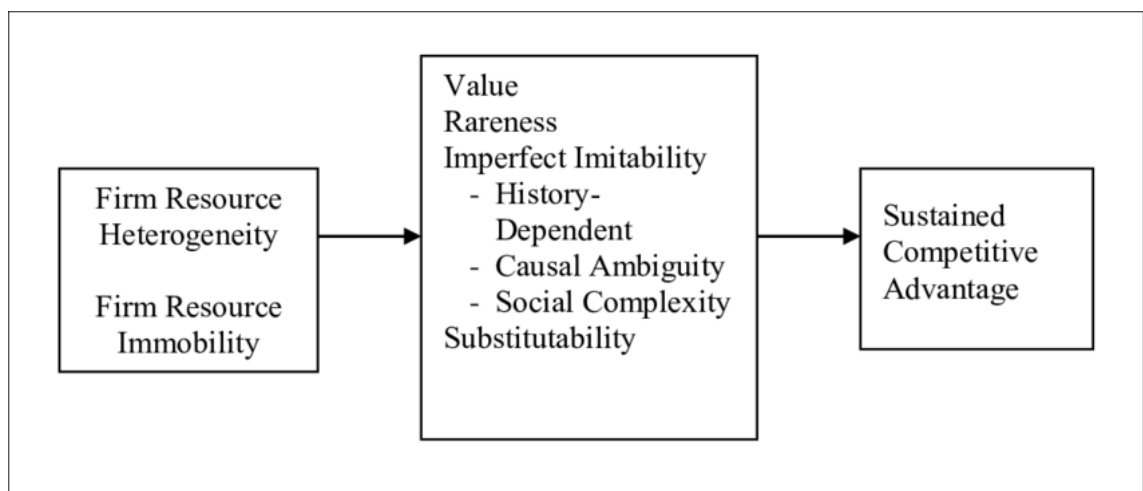
Figure 8: The Relationship Between Resource Heterogeneity and Immobility, Value, Rareness, Imperfect Immobility, and Substitutability, and Sustained Competitive Advantage.

Source: (Barney, 1991)

If competitors are unable to replicate the effects of value creating strategies over a long term, the firm is said to have a sustainable competitive advantage. The term sustainable is not marked by a period of time of which the firm has the advantage, but rather is it

marked by the inability of the competitors to duplicate the advantage. Therefore, a firm can lose its sustainable competitive advantage, when competitors are able to replicate the effects of the value creating strategy. It is argued that when a distinctive capability rests within the architecture, reputation or innovations of an organisation it is these capabilities which are the basis of a value creating strategy and can lead to competitive advantage (Barney, 1991; Kay, 1995). It is the impact that remote working has on these types of distinctive capabilities that is the basis of my research.

2.3.4 *Performance*

Creating a competitive advantage is important for firms, because it lets them outperform their competitors. John Kay and Michael Porter argue that added value is a key measure of corporate success and the analysis of the value chain as a means of appraisal of a firms operating activity (Porter, 2004). This internal analysis can provide an answer as to how competitive advantage is created. The added value is said to be measured as the difference between the cost of production (a firms inputs) and the revenues realised in the market place (a firms outputs) (Kay, 1995; Clegg *et al.*, 2011).

As outlined in the literature remote working can have an impact on a firm's performance through reduced office space costs and increased productivity (Karia and Asaari, 2016). Gaining a competitive advantage and outperforming competitors leads to a superior performance and ultimately to an increased, or above average financial performance (Barney, 1991; Grant, 1998; Collis and Montgomery, 2008). This paper defines an increased financial performance as growth. By gaining insight, into the impact of remote working on resources and capabilities that when combined lead to value creating strategies and contribute to a sustainable competitive advantage, recommendations can be made about better managing the resources that enable remote working. I will argue the potential for this to lead to an effective use of the competitive advantage and therefore an increased financial performance.

2.4 Conceptual Framework
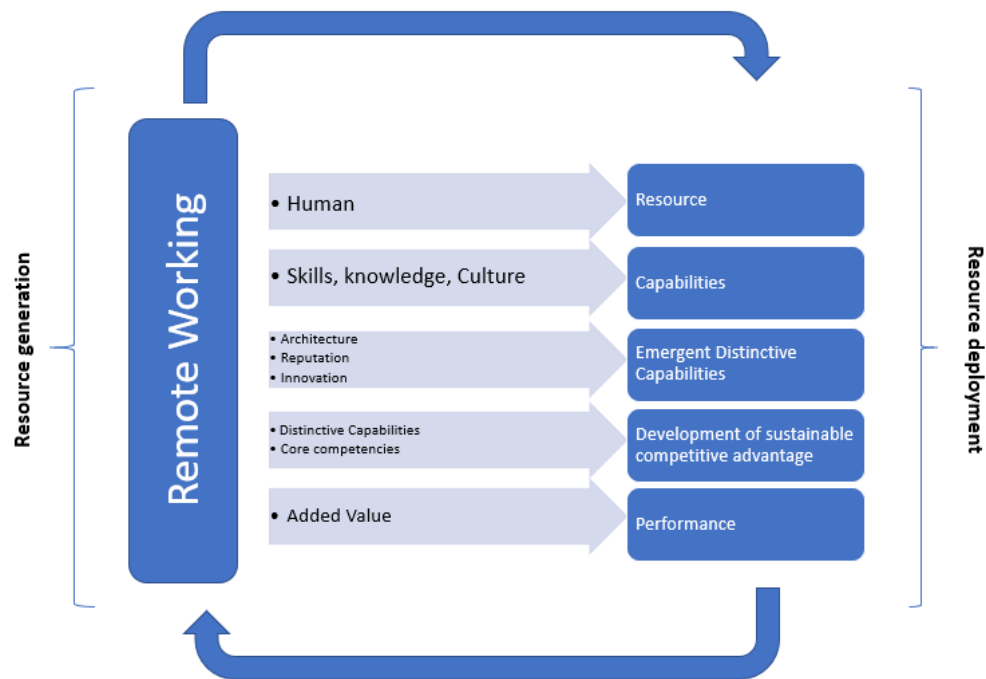
Figure 9: Conceptual Framework Design

The conceptual framework is deduced and developed following extensive research of the literature available on remote working and the resource-based view. It is evident that the practice of remote working has developed over time and is driven by demographics, organisational need, response to globalisation and enabled by rapid advances in technology. Sennheiser has undergone an organizational change and development referred to as the Connected Company which demands that some employees work remotely of their manager, and remote of their internal and external customers.

I have developed the conceptual framework to study how remote working impacts or influences the Sennheiser organisation taking influence from the resource-based view theoretical framework. I will study the impact of remote working on the resources and capabilities of the organisation with the objective of finding how the practice of remote working correlates with value creation and the emergence of a distinctive capability. I will further examine if the emergence of a distinctive capability has been directly impacted by remote working? As I have outlined in the literature review it is argued by advocates of the resource-based view that internal capabilities can be a source of competitive advantage; if those capabilities or competencies are distinctive of competition (Prahalad and Hamel, 1990; Kay, 1995; Barney, 2016). Superior performance can be achieved

through the effective and efficient use of resources. As outlined in the conceptual framework the deployment of effective resources and distinctive capabilities leading to superior performance provides the capability to generate additional resources. The value creating strategy can produce a sustainable competitive advantage - valuable, rare, imitable and non-substitutable (Barney, 1991).

2.5   Conclusion

I have reviewed the literature available on teleworking, virtual working, distributed working and remote working. The definition of remote working is derived from the characteristics of a remote worker identified in the literature and the current European Framework Agreement on Telework of 2002 definition of Telework. Therefore I have concluded that a remote worker: performs their job using information technology outside or away from the employer's premises on a regular basis and is remote of their manager and collaborates with their team or colleagues via virtual workspaces (Bailey and Kurland, 2002; McLennan and McLennan, 2007b; Welz and Wolf, 2010; Davidson, 2013).

Remote working trends indicate that there is an increase in demand for flexible working which has been enabled by technology, Globalisation and demographic changes of talent (McLennan and McLennan, 2007).

Remote work drivers have been studied extensively, and divided into two areas, supply or employer side drivers and demand or employee side drivers. The drivers and the potential impact of remote working on the organisation and its employees include:

Drivers:

- Environmental sustainability and cost efficiencies by reducing office space.

- Work-life-balance, job satisfaction and motivation.

Impact:

- Increased productivity and/or higher quality of work.

- Lack of social interaction is perceived negatively.

Successful implementation of remote working or disturbed teams is influenced by transformational leadership that supports autonomy and flexibility for its employees. Strategic reasoning for remote working, such as time zone differences that invert periods

of work and rest are suggested in the literature as influencing factors on the management and practice of remote work and virtual work within an organisation (Davidson, 2013).

I have concluded from my research of the literature that providing further qualitative research in the form of interviews with remote workers within Sennheiser will support the development of my research aim of determining if remote working can contribute to the internal distinctive capabilities of the Sennheiser organisation and be a source of competitive advantage. There is research available linking competitive advantage to remote work, however there is a gap in the literature in terms of the impact of remote working in a single case.

In Chapter 3, I will outline the methodology and design of the qualitative primary research before discussing the findings in Chapter 4.

3   Methodology and Research Design

3.1   Overview

In my review of the literature in Chapter 2, it is evident that remote work is influencing work practices and modern management. The drivers of remote working are varied on both the demand and supply side and there is evidence to support remote working is positively correlated with increased productivity and the internal capabilities of an organisation. Sennheiser is an organisation that has undergone organizational development and structural change in recent years that has led to an increase in the practice of remote working. I will carry out a qualitative study from a range of stakeholders who have remote working experience within the Sennheiser organisation. I will outline the research philosophy, approach and strategy and outline who voluntarily participated in the interview process and why I selected these employees as suitable candidates.

3.2   Research Philosophy and Approach

A research philosophy or paradigm identifies the perspective or lens from which the researcher views the world. This is based on assumptions, and these assumptions can support the overall strategy of the research and the chosen research method. The research philosophy or perspective to which I view this study is interpretivist (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2016, pp. 65–72). According to Collis and Hussey, the interpretivist view is based on the belief that "social reality is not objective but highly subjective because it is shaped by our perceptions" (Collis and Hussey, 2013, pp. 82–84). As opposed to positivistic philosophy which uses existing theory to develop hypotheses and theorises by definite 'laws', the interpretivist perspective advocates the need to conduct research that captures the differences in humans rather than in objects or pieces of data (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2016). The interpretivist philosophy is based on a belief that reality is a social construct which is created by humans and can be viewed subjectively, rather than a social world which consists of a concrete reality which can viewed objectively (Rahman, 2017). My research is concerned with the subjective view of the impact of remote work on organisational behaviour, the interpretivist paradigm therefore is the most appropriate fit for understanding this research and the findings.

The research approach I undertook required a hybridized approach of inductive and deductive research approaches. The inductive approach is aligned to the interpretivist perspective and is said to support the development of empirical generalisations, or as agreed by David R. Thomas in his citation of Strauss and Corbin's (1998) description: "The researcher begins with an area of study and allows the theory to emerge from the data". This approach is appropriate for the collection and analysis of qualitative primary data. A deductive approach is associated with a positivistic and quantitative data analysis approach, but not exclusively. A deductive approach is used to "deduce a testable proposition about the relationship between two or more concepts or variables from a theory" (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2016). It is argued inductive analysis refers to an approach that uses detailed readings of raw data (such as interviews) to derive themes or concepts through interpretation of that data (Thomas, 2006). There is significant literature and existing research on the phenomenon of remote working and my research objectives are concerned with the impact of this phenomenon on an organisation whilst under the lens of the resource-based view of strategy. Therefore, I developed a conceptual or theoretical framework using the resource-based view, upon which I could hypothesize the existence of a link between remote working and competitive advantage. This method of secondary data analysis of the literature and company documents required a deductive approach from which I developed the conceptual framework (Ali and Birley, 1999).

I have chosen a single method of primary data collection, semi-structured interviews. By preparing open questions to encourage the interviewee to be open about the topic and to allow for other questions to develop throughout the course of the interview (Collis and Hussey, 2013, p. 127).

I have chosen a hybridization of deductive and inductive approaches as it affords me the opportunity to approach the primary research with an informed view of existing theory while also allowing for the potential to see connections between variables not apparent in the theory.

3.3 Research Strategy

The overall aim of my research was to establish if remote working contributes to the organisational capabilities and sources of competitive advantage, applying the research-based view theory of strategy. I set out four research objectives to underpin that aim. By way of an interpretivist perspective and a hybridised deductive/inductive qualitative approach to my research I have designed a research strategy that best fits with my overall research aim.

As cited by Saunders et al., Colin Robson defined a case study as "a strategy for doing research which involves an empirical investigation of a particular contemporary phenomenon within its real life context using multiple sources of evidence" (Robson, 2002; Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2016). I chose the organisation I work for, Sennheiser electronic GmbH & Co. KG, to provide the 'real life context' from which to research remote working, the 'contemporary phenomenon' I am interested in. I work for Sennheiser in a sales management position and have access to senior management and executives across multiple functions within the organisation. Sennheiser has undergone significant organisational development since 2015 which has increased the practice of remote working throughout the organisation. Therefore, a case study provided me with the best opportunity to observe and analyse the phenomenon of remote work. I have undertaken an opportunistic/accidental case study as a result of the level of access and the prevalence of the phenomenon of remote working within Sennheiser. An opportunistic case study can provide "the stimuli for acknowledging that there is much to observe and understand" (Otley and Berry, 1994). I have applied the resource-based view theory of strategy as the theoretical model from which to study the generalisability of remote working as a contributor to an organisation's distinctive capabilities, enabling sustainable competitive advantage. Theoretical generalisability or analytical generalisability relies on a theoretical proposition from which to generalize findings of the study. As contrasted with statistical generalization which, it is argued is less relevant for case study research; an inference is made about a population on the basis of empirical data collected from a sample of that population I have chosen to use a single case study research design (Yin, 2009).

My research objectives ask 'How remote working influences Sennheiser's organisational capabilities?' and 'How remote work impacts a Sennheiser employees' ability to add value, and their performance?'. A deductive approach to a single case using a theoretical proposition/framework based on the research-based view of strategy provides me with the most appropriate method by which to research the remote work phenomena. Further inductive analysis allows me to develop theoretical generalisations in light of the data resulting from qualitative collection methods. Figure 8 is a graphical representation of my research design.
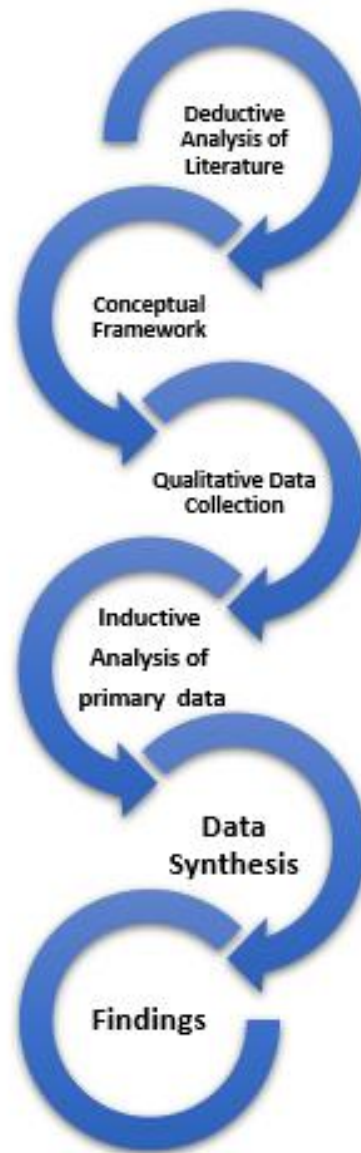
Figure 9: Research Design

3.4 Collection Primary Data

My primary method of collecting data is through semi-structured interviews with employees of Sennheiser from several management levels across multiple functions and job roles within the organisation. I used a semi-structured interview method with open-ended questions allowing for new idea's to be discussed during the interview. I viewed this method as the most appropriate for an inductive approach to my primary research (Collis and Hussey, 2013).

I drew from themes I found within the literature which supported me to produce a conceptual framework that informed the development of interview guides in preparation for the interviews. The interview guide developed over time as I conducted more interviews (See Appendix A for interview guide).

All interviews were performed over the internet using audio and video conferencing software Skype for Business. With the permission of the interviewee I recorded the audio of the interviews, which were later transcribed. Transcriptions of the interviews were sent to interviewees for verification and to afford them the opportunity for additional commentary or clarification (See Appendix B for participant consent form).

Each interview was conducted using audio only. I considered the use of video but given that my experience within Sennheiser of remote calls over Skype can sometimes be demanding of bandwidth, and most business calls are conducted using audio only, I chose not to adapt the environment of which most online calls within the organisation take place. The 'audio only' meeting environment is a natural meeting environment within Sennheiser.

3.4.1 *Sources*

I conducted interviews with the below people as a primary data source. I targeted each individual for interview because they represented a particular function of the organisation and/or a particular level or management. I had access to a wide representation of roles within the organisation; including senior and mid-level management. I researched each individual participant as part of my selection process, using the internal Sennheiser intranet service 'Back Stage'. This portal provides employee information such as role title and contact information. Based on the role title I deduced whether or not the participant had experience of remote working either in their current or previous roles. Where possible I chose participants, who had regional responsibilities as opposed to single country responsibility, thereby increasing the chance that the participant would have

knowledge of, if not extensive experience of remote working. I sought data from varying functions of the organisation to establish if remote working was impacted by role functionality.

The following is a list of Sennheiser employees selected for interview (See Appendix C for invitation to participate email).

Sales Channel Function

Daniel McFarlane – Global Sales Manager/Travel Retail Channel

I chose to interview Daniel because he represents a cohort of employees whose work is across regions and has an international focus. Daniel has extensive knowledge of remote working and represents a mid-level management position within the Consumer Retail channel. He has insights to business unit strategy, and this presented the opportunity to probe if the practice remote working impacts his ability to add value and derive any impact on channel strategy.

Petteri Murto – Sales Director/Professional Audio Solutions Channel (Ireland, UK & Nordics)

I chose Petteri to discuss the topic with a European sales Director of the Professional Audio sales channel. Petteri is a remote worker and remote manager of a team of sixteen sales people. I was interested to discuss Petteri's perspective from a role where remote working is requirement of the job.

Marketing Function

Ingo Angres – Global Marketing Communications Manager/Professional Audio Segment

Ingo Angres has eighteen years' experience within the Sennheiser organisation, primarily in marketing roles. I chose to interview Ingo as he has experience working both within the new 'Connected Company' structure and prior to when the connected company structure was introduced and therefore could provide insights into remote work practices before and after this organisational change.

I.T. Function

Terry Bracken – Information Technology (IT) Support Specialist (Ireland, UK and Nordics)

I chose Terry to provide information from an I.T. perspective. The literature I reviewed has argued that the I.T. function is seen as a function of an organisation that can adapt to remote work practices. I could thereby test this hypothesis (Davidson, 2013).

Customer Services Function

Debbie Dunlop – Customer Service (Southern Europe)

I chose Debbie from customer service because she provided a customer service perspective from outside of management level. While Debbie works most of her time from a Sennheiser office in the UK, she remotely works on occasion and therefore could provide an insight of remote working and traditional office-based working.

Mary Daly – Customer Service Manager (EMEA)

Mary Daly heads a Customer service team of over fifty customer services agents, with six direct management reports. She has extensive experience within the organisation. Working from Sennheiser's manufacturing facility in Tullamore, Ireland she has twenty-eight-years' experience within Sennheiser. Her previous roles include working in the accounts department and progressing to customer service management most recently. She has experience of remote working, being remotely managed and as a manager of a remote team she also has experience in traditionally office-based roles.

Operations Function

Heinke Hahn – Director of Operations (EMEA)

Heinke Hahn has a long career within Sennheiser, working in sales as market manager and now as head of operations, EMEA. She has experience of working at Headquarters in Germany before and after the organisational change to Connected Company. Heinke could therefore provide me a multi-functional perspective on how remote working has been influenced by organisational changes and vice versa.

Finance Function

Kelly Watts – Financial Manager (Ireland, UK and Nordics)

I chose to talk to a representative of a function that is traditionally viewed as a non-remote working function. Kelly fulfils a finance management role which requires remote working because of the wider regional responsibility, enabled as result of Sennheiser's connected company structure. Kelly's responsibilities recently widened to include the Irish and Nordics Sennheiser offices as well as her UK responsibility. Previously Kelly worked in a finance role but solely for the Sennheiser UK office in a non-remote capacity.

Human Resource Function

Karolina Goralska – Human Resource Manager (Ireland, UK and Nordics)

Karolina joined Sennheiser in 2018 to occupy the role of HR manager for Ireland, UK and Nordics. I wanted to gain her perspective as a Human Resources manager, and also as a new hire within Sennheiser, to compare work practices with Sennheiser and other organisations. Collecting data from the Human Resources department was important in order to gain insights about the drivers of remote work practices within Sennheiser and if it is a practice that is embedded into Human resource strategy.

Research and Innovation Function

Veronique Larcher - Director of Research and Innovation

Veronique Larcher represents the highest level of senior management within the organisation I could obtain access to and could provide insights of remote working from Sennheiser's research and innovation department.

3.4.2 *Access and Ethical Issues*

I have worked for Sennheiser for four years and in the professional audio industry for fifteen years. I have built up a wide range of connections and contacts within the professional audio industry over that time. In Sennheiser I have access to management executives at various levels of the business. It is this access and my ability to leverage my contacts that became one of the driving factors of my decision to choose Sennheiser as a case to study the phenomena of remote working.

I made a formal request for interviews via email and asked for each participant's consent in writing (see appendix C & B for examples of both). All participants were aware of the nature and scope of my research and also made aware that the interview would be held over Skype; the audio of which would be recorded and later transcribed. I offered and provided a copy of each transcribed interview in case the interviewee wished to update or change any of their commentary or opinion.

I always took a professional and ethical approach to the interviews, making it clear that the data collected from the interviews would be treated confidentially and, if requested, reported anonymously in the findings.

3.5   Approach to Data Analysis

Qualitative data by nature is complex and can be difficult to analyse. Collis and Hussey agree with J.M. Morse in his 1994 book 'Emerging from the Data: The Cognitive Processes of Analysis in Qualitative Inquiry', where he states: "despite the proliferation of qualitative methodology texts detailing techniques for conducting a qualitative project, the actual process of data analysis remains poorly described" (Collis and Hussey, 2013). Recognising the complex nature of qualitative data analysis, I chose an inductive approach to analysing the data. I approached the secondary research; articles, books, online reports, archival records and company documents by way of deductive analysis. This allowed me to develop a conceptual framework which supported the interview guides used during the interview process. I then pivoted my approach to primary research, and resulting qualitative data collected from interviews, by using an inductive approach to the analysis.

A general inductive approach to qualitative data is described in three stages as data reduction, data display and conclusion or verification. I have used a coding approach as described in Figure 10 for the process of data reduction and display (Thomas, 2006).

Table 2
The Coding Process in Inductive Analysis

Initial reading of text data	Identify specific text segments related to objectives	Label the segments of text to create categories	Reduce overlap and redundancy among the categories	Create a model incorporating most important categories
Many pages of text	Many segments of text	30 to 40 categories	15 to 20 categories	3 to 8 categories

Source: Adapted from Creswell (2002, p. 266, Figure 9.4) by permission of Pearson Education, Inc. (© 2002, Upper Saddle River, NJ).

Figure 10: The Coding Process in Inductive Analysis

Source: (Thomas, 2006)

I recorded each interview over Skype and then transcribed to a word document. I printed each transcribed interview and performed an initial reading of the text (See appendix D for example of transcribed interview). I identified specific text segments as related to the research aim, objectives and conceptual framework. I coded each piece of text into five themes where relevant to the conceptual framework, I then developed sub themes driven

by the data emerging from the interviews. This coded data was then reduced into three themes and ten sub-themes (see appendix E & F to view the thematic coding table and a coded transcribed interview).

After reducing the codes and themes I inputted the data from the coding table into the qualitative software program NVivo to create a synthesis matrix and method of displaying the data for conclusion and verification (see appendix G for example of thematic analysis NVivo table). The thematic analysis of the data, while inductive was supported by the conceptual framework developed following a deductive review of the secondary data/literature available.

3.6   Conclusion

I have outlined in this chapter the justification for my research approach and philosophy. I have detailed my research strategy and design and outlined the methods by which I collect and analyse the qualitative data.

The aim of this research project is to study the phenomena of remote work within the Sennheiser organisation and its potential impact on organisational distinctive capabilities that lead to competitive advantage. A case study strategy viewed through an interpretivist perspective became the most appropriate research framework by which to approach the research. Using a qualitative data collection methodology, I applied a deductive approach to secondary data analysis of remote working and the research-based view literature. This informed the development of a conceptual framework. I took a general inductive approach to the analysis of primary research. The primary research was collected by semi-structured interviews of Sennheiser employees from varying levels of management and with roles across multiple functions of the organisation. The general inductive approach is appropriate to this type of qualitative data collection and analysis to allow for the development of a theory. I will discuss the findings of this analysis and its relationship with my overall research aim and objectives in chapter four.

4   Presentation and Discussion of the Findings

4.1   Overview

The aim of my research is to study how remote work impacts the internal resources and capabilities of the Sennheiser organisation and how a sustainable competitive advantage can be derived. Chapter Three set out the methodology and approach to my research and I discussed why I chose a single case study research strategy whereby primary data is collected through semi-structured interviews of Sennheiser employees. The qualitative data was subsequently collected and transcribed, and a thematic analysis performed. Having reviewed the available literature on remote working and contemporary strategy and developed a conceptual framework, I will now discuss my findings and how they relate to the literature, conceptual framework and research objectives set out in chapter two. I will discuss how the practice of remote working in Sennheiser has impacted their employee's ability to add value, their performance, the resources and capabilities of the organisation and Sennheiser's ability to derive a sustainable competitive advantage as a result.

4.2   Findings

There is extensive literature which studies the impact on both the organisation and the employee of remote work practices but little existing literature discussing a link between remote working practice and competitive advantage. The Sennheiser organisation undertook a significant organisational development which re-structured the company in 2015. This change resulted in a greater need for remote working to support the internationalisation of roles and responsibilities within their connected company structure.

The chosen research methodology, strategy and subsequent qualitative data collection has provided findings from which I can draw conclusions as they relate to my research objectives. A large amount of data was collected from ten semi-structured interviews with Sennheiser employees. I have performed a thematic analysis and found:

The themes that emerged from the interview data are: -

1. The understanding of remote working is varied amongst the participants.

2. The internal resources of Sennheiser are impacted by remote working.

3. There is evidence of the emergence of distinctive capabilities resulting from the impact of remote working on the internal resources of Sennheiser.

4. The ability of the participants to add value for Sennheiser in their role is impacted by remote working.

5. The performance of the participants in their current roles for Sennheiser is impacted by remote working.

I am using the conceptual framework developed from my review of the literature to support the presentation of my findings. The structure of the framework allows me to focus my findings on how remote working impacts the internal resources and capabilities of Sennheiser, and how remote working impacts the emergence of distinctive capabilities such as architecture, reputation and innovation. It is these distinctive capabilities that can be a source of a sustainable competitive advantage. Firstly, I will address the definition and understanding of a remote worker.

Understanding and Definition of a Remote Worker

I asked the participants a version of the following question 'do you consider yourself a remote worker?', according to a particular definition. I referred to varying sources when defining a remote worker in interviews 1 to 3 (Daniel, Terry, and Debbie); the following definition was common for all three interviews:

"A remote worker is defined as a full-time employee who is not required to use a Sennheiser office to perform their work. The work is information based. Therefore, it can be executed using available technology such as a laptop, secure Internet connection and a mobile phone." ((Kane, 2019 interview with (Bracken, 2019)).

I decided to standardise the definition using a single source. I chose the EU statistical agency definition for the remaining interviews 4-10 (Mary, Ingo, Heinke, Kelly, Karolina, Veronique and Petteri):

".... a remote worker or tele worker refers to people who use information and communication technologies to perform their work away from their main workplace. Characteristics of a remote worker somebody who's remotely managed. They're using telecommunications and I.T. based communications. They're offsite or at multiple sites or at alternative workspaces and they use virtual teamwork and collaboration." ((Kane, 2019 interview with (Daly, 2019)).

According to the definitions provided, all participants confirmed to have the characteristics of a remote worker; it was apparent that their role required that the individual be remotely managed and/or to manage remotely, work offsite at multiple sites

or alternative workspaces and use virtual workspaces for team work and collaboration. While not all of the remote work characteristics dominate their work practices, and where the participant is 'mostly' based in a Sennheiser office, all participants agreed that the ability to work off site and the experience of being remotely managed or managing a remote team provided confirmation of the practice of remote working. It is evident from my interviews with all participants that their understanding or remote work against the definition(s) I provided was not always the same. In some cases, it was perceived that remote working meant to work from home only. This definition issue is also highlighted within the literature.

4.2.1   *Remote Work – Impact on Resources & Capabilities*

Human Resources

The resource-based view asserts resources are tangible and intangible and when working together can create organizational capabilities that lead to competitive advantage. Tangible resources include financial and physical assets like property-based resources, intangible resources can be more difficult to assess but can include organisational culture, routines, reputation and human resources (Clegg et al., 2011).

I have coded the data collected from the interviews to analyse the impact that remote working has on human resources and the deployment of capabilities and competencies such as knowledge and skills that can contribute to value creating strategies. Other intangible resources, 'Culture' and 'Leadership' emerged from the data.

Skills and Competencies

Of the participants that referred to additional skills and/or competencies developed as a result of remotely working, self-discipline, motivation and communication were terms used by some of the participants. Daniel stated: *"Self-management and independence.... They're definitely at the forefront of the benefits or skills I've learned by being remote."* (McFarlane, 2019). Karolina also commented on the skills she believed were needed from a remote worker *"Not everyone is able to work remotely and not everybody's ready to work remotely because obviously you need to be kind of self-motivated. You need to be self-driven or results driven"* (Goralska, 2019). Petteri spoke about the entrepreneurial spirit that's needed to be a remote worker; *"The manager of this invisible manager who's all the time you know they're giving the instructions what to do next. And how to do this and that so. So,*

we need a lot of you know entrepreneurial spirit." (Murto, 2019). Mary provided an example of how she disciplines herself when working from home; *"I live in the country and I have to bring my car around the back. So, none of the neighbours know that I'm at home. So, you have to discipline yourself. You're in the office. You're not available."* (Daly, 2019). Communication skills were cited by Daniel, Kelly and Petteri as having improved or developed as a result of remote working. Daniel commented,

".... I would imagine my communication skills have improved and by communication, I mean all forms of communication whether it's cyber, physical, email, written or whatever. By being able to balance and by spending more time on the digital communication realm rather than relying solely on the physical interaction this has probably improved my breadth of communication skills." (McFarlane, 2019).

While Petteri believes, *"Communication skills. It's a must. You really have to have good communication skills."* (Murto, 2019). The question(s) relating to skills development as a result of remote working were approached differently in each interview, the general responses were aligned more with competency development rather than skills development i.e. 'motivated', 'entrepreneurial', 'disciplined'. The perspective given was driven by what the participant believed was needed to work remotely rather than the competencies that are developed or impacted as a result of remote working.   The interview method in this case, of semi-structured interviews, did not provide for specific enough questioning to provide a deep understanding of the impact of remote working on skills or competency development.

Knowledge Capability

The impact that remote working has on knowledge transfer or education was remarked on by two of the participants, Terry and Petteri. Terry spoke about knowledge or education in the context of his role in IT support. He spoke about the volume of support tickets he receives from remote workers in comparison to office based workers and that remote workers have a tendency to education themselves to resolve IT issues quickly: *"...if you are somebody that is going to be working from home every day, you're gonna make sure you know what you need to know to do that. Likewise, if you're in the office every day you don't need to really worry about anything."* (Bracken, 2019). Petteri on the other hand spoke about how remote working enabled the creation of sub-teams despite varying locations of the team members, best practise could be shared:

"I have also built quite a lot of famous sub teams so people collaborate across boundaries ………. So, it's like a lot of the same topics instead of you know having everybody in their own silos thinking about exactly the same problem or issue. ……. So just you know more creative

minds and good people together brings much more better results than everybody doing by themselves (sic)." (Murto, 2019).

There was not sufficient depth of response specifically on knowledge capability to draw any conclusion to the impact of remote working on this specific capability.

Leadership Capability

This topic was touched on by Heinke in the context of leading a remote team and needing to have face to face to contact with her team; *"I think over time now there was much more training on virtual leadership… And there was a big awareness factor as well, that as part of good leadership you also need to be somewhere close to your people."* Later she mentions a need for *"a systemic leadership approach where you really look at the holistic view of the person in the full context of what he or she is going to do"* (Hahn, 2019). Ingo refers to the challenges of remotely managing teams, particularly cross-cultural teams, and finding ways to improve on that though his leadership.

There is evidence in the literature that remote work/telework leaders are innovative, effective and receptive (Karia and Asaari, 2016). Daniel, Petteri and Karolina have referred to characteristics needed when remote working such as being self-driven, motivated, results driven and entrepreneurial. These traits indicate evidence of leadership skills emerging as a result of remote working and is concurrent with the evidence presented in the literature on leadership style being an influencing factor for positive remote work practice (Kowalski and Swanson, 2005; Davidson, 2013).

Culture

Culture was referred to in organisational and societal terms in the interviews. Organisational culture was referred to in varying contexts. Heinke for example referred to the challenges of remotely managing a team and building team culture. While Karolina refers directly to the seven culture principals within Sennheiser that serve as a guideline for the behaviours expected from a Sennheiser employee. Karolina notes that the seven principals are the characteristics needed to be a remote worker. *"You have to have (sic) the right attitude ……… this is also another culture principle obviously(sic) perform to your full potential. So, every cultural principle actually refers to the (sic) remote working."* (Goralska, 2019). Petteri talks about the cultural shift within Sennheiser and at the same time a change in employee demographic, from older to younger. The perception of some older team members is working remotely negatively impacts performance. Petteri believes this perception is changing with a younger demographic entering the company; *"you don't get the bad vibes from colleagues if you work from home."* (Murto, 2019).

Societal cultural differences are referred to by Ingo in the context of managing cross-cultural teams and how remote working has impacted his ability to manage his professional audio marketing team. Ingo talks about virtual collaborations across cultures and wanting to understand more about how other 'cultures' work remotely; "*…we are now a very global marketing company and have a lot of teams that ….. are wildly mixed together maybe with different peoples and people and cultures I would be more interested in how do other cultures really work remotely?*" (Angres, 2019). Veronique comments on the benefits of being able to remotely manage her team, while she is based in Switzerland, she has team members in the U.S. who are close to the market and Sennheiser's immersive audio target group, she believes they are, "more infused with the culture" (Larcher, 2019) as a result of distributed there.

The findings suggest that remote working has impacted the capabilities of the interviewees positively. Words such as 'self-management', 'discipline', 'motivation', 'entrepreneurship' are used to describe characteristics needed to work remotely. It is also evident that organisational culture is a strong influence on the characteristics and behaviours expected within the Sennheiser organisation. Knowledge capability and transfer is also impacted positively be remote working, which enables cross regional/border communication and sharing of best practice. As suggested in Davidson's study of distributed remote teams, remote/virtual working can become a 'core competency' for an organisation (Davidson, 2013). It is also argued that distinctive human resources can shape core competencies of an organisation (Cappelli and Crocker-Hefter, 1996).

4.2.2 *Remote Work - Impact on* Distinctive Capabilities

Architecture

The architecture of an organisation, organisational routines and relationships between the organisation it's employees and its customers can hold distinctive capabilities, which are a valuable differentiator and source of competitive advantage. The literature on sources of competitive advantage posits distinctive capabilities, dynamic capabilities and core competencies can drive a firm to superior performance (Kay, 1995; Cappelli and Crocker-Hefter, 1996; Teece, Pisano and Shuen, 1997).

Internal Architecture

Those participants who remotely manage teams often referred to the importance of communication face to face or physical communication as well as virtual communications

via online meetings or video conference. Veronique, Karolina, Heinke and Petteri highlight the need for face to face meetings with their teams. This physical meeting provides the opportunity to build team spirit and facilitate long meetings. The face to face meeting is less frequent than online meetings, which can happen daily or weekly. These participants believe that remote working needs to be interlinked with direct contact between the team. As noted by Heinke; *"I absolutely think it's necessary to stay close to the people, to actually see them face to face and even to build this team spirit."* (Hahn, 2019). The same participants also spoke positively about the experience of remote working with their teams, and how it had provided a cooperative ethic which emboldened the team performance despite remoteness or distance. A key driver of this cooperative ethic is trust between management and their team. The importance of trust is re-iterated by Karolina, she mentions the importance of trust between management and remote workers on several occasions throughout her interview. Petteri also notes trust, in the context of team demographics; the older members of the team, used to traditional office-based work needed to be more trustful of remote workers; *"It's a lot about you know a trust thing. That people tend to have at least in the older generation it feels like OK if you work from home it means that you don't do anything."* (Murto, 2019). The literature on remote working cites trust as having a significant influence on the integration and adoption of remote working practice (Kowalski and Swanson, 2005; Karia and Asaari, 2016). Trust and a cooperative ethic are themes present in the data and consistent with the value placed on the internal architecture of an organisation as a source of competitive advantage (Kay, 1995). Terry, Debbie, and Kelly talk about the relationship with their manager and how remote working has impacted that relationship positively. Kelly points out;

"I have to say with the relationship I have with my manager its better than I would say my previous manager who is based in the office. Actually, we communicate much better and I think that's because we've been forced into that. And I actually think that's been a good and a positive thing for me or for him as a manager with the relationship with me" (Watts, 2019).

Veronique, who manages a distributed team, relates remote working and as an efficient use of resources;

"I want to stress out that in terms of people, of team spirit, of people management, remote working is never the easy option. So it's not for everyone. It comes with a lot of things that need to happen to make it work. But when you have these in place or you're willing to work with those tools and those compromises, then yes. When you are such a team then it can be used to your benefit." (Larcher, 2019).

The relationship between the employer and employee takes form in the relational contract(s) between a firm and its employees (Kay, 1995). I would argue that the impact of

remote working has led to a cooperative ethic and strong relationships, underpinned by trust, emboldening the team spirit and the internal architecture of the Sennheiser organisation (Kay, 1995; Karia and Asaari, 2016).

External Architecture

Mary referenced how working remotely with her customer service teams is benefitting customers by their ability to share live information with each other at anytime from anywhere concerning customer orders; this is leading to quicker reaction times. For example, Mary mentions one of her customer service managers who regularly engages with customer service teams in the Asia Pacific region very early in the morning. This degree of flexibility and technology enables team leaders in Marys' customer service team, in this case from the EMEA region, to remotely support their colleagues and customers on the other side of the world. This provides evidence that deployment of technology as an enabler of remote work positively impacting the external architecture or customer relationships of Sennheiser. (Kay, 1995).

Reputation and Innovation

Karolina refers to serving Sennheiser customers better through implementing cloud-based communication technologies such as Microsoft Office 365 and Skype throughout the organization, enabling teams to respond remotely to customers. She talks specifically about customer service teams, and how this could benefit Sennheiser customers in the future (Goralska, 2019). Daniel talks about working with international customers in different time zones and how the flexibility of remote working allows him to engage with his customers at a time that suits them, *"I'd say it's positive particularly on the international level. Being able to engage with customers at a time that suits them rather than a time that suits me."* (McFarlane, 2019). Ingo compares working in Sennheiser before and after the connected company and how remote working has enabled the internationalisation of the Professional audio segment marketing department. He believes this way of working has enabled the marketing team to deliver a global brand message;

"There is literally no way of trying to work from your little, I call it an island right. So, if you have everything put into one setting if there is a headquarter which does constantly what headquarter thinks is best and you are so decentralized that there are so many differences. First on the cultural level, on a working level and on a content level. You will not be able to ensure that your brand is recognized. Everywhere the world at the same time. So that wouldn't work. You definitely need to become global. And that only works if you are working with people from around the globe." (Angres, 2019).

Sennheiser has re-organised and developed the organisation so that it can perform at the level to which these statements reflect. Taking a global approach to their customers and end-users was a key driver of that change (Sennheiser, 2014). This is evidence that Sennheiser has enjoyed some success, from an internal perspective, in shaping the company to the new connected company structure. It is also evident that remote working has had an impact on Sennheiser's ability to deliver that organisational change. The literature claims that a good reputation can signal superior quality of a company's product or service. Remote working is impacting Sennheiser's ability to deliver 'a better approach to their customers and end-users' and I would argue impacting the brand reputation in the process.

Veronique has made reference to how her distributed remote team is impacting their ability to research innovations in immersive audio. Remote working has enabled her to employ people closer to Sennheiser's end-user target group, early adopters of immersive audio technologies in the United States. The immersive audio research she is leading known as AMBEO, is about *"commercializing research on Immersive Audio technologies and selling products, and leading the team doing that."* (Larcher, 2019). She believes that remote working has enabled the research process;

"I wouldn't say it is only for research where I have felt that it would have been much less desirable. But when we talk about being customer centric and productising research, then Yes. That's where we need to be close to customers and I think that having some people in the US is key and therefore we have to accept the challenges that come with being remote." (Larcher, 2019).

On reviewing the literature, it was argued by John Kay that innovation as a source of competitive advantage can be costly and easily replicated and therefore can be a weak source of sustainable competitive advantage. It was also purported that reputation can be derived from an existing source of innovation (Kay, 1995). It is non-technological forms of innovation however, such as finding new ways of organising business (Green, Agarwal and Logue, 2015), I would argue that influences Veronique's ability to resource a distributed remote team. The deployment of that resource and capability close to the market(s) directly impacts her teams' research of AMBEO innovations and has the potential to impact Sennheiser's brand reputation in the immersive audio market segment. It is also within the innovation capability of Sennheiser through their provision of the technological infrastructure to support remote working, that enables remote workers and distributed teams such as Veronique's to perform their roles and add value.

4.2.3 *Remote Work – Impact on Performance*

Ability to Add Value

The question, 'how does remote work impact your ability to add value?', was asked of the ten participants. The overall theme's that emerged in response to this question were, additional time and less disruptions/distractions; these stated 'benefits' of remote working led to increased productivity resulting from the additional flexibility to utilise their time and work space. John Kay argued that "a firm can achieve added value only on the basis of some distinctive capability – some feature of its relationships which other firms lack, and cannot readily reproduce" (Kay, 1995).

Ingo and Mary talked about the ability to perform virtual online meetings using online platforms such as Skype, resulted in less time spent travelling to meetings in other countries. This provided additional time in their working day and as noted by Ingo;

"So there's no necessity for somebody to fly over all the time and have face to face conversations with the people who are managing the project. That is a big advantage. And it also of course adds value because in the end the quality as well as the deadline orientation has evolved much further. So we are much more quicker and I guess even better in what we are doing." (Angres, 2019).

The flexibility that remote working offers in terms of work-life balance was mentioned by Karolina and Daniel, for example less time commuting to work allows time for personal arrangements, noted by Karolina, whereas Daniel directly linked being able to balance time with working later in the evening and thus increasing productivity; *"My ability to balance my time I think is a significant factor that increases my productivity."* (McFarlane, 2019). Having the option to work outside the office with less distractions was a theme that also emerged from the interviews, providing a more efficient use of time. Debbie and Petteri talk about less distractions working outside the office, at home for example, where you can be alone with your work with no interruptions. This was perceived as an advantage for Debbie, who spends most of her time working from the Sennheiser UK office, and from home once every three weeks (Dunlop, 2019). Time zones were mentioned by the participants who occupied roles with international responsibilities. Veronique in particular spoke of a specific example were remote working across time zones allowed for the efficient development of a software app. Software developers in Switzerland worked while their colleagues in the U.S. slept and vice versa (Larcher, 2019). Remote working also enabled a greater level of flexibility to manage work routines, for example by taking conference calls earlier in the morning or later in the evening, coordinating with colleagues or customers in different time zones, was an advantage cited

by many of the participants. Heinke specifically talks about the efficiencies it adds to her team; *"It does add value. It actually is a big contributor to us working as a team. We would not be able to work as efficiently if we had to see each other to get the work done."* (Hahn, 2019). Kelly mentions that Sennheiser is getting additional value from her because she now manages several regions, *"Actually now setting up a new team in another region has meant that actually for Sennheiser they're getting more value out of me."* (Watts, 2019)*.*

The overall sentiment from the interviews was remote work correlated positively with the participants ability to manage and deploy their time more efficiently. It is viewed that remote working and/or the technology that enables remote working provides additional flexibility to perform work duties outside of standard working hours. It is also viewed that working outside of the office, from home for example, provides an environment with less distractions allowing the participant to achieve a greater level of productivity, providing additional value to the organisation.

Productivity

The literature cites an increase in productivity and a higher quality of work as a result of remote working. Remote working enables the worker to be removed from disruptions that can occur in an office (Bailey and Kurland, 2002; Davidson, 2013; Bloom et al., 2015). This is also the perception of Karolina, *"Yeah definitely more engagement so I would say it increased my productivity, more motivation, more engagement."*, when asked to compare her experiences of remote working versus not remote working or being office based (Goralska, 2019). Daniel talks about increased productivity and higher quality of work because he doesn't have the time constraints; *"I think the productivity and the quality of the work is increased in the context of having more time……I can manage my own time and I'm not against time pressure schedules."*, and also in the context of being removed from disruptions, *"Just being alone and being able to focus on what I'm doing and this definitely adds to productivity and value."* (McFarlane, 2019). The perception of improved productivity as a result of fewer distractions and increased flexibility to manage one's own time, is a common theme throughout the interviews. I would argue that this ability to improve productivity and add further value for Sennheiser is a direct impact of remote working. Productivity is key performance indicator, and potential link to a source of competitive advantage.

Challenges

The topic of isolation is mentioned in the literature and viewed as a factor that negatively impacts remote working (Sarbu, 2015). In the C-Trip study more than fifty percent of the volunteer group who chose to work from home switched their preference to working from the office primarily because of "feeling isolated and lonely at home" (Bloom et al., 2015). Karolina and Terry speak about isolation from other team members, Karolina in speaking about remote employees in general; *"I have spoken with several employees who kind of said that remote working actually makes them feel a little bit isolated so they don't feel as part of the team"* (Goralska, 2019). Terry talks about his own experience and challenges as a remote worker; *"The challenge for me is that I very rarely get to see my team."* (Bracken, 2019). The need to interact socially is mentioned by many of the participants. Heinke describes the need to build team culture through social interaction and physical meetings. She talks about having *"high social skills in order to communicate properly to understand the person."*, as part of a *"systemic leadership approach where you really look at the holistic view of the person in the full context of what he or she is going to do."* (Hahn, 2019). This is all within in the context of social interactions and physical meetings with her team. Kelly concurs with Heinkes' statements saying she likes to be around people and she *"thrives off relationships",* and feeling *"part of a team"*. (Watts, 2019). Daniel on the other hand mentions social interactions in the context of leading to distractions, *"For example being in an office space environment there's a social aspect which is time that could be spent working."* (McFarlane, 2019). He also agrees however that 'social exclusion' can be an issue when remote working particularly when spending prolonged periods of time away from an office; however, he attributes this feeling of loneliness as the responsibility of the remote worker. He maintains that there are both benefits and challenges of remote work; social isolation can be a challenge but on the other hand is benefits productivity. When I asked Daniel if he thought the challenges of remote work were surmountable, he replied; *"Yeah absolutely. Yeah. But proactively by the remote employee."* (McFarlane, 2019). Petteri also makes the point that a lack of social interaction is a challenge when remote working but the remote worker must make efforts to combat this and to engage with team members and colleagues in other teams (Murto, 2019).

4.3 Discussion

The research I conducted was with the aim of studying the impact of remote work on the organisational capabilities influencing competitive advantage within the Sennheiser organisation. The research objectives I set out, underpinning my overall research aim,

provided the path by which I researched the literature on remote working, sources of competitive strategy and the Sennheiser organisation. I developed a conceptual framework and finally set out my research methodology and design. I will now discuss my findings from the qualitative data collected, literature reviewed as they relate to the four research objectives:

Research Objective One

How does remote working influence the ability of a Sennheiser employee to add value?

The employees from Sennheiser who participated in the research have provided evidence that their experience and practice of remote working has impacted their ability to add value through the experience of traveling less, fewer interruptions/distractions and increased flexibility. These impacts have led to a more efficient deployment of their time, eventually leading to increased productivity and higher-quality outputs. The efficient deployment of an organisation's internal resources can be a source of competitive advantage (Barney, 1991; Clegg et al., 2011). It emerged from the interviews that many of the participants recognised time as an important and valuable resource, which when deployed efficiently as is the case when remote working, contributes to additional value for Sennheiser.

Research Objective Two

How does remote working impact Sennheiser's organisational resources and capabilities?

The data from the interviews suggest remote working benefits skills, capabilities and core competencies such as self-discipline, communication, entrepreneurship. Moreover, it is argued to perform successfully as a remote worker certain abilities are required, characteristics and behaviours such as self-motivation, autonomy (McLennan and McLennan, 2007). Sennheiser's culture principals and the impact of remote working as a driver of certain behavioural traits such as motivation, discipline, communication could contribute to the emergence of a distinctive capability/core competencies within the human resource acquisition, deployment and retention programs in Sennheiser (Cappelli and Crocker-Hefter, 1996).

Research Objective Three

How does remote working impact Sennheiser's employee performance?

The participants provided testimonials that the impact of remote working on their ability to add value, led to increased productivity and higher quality outputs. The ability to provide additional value is derived from the flexibility to manage time more effectively, the efficient use of resources across multiple regions via distributed/virtual teamwork and fewer disruptions that are perceived by being away from an office environment. Lack of social interaction with colleagues and in particular other team members however was a factor that had the potential to impact performance negatively. Lack of social interactions were mentioned during interviews in terms of building team spirit/culture. Some participants Heinke, Kelly, Petteri and Terry had a strong feeling that a lack of social interaction could have a negative impact on performance in terms of team interactions, and therefore ensured that physical face to face meetings occurred as needed. Daniel felt that social interactions or lack thereof were the responsibility of the remote worker who should proactively manage perceived issues or challenges of this. Petteri also had a feeling that it was incumbent on remote workers to become involved with not just their own team members but staff members from other departments too.

There is evidence to support the hypothesis that performance of Sennheiser employees is impacted positively by remote working by an increase in productivity and an efficient use of resources, however lack of social interactions can impact negatively on team spirit and/or culture and therefore potentially impact performance negatively.

Research Objective Four

How does remote work impact Sennheiser's ability to deliver sustainable competitive advantage?

The impact of remote working on a Sennheiser's architecture, reputation and innovation capabilities as outlined in the conceptual framework provides the basis from which to study the emergence of distinctive capabilities. The interviews provided evidence that although remote working in Sennheiser is prevalent it is not, in all cases, formalised through contracts or written agreements. The adhocracy of the remoteness of an employee from their nearest Sennheiser office, particularly demonstrated by those working in the Professional Audio marketing and sales functions, is largely based on business or customer need. The Head of Research and Innovation for Sennheiser's immersive audio products, Veronique, comments that the ability to work remotely from

headquarters provides her team a certain amount of autonomy, and a closeness to end-users which supports their research objectives. The architecture of an organisation is based on a structure of relational contracts; however, it is the complex nature of the relationships between the organisation and its employees that if formalised would negate its inimitability and therefore potential source of competitive advantage (Kay, 1995).

As outlined by (Cartwright and Cooper, 2012), support at senior management level for remote working is key to sustaining loyalty and commitment. Critical success factors in the integration of remote working are Management support, communication and trust (Kowalski and Swanson, 2005). It is also evident from the interviews Sennheiser is supportive of an internal architecture that gives autonomy to its leadership to empower remote working.

It is clear that Sennheiser's support of remote working across functions is enabled by its deployment of the technology needed to access company systems from anywhere with an internet connection. This technological capability enables remote working, the impact of which is leading to the emergence of distinctive capabilities within the internal architecture of the organisation in the form of an informal cooperative ethic that has developed and is underpinned by the trust that is needed to empower remote workers.

I would argue there is an emerging impact of remote working on Sennheiser's reputation with their customer. As outlined by Ingo, the impact of remote working has enabled the Professional audio marketing team to communicate a global brand message simultaneously across markets. The flexibility and speed with which Sennheiser can communicate with customers in different time zones at a time convenient to the customer can drive positive customer relationships. Remote working is impacting Sennheiser's ability to deliver a better approach to their customers and end-users and I would argue impacting the brands' reputation in the process. This can only be tested with further research of Sennheiser consumers providing for their insights on how the connected company change has impacted their perception of the brand.

4.4 Conclusion

I discussed the findings of the research as it relates to the literature, the conceptual framework and the research objectives in this chapter. There is evidence in the literature to support the concept of remote working or telework as a source of distinctive capabilities and/or core competencies from which a source of competitive advantage can be derived (Davidson, 2013b; Karia and Asaari, 2016). Despite the abundance of research

available on remote work and competitive strategy, such as the resource-based view, there is a gap in the research that refers to a single case to study the impact of remote working on internal resources and sources of sustainable competitive advantage.

The data collected from the interviews appears to provide a high degree of positivity on the impact of remote working on the participants ability to add value to Sennheiser. The flexibility that remote working enables does support an efficient use of time, the deployment of resources and removes distractions, leading to increased productivity and higher quality outputs. There is a belief that physical interaction(s) and face to face meetings are needed alongside virtual interactions to develop team spirit and a cooperative ethic. It is this cooperative ethic, and trust from Management, and its relative informality that is distinctive in its capability to deliver a valuable, and imitable capability within the internal architecture of the organisation (Barney, 1991; Kay, 1995).

Remote working is positively impacting the participants ability to deliver value to their customers. Brand marketing is impacted by the marketing teams' ability to work remotely of each other yet deliver brand messaging to global markets simultaneously. Customer relationships are impacted by the flexibility of remote workers to contact their customers at a convenient time and Sennheiser's capability to research innovations in immersive audio by being closer to end-users, despite being remote of headquarters. The impacts of remote working are beneficial to the reputation of the Sennheiser brand, a source of competitive advantage (Kay, 1995).

There are challenges perceived and felt by the participants of remote working. The biggest of these is isolation or lack of social interaction. This aligns with much of the literature (Bailey and Kurland, 2002; Bloom *et al.*, 2015; Sarbu, 2015). However, it is recognised as a challenge and it would appear those in positions of management are ensuring face to face interactions to counteract any feelings of isolation. It is also acknowledged that the remote worker must be motivated themselves to find solutions.

The ability to deploy internal resources and capabilities to exploit value creating strategies, can drive distinctive capabilities as sources of superior performance and competitive advantage. Therein lies a potential source of sustained competitive advantage. Barney argued that in order for a firms resources to hold the potential to sustain a competitive advantage they must hold the four attributes, rarity, value, imitability, substitutability – the V.R.I.N. theoretical model of competitive advantage (Barney, 1991). I would argue the aforementioned impact of remote working provides an informal and casually ambiguous link to architecture, reputation and innovation as sources of

competitive advantage and therein have the potential to be sustainable and imperfectly imitable resources (Barney, 1991; Kay, 1995; Collis and Montgomery, 2008).

In the following chapter I will provide my concluding thoughts on the contribution of this research, its limitations and suggestions for further research.

5 Concluding Thoughts on the Contribution of this Research, its Limitations and Suggestions for Further Research

5.1 Implications of Findings for the Research Questions

In the previous chapter I assessed the findings that emerged from the data and how those findings aligned with the conceptual frame work developed in chapter two. I also discussed the findings in the context of my four research objectives.

In this chapter I will discuss the implications of the findings for the four-research objectives.

There is much research available on the impact of remote working on the demand or employee side and on the supply or employer side, but limited research dedicated to the topic of remote working as a source of competitive advantage. The literature that does deal with this link has not focused on a single case nor the specific impact of remote working on the internal resources and capabilities of a single organisation. The Sennheiser organisation has deployed the technologies needed to enable remote working within their organisation, and since the re-development of the organisational structure in 2015 the prevalence of remote working and increased. Studying the impact that the practice of remote working has had on remote workers within the organisation has provided the findings as discussed and the following implications for the research objectives.

The ability for Sennheiser employees to add value is impacted by remote working positively. This is demonstrated by increased productivity enabled by the flexibility that remote working offers. A need was identified by many of the participants for social and face to face interactions with colleagues and team members, without which their ability to add value could be negatively impacted. The research infers that remote working practice can provide a way of working which has the potential to add value for Sennheiser through employee flexibility but with management support to ensure effectiveness of team and colleague interactions on team spirit and individual motivation. The impact on the performance resulting from remote work is positive and supports the literature in terms of increased productivity through flexibility and autonomy.

The additional value is supported by the skills, capabilities and competencies that many of the participants agreed are inherently needed to be a successful remote worker. It also emerged that many of these skills and competencies are common with the behaviours

advocated by Sennheiser through their culture principles. Characteristics such as self-drive, discipline, entrepreneurial, innovative and receptive are underpinned by a successful leadership style, which is shown throughout the literature to be congruent with successful remote work management practice. It is implied therefore that the capabilities apparent in successful remote workers or remote work managers influences the leadership competency within the organisation.

The findings imply that the remote working practice enables Sennheiser employees to be more flexible, impacting their skills and competencies such as self-motivation, drive, self-management. This work place flexibility and impact to skill and competencies has the potential to drive increased performance and effectiveness through increased outputs and interactions with the market (customers) and colleagues. The implication is by acknowledging remote working as an enabler of effective behavioural traits that impact performance, the potential impact to the internal architecture of Sennheiser of remote work practice is the source of competitive advantage. The potential to sustain this competitive advantage is through the casually ambiguous link and informal structures, such as culture, which support remote working.

5.2   Contributions and Limitations of the Research

The extensive existing research on remote working, impacts on the employer and employee and the resource-based view analysis of an organisation, provided a comprehensive base from which to develop a conceptual framework. The qualitative methodology of the primary research allowed for additional themes to emerge from the data. The contributions from the participants was of a high standard and their experience of remote working has contributed further to research in this area.

The limitations of the research were a lack of peer reviewed literature available on the study of remote working as a source of competitive advantage. There are some useful study's linking virtual working and teleworking to competitive advantage which informed my research objectives and overall research aim. I acknowledge my inexperience as a researcher which impacted my approach to the research and the wide scope of my research aim. This has the effect of limiting my focus and ability to answer the research questions conclusively. Finally, the limited sample size I could use to participate given the time frame allowed has impacted the overall generalisability of the findings.

5.3 Recommendations for Practice

Remote working is practiced across many functions of the Sennheiser organisation. Since the advent of the connected company structure, the decentralisation of roles and functions and an increase in the number of roles with international and regional responsibility, there has been an increase in the prevalence of remote work practices. This increase is reflected in the research which indicates that the trend towards remote working is increasing in the EU and USA (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2016; Eurostat, 2018).

Due to the limitations of the research which I undertook I cannot make any recommendations with regard to the impact of remote work as a source of competitive advantage to Sennheiser. However, I do recommend Sennheiser acknowledge remote work trends as a driver in talent acquisition and management, and the continued deployment of technologies that enable remote working as a legitimate work practice.

5.4 Recommendations for Future Research

Given the increased trend towards remote working, examining this phenomenon in the context of the Sennheiser organisation had the potential to provide recommendations for practice for this type of working throughout the organisation. As a result of the findings of my research to study the impact of remote working on the organisational capabilities of Sennheiser as a source of sustainable competitive advantage, I recommend the following:

Firstly, the findings of my research show circumstantial evidence to support the hypothesis that remote working within Sennheiser can impact an employee's ability to add value leading to increased productivity and performance. The findings suggest that the flexibility remote work offers in terms of managing one's own time and avoiding distractions in an office environment can improve productivity and work outputs. The findings also suggest remote work has enabled a more efficient use of resources across regions. This aligns with existing quantitative research such as the C-trip study, which saw a 13% increase in productivity of employees who chose to work from home instead of their office (Bloom *et al.*, 2015). I would recommend further quantitative research to measure the impact on productivity outputs of a dedicated cohort of Sennheiser employees in an office environment versus outputs at home and a resulting measurable impact on performance.

The findings also suggest that the increase in productivity and performance was closely linked to the skills and competencies inherent in the employee or developed as a result of remote working, such as self-management, drive, entrepreneurial spirit (Kowalski and

Swanson, 2005; Davidson, 2013; Karia and Asaari, 2016). These behaviours are congruent with good leadership and therefore further research into the topic of behaviours associated with the practice of remote working and their congruence with good leadership, may further the research in the area of human resource development.

The findings, in line with the literature, also indicated that social interaction and face to face time with colleagues and team members plays a role in job motivation and satisfaction (Bailey and Kurland, 2002; Sarbu, 2015). This was particularly evident from participants occupying roles in the operations function of the Sennheiser organisation. Further research of the impact of remoteness from management of Sennheiser remote workers, would support future developments in management practice of remote working.

Finally, the findings of my research suggest that Sennheiser's' 'connected company' structure, which has led to an increase in remote working, is impacting the effectiveness of employee engagement with key stakeholders namely Sennheiser customers and end-users. This was a key driver and expectation of the organisational development and re-structure in 2015 (Sennheiser, 2014). The findings suggest that remote working has enabled this outcome. Ingo from the professional audio marketing department, for example, talks about the increased speed and effectiveness by which global brand messaging can be communicated to the markets. Veronique, Head of Research and Innovation speaks of the closeness to target end-users that her distributed/remote team has, and how that positively impacts on her research into this field. Therefore, I would recommend Sennheiser to undertake quantitative consumer/end-user research into the impact of the connected company on their brand reputation. Specifically, a study of the impact of the perceived speed and flexibility enabled by remote working, is having on Sennheiser' brand reputation. This would further support this study in identifying sources of sustainable competitive advantage for the organisation.

5.5   Final Conclusion and Reflections

This research study found that remote working impacts some Sennheiser employee's ability to add value through increased productivity and improved performance. It also found that Sennheiser resources and capabilities are impacted by remote working through a recognition of inherent skills and competencies required to work remotely and the efficient deployment of resources across regions. The study revealed that face to face and social interactions are required with team members and colleagues to encourage job satisfaction and motivation. The emergence of distinctive capabilities it is argued exists in the architecture, innovation and reputation of an organisation. Is was demonstrated that remote working impacts the informal structures within Sennheiser, such as culture, the innovation capabilities such as technology enablement and brand reputation through flexibility and speed of response to the market, further research however is needed to conclusively argue these points. The research provided by this study as to the impact of remote work on the organisational capabilities and resources of Sennheiser as a source of sustainable competitive advantage, is inconclusive. However, the research indicates that a casually ambiguous link exists. I have made recommendations for practice and further research as a result of this study.

On reflection, the scope of the research I undertook was too wide and reflects my naivety as a researcher. However, the process of this research dissertation has emboldened my confidence to take on future research projects. I also look forward to communicating the progressive journey and conclusions of this research project with my colleagues in Sennheiser.

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Appendices

Appendix A – Interview Guide

Interview Guide – Remote Worker

Definition: Remote Worker

EU Statistical agency definition: "remote (tele)working specifically refers to people who use information and communication technologies to perform work away from their main place of work"

Characteristics:

- Remotely managed
- Using telecommunication or ICT based communications
- Off-site or multiple sites or alternative workspace working
- Virtual teamwork and collaboration

Questions

1) How long have you worked for Sennheiser?
2) What is your current role?
3) Have you always worked remotely in this role?
    a. Yes – Next Question
    b. No - Did you perform the role in the same way?
4) How often do you work remotely i.e. how many days per week?
5) Do you work from multiple locations?
    a. Satellite office
    b. WFH
    c. other
6) Describe your typical remote working day?
    a. Do you have flexible hours?
    b. How do you interact with management? Is this impacted by remote working?
    c. How do you interact with your customers? Is this impacted by remote working?
7) How do you add value in your current role to Sennheiser?
    a. How does working remotely impact your ability to add value this value?
    b. How does working remotely impact your relationship with Sennheiser's internal/external customers?
8) What challenges do you face as a result of working remotely?
    a. Is social interaction a factor that is impacted by remote working?
    b. Is self-motivation a factor that is impacted by remote working?
9) What skills do you use as a remote worker that you would not use if working in an office?
10) What experience or knowledge have you gained remotely working?
11) If you didn't work remotely, how do you think this would affect your:
    a. Ability to add value?

A

      b. performance?
      c. Motivation?
      d. Productivity?

12) Do you think Sennheiser should have a remote work policy?

Consent Form

I _____ the undersigned, hereby consent to participate in Lisa Kane's research study.

The purpose and nature of the study has been explained to me in writing.

I am participating voluntarily.

I understand that I can withdraw from the study, at any time, before it starts or while I am participating.

I understand that anonymity will be ensured in the write-up by disguising my identity if required.

(Please tick one box:)

I agree to quotation/publication of extracts from my interview.

Yes ☐   No ☐

(Please tick one box:)

I give permission for my interview with Lisa Kane to be audio recorded.

Yes ☐   No ☐

Signed: _____   Date: _____

PRINT NAME: _____

From: Kane, Lisa
Sent: Monday, June 3, 2019 7:02 PM
To: Larcher, Veronique <Veronique.Larcher@sennheiser.com>
Subject: Interview request

Hi Veronique,

I am writing to request your cooperation with a study I am undertaking as part of my Master of Business Administration (MBA) in International Business Management at Griffith College Dublin.
I am conducting research on the topic of remote working.
The working title of my research is, 'Does remote working contribute to competitive advantage?'
The objective of my research is to study if remote working adds value to Sennheiser and if remote working impacts the organizational capabilities of Sennheiser.

I would like to interview you in relation to this topic during a skype video call that should take no more than 30-45 minutes.
The skype call will be recorded with your permission.

The interviews are strictly for the purposes of the study and the contents of the interview or any information revealed during the interview will be treated in strictest confidence.
If you have any questions about the interview, or about being in this study, you may contact me by reply to this email or via my personal mobile phone number: + 353 87 6531700.
The Graduate Business School at Griffith College Dublin has approved my project and can also answer any questions you might have about privacy.

Please advise if you are available within the next two weeks.

With best regards,

Lisa Kane

Remote work research - 17 June 2019 10.03.46.mp4 - Veronique

Lisa: [00:00:03] Start recording and recording has started. OK so. as I said my dissertation is on the topic of remote work and can it be a source of competitive advantage for Sennheiser. So that's the context. Throughout my research Veronique I've come across many different definitions of remote working, teleworking and so on. So I am going to use a definition from the European Union Statistical Agency. think you're recording stIopped.

Veronique: [00:00:38] I know just the notice left. OK go ahead.

Lisa: [00:00:41] Oh yes. No that the notification drops I. Yeah. So yeah I'm gonna use a definition as recorded by the European Union statistical agency and they define remote working or teleworking as specifically referring to people who use information and communications technologies to perform work away from their main place of work. OK and the characteristics of a remote worker is somebody who is remotely managed so away in a different location to their manager and they're using ICT based communications. They're offsite or at multiple sites or alternative workplaces. And they use virtual teamwork as the way to collaborate with their colleagues and team. Does that make sense?

Veronique: [00:01:33] Yes. OK.

Lisa: [00:01:34] So based on that definition do you consider yourself a remote worker or not a remote worker?

Veronique: [00:01:41] Interesting. No I am not a remote worker but lots of my team members of other jobs have been remote workers whom I have managed. So that's why although I can share some insights in my experience in that sense with me personally I've been mostly working in an office space that I've built or designed for my team and they've been mostly doing that. No you're right that my boss is away from me so in that sense although I am in a physical space it's mostly always the same. And despite the fact that I'm also travelling a lot which means I use a lot of ICT to do my work in my travels I am 100% remote from my boss. Yes. And I've always been at Sennheiser. So in that sense yes. OK. That's not your definition?

Lisa: [00:02:37] So. And a lot of people have actually, according to that definition have had to rethink what they think of how they work for example. So where a lot of people thought well I don't remote work because I go to an office every day. We find a lot of our colleagues and our management are actually in a different office. So within that definition, yes remote working is a part of your working life.

Veronique: [00:03:04] I have more to say about my team members who are remote from me than about me being remote from my headquarters.

Lisa: [00:03:16] Can you explain just a bit about your role what it is you do and how long you've worked for Sennheiser?

Veronique: [00:03:23] Yes. You know in September it would will have beenbe 14 years that I worked for Sennheiser. And it's always been in some innovation roles. The first nine years were about creating and then leading an innovation team in the Bay Area in California. Palo Alto and then moved to San Francisco , and the past five years I've been to lead AMBEO, an innovation initiative that's more narrow in purpose and also in terms of scope. It's no longer research I would say it's it's from research tomore about commercializing researchation on Immersive Audio technologies and saling products products, and leading the team doing that.

Lisa: [00:04:12] Ok. OK. So and in comparison to the previous rule how would you say you worked with your colleagues? Was it always they were in a different location to you or you were in the same location?

Veronique: [00:04:28] So in the first role I was there as Head of Global research innovation. Anyway my first roles when I was based in California my team was always with me. So we were very physically co-located and the remote part of my job was really communication to headquarters and it was - I realize now that I'm in Switzerland so same times zone - it was extremely difficult and challenging too. You have to connect to headquarters because ofbut face a nine hours of time difference. It was in a way good because we needed to be shut down and to be to have some autonomy. And so for my team in a way it was good but for me personally and the team as a result being able to be informed, be able to share information was difficult and travelling overseas that far away so often was also very expensive. Yeah. So phone calls at 4:00 a.m.. Yes of course that happens a lot. OK. That's certainly a great part of the job but just to say that was difficult and I can measure the benefits of being in the same time zone as headquarters. In the second role here it's different because our team is globally distributed. Yes so yeah I would say I don't feel the remoteness to my headquarters or boss because we are a one hour flight apart, I go there often and I'm in touch just in the same time zone. You know even people at KG, in our headquarters whjo are co-located, they SKYPE each other instead of talking to each other in a way I don't feel different. What's different this year is that the team is distributed ==ghetto== and and we are a small team. Small lLike it was in California so and it's important to me so that we have a very close connection and close relationship like thesebetween us. And in particular we have one team member in California. And by the way this is for two reasons. It is by design because our markets are very strongly located in California or in the US. We have two key team members in the US. One is in the Midwest and one is California. It's very important to have them there rather than say Switzerland where I am because they are more in tune with the users and of course travelling to see our target group x or y is much cheaper too. As well as they are just more enthused infused with by it by the culture, customer pressure. And number two it's also where you find talents and what we do is so niche that I'd rather capture a talent wherever the talent is than spend time waiting for somebody to be like that in Switzerland. Two things explain that we have a distributed team especially those far away in the US and the

way we cope with this time difference which is the same as when I was in California and here in Germany we still have nine hours. Is that Ffirst of all he started by spending five months with us so we would make sure that the team would gel. He spent five months in Switzerland and now we agreed you he would comes every quarter for two weeks. So we keep some level of direct connection. And of course I talked to him several times a week at least one time a week. And his colleagues do as well.

Lisa: [00:08:02] So that face to face is important face to face communication.

Veronique: [00:08:07] Yes the face to face communication is important and but you know we spread it through the year so that's about two months per year that we are physically co-located.

Lisa: [00:08:19] Yes but the characteristics of the role and the team that the nature of innovation is that you would have a distributed remote team you need people in different areas in order to be close to the market.

Veronique: [00:08:35] It is important. Yes. Because I wouldn't say it is only of thefor research rule where I have felt that it would have been much less desirable. But when we talk about being customer centric and productising research, then. Yes. That's where we need to be close to customers and I think that having some people in the US is key and therefore we have to accept the challenges that come with being remote.

Lisa: [00:08:57] Ok OK. So in terms either way.

Veronique: [00:09:01] By the way Lisa, you may like that. It also proved extremely valuable to have the time difference in a specific case where when we were developing these products orthat software app it wason a very tight timeline. We had part of the development in here and in Switzerland working during the day releasing internally some level of version of the app and then our US developer was taking over because you know when we we go to bed or when we leave the office California wakes up and they were likethis way the app was worked on 24 hours and actually it was pretty beneficial to use to our advantage this time difference. Very specific case where it's actually very cool.

Lisa: [00:09:45] Ok. Well that actually leads me to my next question Veronique is about adding value. So I mean it's all very obvious how an innovation and research development adds value to Sennheiser but specifically I want to relate that to remote working. So how does distributed remote teams or remote working add value to your function. And that is one example.

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Veronique: [00:10:10] I already I already touched on that the main one is that we're able to serve different sides. I certainly talked about how that Americans help us be close to the customers. Yeah. Yeah. Because our customers are mostly. I mean the Americans are the early adopters. So we have our two guys there. It's good and important. It's actually saving us money from having to travel there plus many more benefits. These are just the kinds of guys who who understand and breathe the life of a customer. Second we have people in headquarters. I'm not OK. I mean I am remote. Well it's good to have those people there as well because they meet the CEOs over lunch. You have all these non scheduled interactions that are occurring at Headquarters. It's good to have two people there for these reasons.

Lisa: [00:11:01] Yes yes.

Veronique: [00:11:03] And then we used to have one in Austria because that's where we had a studio that we had to use and it was much cheaper to have that studio there than anywhere else. I mean actually it was just a very high quality, low cost solution for us. It turns out that that now that we have our own studio in our Swiss office, this employee now moved to Switzerlands know we need towhich increased the cost but it also helps us to create more critical mass in Switzerland which for the team spirit and cohesivenesswhich is important. So that goes against our remote working argument but I want to say that was a good use for these three now four different locations.

Lisa: [00:11:43] Ok. So in a nutshell would you say it's a more effective and efficient use of resources? Can you see the outcome?

Veronique: [00:11:52] Yes. Say, you have to be a certain, I want to stress out that in terms of of people, of team spirit, of people management, remote working is never the easy option. So it's not for everyone. It comes with a lot of things that need to happen to make it work. But when you have these in place or you're willing to work with those tools and those are compromises, then yes. When you are such a team then it can be used to your benefit. Yeah those two main examples. Customer centricity and the decision half of the decisionscenter. Those two things are places where we was very beneficial to have our some representatives there.

Lisa: [00:12:36] Ok. OK. And the example of the development of the app you're able to increase capacity in terms of hours. That's one example of that.

Veronique: [00:12:46] Yes. That's one example but it goes the other two are more important to me. This was like a nice by-product. I would not choose that option with all the difficulty that come with it, just for the app. It's a nice by-product.

Lisa: [00:13:02] Yeah yeah. But the focus on our customers, customer centricity of course.

Veronique: [00:13:08] And the closest center of decision that is at headquarters - that's another part of the of the group. So I'm in Hanover while actually the core team is in Zurich Switzerland.

Lisa: [00:13:21] Core team is in Zurich.

Veronique: [00:13:23] And when I look at the number of people: yes OK.

Lisa: [00:13:26] Ok. OK. And in the past when most people were let's say based in headquarters in KG in Hanover. That the challenge.

Veronique: [00:13:41] This has never been my the case.

Lisa: [00:13:43] Sorry yeah.

Veronique: [00:13:46] This is not something I can speak to because I've never been in headquarters or my teams have never been in headquarters. I've been either all together in San Francisco, for the. For first nine years or a distributed team andsuch as now where we have five people in Switzerland, two people in Hanover, two people in USA. I say you know we have the critical mass in Zurich. but then have two people close to customers in the US. Two people close to decisions in Hanover.

Lisa: [00:14:17] And are you aware of a remote work policy or guidelines Is this something that you use Veronique or is it something that you have learned to manage over time.

Veronique: [00:14:31] I have learned to manage over time. I'm only aware of something [happening at SeKG] that we apply also to our people here in Zurich that if they so choose they may work from home or anywhere else outside of the office one day per week. Friday's.

Lisa: [00:14:53] Ok and in terms of team members you have a cross-cultural team. Is that correct? So you have people from different countries, different regions.

Veronique: [00:15:06] Mm hmm. Yeah.

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Lisa: [00:15:08] What's your opinion on managing remote teams particularly from different cultures. Does it make it more difficult or challenging or is it the same.

Veronique: [00:15:23] No I mean. I have an approach to managing people that's very personal. I don't know if its truly by the book. I like a very very close tight knit type of... a very close relationship with each team member. And I can afford it because a my team is small and that means that I adapt my style to the specific needs of every individual. So in that sense whether they are from different culture or just different because they have different people is the same. It also helps that I was immersed in the US for 12.5 years, some of which was with Sennheiser because it also doesn't feel like they are so different.

Lisa: [00:16:10] And the fact that you bring people to the example you used you bring people into work for five months maybe on on a business. Would you say helps that.

Veronique: [00:16:22] Yeah I mean yes it helps. Not as much for me as it does for the rest of the team so they get to work together firsthand with the remote worker.

Lisa: [00:16:38] And I suppose you've reiterated this, the customer centricity, decision making. But again I suppose just for my benefit and that I have it locked in. What I'm trying to establish is the difference between or the value that remote working can add specifically within your role. So specifically what you do and how that adds value to Sennheiser. So just to wrap that up I want to make sure that I have that - that's where I'm basing a lot of the research on.

Veronique: [00:17:12] You want me to repeat.

Lisa: [00:17:13] Yes please.

Veronique: [00:17:15] So let's assume we have no remote workers, means we are nine people in Switzerland. So here is what we lose. Number 1, we lose their connections to our largest customer base which is in the USA. Yeah. So that may mean that probably some of us have to travel. Over time you know our families will complain, people will lose motivation, it's going to get too expensive. But to be honest I don't think we will get the most out of our efforts. Second we lose our direct connection to the center of decision which is headquarters and what does that mean. Probably we travel more often to KG. That's again more expenses. And to be honest probably less efficient because when you're not there on an everyday basis you just don't have these.. 'Oh let's have a coffee now'. You try to just schedule your flight, you'll try to schedule your appointment for the day. But what if not all these other people are on vacation. I mean you don't have the same number of interactions. So that's what we lose if we don't have those two satellites which are one in the US and 1 in Hanover.

Lisa: [00:18:28] Ok. Okay. Yeah. I think that's it. I think I've got everything.

Veronique: [00:18:36] Great Lisa. I'm going to ask you more questions outside of the recording.

Lisa: [00:18:41] A Yes of course. Let me just that now one second.

	Themes	Sub themes	Code
1	Resouces and Capabilties	Human	1.1
		Skills	1.2
		Knowledge	1.3
		Time	1.4
2	Distinctive Capabilities	Architecture	2.1
		Reputation	2.2
		Innovation	2.3
5	Performance	Organisational Rent	5.1
		Value Chain	5.2
		Increased financial performance	5.3

Resources + Capabilities   *Distinctive Capabilities*

Performance -

Remote work research - 17 June 2019

10.03.46.mp4 - Veronique

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1.1

1.4

2.1 (internal)

1.4

1.4

2.2

5.2

3

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1.1

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2.1 (internal)

Lisa: [00:08:19] Yes but the characteristics of the role and the team that the nature of innovation is that you would have a distributed remote team you need people in different areas in order to be close to the market.

2.2

Veronique: [00:08:35] It is important. Yes. ~~Because~~ I wouldn't say it is only ~~of the~~<u>for</u> research ~~rule~~ <u>where</u> I have felt that <u>it</u> would have been much less desirable. But when we talk about being customer centric and productising research, <u>then</u>. Yes. That's where we need to be close to customers and I think <u>that having</u> some people in the US is key and therefore we have to accept the challenges that come with being remote.

2.3 (internal)

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Lisa: [00:08:57] Ok OK. So in terms either way.

Veronique: [00:09:01] By the way Lisa, you may like that. It also proved extremely valuable to have the time difference in a specific case where when we were developing ~~these products or~~that software app ~~it was~~on a very tight timeline. We had part of the development in here ~~and~~ in Switzerland working during the day releasing internally some level of version of the app and then our US developer was taking over because you know when we we go to bed or when we leave the office California wakes up and ~~they were like~~this way the app was worked on 24 hours and actually it was pretty beneficial to use to our advantage this time difference. Very specific case where it's actually very cool.

Lisa: [00:09:45] Ok. Well that actually leads me to my next question Veronique is about adding value. So I mean it's all very obvious how an innovation and research development adds value to Sennheiser but specifically I want to relate that to remote working. So how does distributed remote teams or remote working add value to your function. And that is one example.

Veronique: [00:10:10] I already I already touched on that the main one is that we're able to serve different sides. I certainly talked about how that Americans help us be close to the customers. Yeah. Yeah. Because our customers are mostly. I mean the Americans are the early adopters. So we have our two guys there. It's good and important. It's actually saving us money from having to travel there plus many more benefits. These are just the kinds of guys who ~~who~~ understand and breathe the life of a customer. Second we have people in headquarters. ~~I'm not OK. I mean I am remote.~~ Well it's good to have those people there as well because they meet the CEOs over lunch. You have all these non scheduled interactions that are occurring at Headquarters. It's good to have two people there for these reasons.

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Lisa: [00:11:01] Yes yes.

Veronique: [00:11:03] And then we used to have one in Austria because that's where we had a studio that we had to use and it was much cheaper to have that studio there than anywhere else. I mean actually it was just a very high quality, low cost solution for us. It turns out that that now that we have our own studio in our Swiss office, this employee now moved to Switzerlands know we need towhich increased the cost but it also helps us to create more critical mass in Switzerland which for the team spirit and cohesivenesswhich is important. So that goes against our remote working argument but I want to say that was a good use for these three now four different locations.

Lisa: [00:11:43] Ok. So in a nutshell would you say it's a more effective and efficient use of resources? Can you see the outcome?

2.1 (internal)

Veronique: [00:11:52] Yes. Say, you have to be a certain, I want to stress out that in terms of of people, of team spirit, of people management, remote working is never the easy option. So it's not for everyone. It comes with a lot of things that need to happen to make it work. But when you have these in place or you're willing to work with those tools and those are compromises, then yes. When you are such a team then it can be used to your benefit. Yeah those two main examples. Customer centricity and the decision half of the decisionscenter. Those two things are places where we was very beneficial to have our some representatives there.

5.2

Lisa: [00:12:36] Ok. OK. And the example of the development of the app you're able to increase capacity in terms of hours. That's one example of that.

Veronique: [00:12:46] Yes. That's one example but it goes the other two are more important to me. This was like a nice by-product. I

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would not choose that option with all the difficulty that come with it, just for the app. It's a nice by-product.

Lisa: [00:13:02] Yeah yeah. But the focus on our customers, customer centricity of course.

Veronique: [00:13:08] And the closest center of decision that is at headquarters - that's another part of the of the group. ~~So I'm in Hanover~~ while actually the core team is in Zurich Switzerland.

Lisa: [00:13:21] Core team is in Zurich.

Veronique: [00:13:23] ~~And~~ when I look at the number of people: yes ~~OK~~.

Lisa: [00:13:26] Ok. OK. And in the past when most people were let's say based in headquarters in KG in Hanover. That the challenge.

Veronique: [00:13:41] This has never been ~~my~~ the case.

Lisa: [00:13:43] Sorry yeah.

Veronique: [00:13:46] This is not something I can speak to because I've never been in headquarters or my teams have never been in headquarters. I've been either all together in San Francisco, for the. ~~For~~ first nine years or a distributed team ~~and~~ such as now where we have five people in Switzerland, two people in Hanover, two people in USA. I say you know we have the critical mass in Zurich. but then have two people close to customers in the US. Two people close to decisions in Hanover.

Lisa: [00:14:17] And are you aware of a remote work policy or guidelines Is this something that you use Veronique or is it something that you have learned to manage over time.

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Veronique: [00:14:31] I have learned to manage over time. I'm only aware of something [happening at SeKG] that we apply also to our people here in Zurich that if they so choose they may work from home or anywhere else outside of the office one day per week. ~~Friday's.~~

1:1 (HR Policy)

Lisa: [00:14:53] Ok and in terms of team members you have a cross-cultural team. Is that correct? So you have people from different countries, different regions.

Veronique: [00:15:06] Mm hmm. Yeah.

Lisa: [00:15:08] What's your opinion on managing remote teams particularly from different cultures. Does it make it more difficult or challenging or is it the same.

Veronique: [00:15:23] No I mean. I have an approach to managing people that's very personal. I don't know if its truly by the book. I like a very very close tight knit type of... a very close relationship with each team member. And I can afford it because ~~a~~ my team is small and that means that I adapt my style to the specific needs of every individual. So in that sense whether they are from different culture or just different because they have different people is the same. It also helps that I was immersed in the US for 12.5 years, some of which was with Sennheiser because it also doesn't feel like they are so different.

Lisa: [00:16:10] And the fact that you bring people to the example you used you bring people into work for five months maybe on on a business. Would you say helps that.

Veronique: [00:16:22] Yeah I mean yes it helps. Not as much for me as it does for the rest of the team so they get to work together firsthand with the remote worker.

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Lisa: [00:16:38] And I suppose you've reiterated this, the customer centricity, decision making. But again I suppose just for my benefit and that I have it locked in. What I'm trying to establish is the difference between or the value that remote working can add specifically within your role. So specifically what you do and how that adds value to Sennheiser. So just to wrap that up I want to make sure that I have that - that's where I'm basing a lot of the research on.

Veronique: [00:17:12] You want me to repeat.

Lisa: [00:17:13] Yes please.

Veronique: [00:17:15] So let's assume we have no remote workers, means we are nine people in Switzerland. So here is what we lose. Number 1, we lose their connections to our largest customer base which is in the USA. Yeah. So that may mean that probably some of us have to travel. Over time you know our families will complain, people will lose motivation, it's going to get too expensive. But to be honest I don't think we will get the most out of our efforts. Second we lose our direct connection to the center of decision which is headquarters and what does that mean. Probably we travel more often to KG. That's again more expenses. And to be honest probably less efficient because when you're not there on an everyday basis you just don't have these.. 'Oh let's have a coffee now'. You try to just schedule your flight, you'll try to schedule your appointment for the day. But what if not all these other people are on vacation. I mean you don't have the same number of interactions. So that's what we lose if we don't have those two satellites which are one in the US and 1 in Hanover.

Lisa: [00:18:28] Ok. Okay. Yeah. I think that's it. I think I've got everything.

Veronique: [00:18:36] Great Lisa. I'm going to ask you more questions outside of the recording.

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Appendix G – Thematic Analysis (NVivo Table)

Folders

Nodes

Name	Files	References	Created On	Created By	Modified On	Modified By
Distinctive Capabilities	0	0	13/07/2019 17:32	LK	13/07/2019 17:32	LK
External Architecture	4	13	13/07/2019 17:54	LK	06/08/2019 11:48	LK
Internal Architecture	9	29	13/07/2019 18:06	LK	12/08/2019 16:34	LK
Trust	2	6	30/07/2019 19:00	LK	06/08/2019 12:15	LK
Social Interaction	1	2	12/08/2019 16:33	LK	12/08/2019 16:34	LK
Cooperative Ethic	2	6	05/08/2019 17:55	LK	12/08/2019 16:30	LK
Reputation	7	10	13/07/2019 17:55	LK	06/08/2019 11:45	LK
Innovation	1	1	13/07/2019 17:55	LK	14/07/2019 12:40	LK
Performance	0	0	13/07/2019 17:33	LK	13/07/2019 17:33	LK
Added Value	10	30	13/07/2019 17:55	LK	12/08/2019 16:07	LK
Resources and Capabilities	0	0	13/07/2019 17:32	LK	13/07/2019 17:32	LK
Human	10	29	13/07/2019 17:53	LK	06/08/2019 12:24	LK
Remote Worker Definition	10	16	13/07/2019 18:01	LK	06/08/2019 12:13	LK
Knowledge	2	4	13/07/2019 17:54	LK	06/08/2019 12:25	LK
Organisational Culture	1	2	07/08/2019 11:33	LK	07/08/2019 11:37	LK
Skills	8	13	13/07/2019 17:54	LK	07/08/2019 11:39	LK
Discipline	1	3	30/07/2019 17:54	LK	12/08/2019 16:32	LK
Leadership	1	2	07/08/2019 11:29	LK	07/08/2019 11:30	LK
Motivation, self-efficacy	2	3	30/07/2019 17:52	LK	07/08/2019 11:39	LK
Time	9	15	13/07/2019 17:54	LK	09/08/2019 14:21	LK
Flexibility	4	8	30/07/2019 18:35	LK	06/08/2019 15:40	LK

Search Project