



Impact of COVID-19 on Accountants Services in Finland

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Abstract

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<p>This bachelor thesis is based on research, the author dealt with and Highlighted the most recent event that occurred during the past few years; it is COVID-19, and the impact it had on the accounting services of accounting companies located in Finland. The goal of this thesis is to study and figure out how accountants, their services and tasks got influenced by COVID-19 and what they have done to avoid possible challenges. The author of this thesis presented the impacts on accountants after the epidemic.</p> <p>The theoretical framework included different accounting services done by accountants in different accounting companies, as well as remote working, its models, advantages, and disadvantages, and challenges faced by different accountants due to COVID-19 and remote work. Many possible aspects were taken into consideration and explained to cover the possible information needed and fulfill the purpose of the research.</p> <p>In the empirical part, the research has one phase that included qualitative analysis of open questions as a research method used, face-to-face thematic interviews and questionnaires as data collection methods. The author used the qualitative approach and was able to deal with respondents from different accounting companies as well as freelance accountants and collected the data needed, analyzed them, and obtained satisfactory results for the investigative questions as well as the research question.</p> <p>The outcomes of this thesis were satisfactorily met. The author succeeded in presenting the typical issues and events that occurred during COVID-19. In the result analysis section, it is explained in detail how accountants coped and adapted to this situation to provide continuity for their work in light of COVID-19. The impacts do not necessarily mean only negative, they can also be positive and negative, as indicated by the author in the results of this research. Moreover, it showed how accountants and their services got affected and what procedures and steps were taken to protect their profession and business during COVID-19, and thus the prosperity of their company.</p> <p>As a result, workloads increased which increased income. Some difficulties in the completion of some accounting services appeared such as bookkeeping, financial statements, tax statements and tax returns due to the difficulty of obtaining data from customers. Usage of advanced and modern technologies to enable distant work and communication. Moving to remote work from home, had positive effects such as flexibility, freedom, productivity and efficiency have increased and saved more money and time. In addition, there were negative effects at the same time such as domestic distractions, social isolation, dependence on technology, high self-discipline required, stress and conflicts between personal and professional life. The conditions of health care were adhered to, and the precautionary measures imposed by the government, such as general closures and social distancing and other restrictions were applied.</p>
Keywords Accountant, Accounting, Accounting Services, Remote Work, COVID-19.

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1 Introduction

This is a research-based type of bachelor's thesis for the Degree Programme in international business in the major specialization of accounting and finance at Haaga-Helia university of applied sciences. In this thesis, the writer will consider the recent issues caused by COVID-19 to see how hard it was for accountants to deal with such issues. Many aspects related to this pandemic will be studied and researched to see how accountants overcame possible challenges and what things have changed during the COVID-19 period and what procedures or strategies have been followed by them to keep their business ongoing, this impact can be negative and positive.

This thesis is divided into five parts. The first part is presenting the topic and the introduction. It clarifies the background information, research and investigative questions as well as some key concepts related to the context of the thesis are explained. The second part is going to be about the theoretical framework of the thesis topic. This includes the different accounting services, how are done as well as the task of the accountant in each service, also remote working and its models will be illustrated in detail as well as its advantages and disadvantages to see how COVID-19 impacted the work of accountants working in accounting offices or accounting firms, furthermore, some challenges.

The empirical part of the thesis topic explains and exhibits the data collection and research methods used in this thesis. Last but not least, the results part involves the research results of the thesis topic and a small summary of the results, moreover, it shows the analysis of the collected data from the accountants in a logical way. Finally, the conclusion presents recommendations, reliability, validity and reflection on learning.

1.1 Background to the Topic

This thesis studies the impact of COVID-19 on accountants and their services and how possible challenges got controlled by utilizing remote working. The author is an accounting student at Haaga-Helia university of applied sciences addressing this issue to figure out possible solutions to the possible challenges.

Many companies in Finland have faced difficult times since the COVID-19 started. Those firms have suffered from defects in the work structure due to infected workers and lockdowns. Many people lost their jobs and the unemployment rates increased, which led to a decrease in productivity and this led to a decrease in sales, some of them decided to fight against this virus to save their position in the market, while others got bankrupt. (Alareeni & Hamdan 2022, 12.)

The Nordics economy got affected since COVID-19 started spreading until it began to impose its repercussions day after day and increasingly, as its impact reached the whole world, it created a kind of tension and fear for many people, and daily life stopped, restaurants and companies closed, and heavy losses were incurred. The damage is unimaginable; the whole world has become within the framework of this virus. In the same context, we cannot exclude experts working in the field of accounting, as it was in the face of the opponent, and all companies have become dependent on accountants today. The situation must be adapted, and the businesses should continue as they were before, but in a different way, otherwise, no company will be able to survive, and its fate will be bankruptcy. (Flam & Skans 2022.)

The total number of bankruptcies in Finland from January to December 2021 rose compared to the same time period the year before. The coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic has not yet had a significant effect on bankruptcies, according to data from 2021. The month of January 2022 saw the highest number of bankruptcies ever reported. (Clausnitzer 2022.)

Governments all across the world work to lessen the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on businesses and economies. The COVID-19 pandemic has had a significant impact on human behavior in many areas. (Alareeni & Hamdan 2022, 3.)

Some companies received a variety of forms of assistance such as government aid applications, including cash infusions, subsidies for fixed expenses, and subsidies based on revenue losses. Typically, governments have to achieve a balance between the costs of supporting less economically efficient businesses and the costs of allowing otherwise successful businesses to go bankrupt and losing company-specific tangible and intangible capital. (Flam & Skans 2022.)

Most physical offices have reopened, although many employees continue to work from home. Almost all categories of service are provided without interruption thanks to information technology. In Finland, remote work has been prevalent for a long time, which has helped firms prepare for COVID-19. (Expat Finland 2022.)

1.2 Research Question

The thesis objective is to figure out how COVID-19 has affected the accountants in accounting firms or entrepreneurs accountants in Finland and their services, and to study what alternative strategies accountants did during this period to mitigate the possible challenges, as we can see today in the technology era, everything became more easier and possible. The remote working practice will also be taken into consideration to see how it contributes to overcoming the potential impacts and how it helped positively.

The research question (RQ) of this thesis is: What are the impacts of COVID-19 on accountants working inside accounting companies in Finland and their services, and what's the role of remote working in mitigating possible challenges? The research question was divided into five investigative questions to simplify the data collection as follows:

IQ 1: How were the service processes of accounting companies affected by COVID-19? March 2020 till now

IQ 2: What changes have been implemented to adapt to COVID-19?

IQ 3: Who in this service process got affected the most during this pandemic situation? And how?

IQ 4: How did remote working help resolve the challenges presented by COVID-19 and what challenges arose from this technique?

IQ 5: What strategies were applied in accounting firms to mitigate the negative impacts of this epidemic on accounting firms?

Table 1. Overlay Matrix

ResearchTask	Theoretical Framework	Research Methods	Results
IQ 1. How were the service processes of accounting companies affected by COVID-19?	Accounting services and processes.	Face-to face thematic Interviews and questionnaires.	Data analysis and results.
IQ 2. What changes have been implemented to adapt to COVID-19?	The changes in the accounting process.	Face-to face thematic Interviews and questionnaires.	Data analysis and results.
IQ 3. Who in this service process got affected the most during this pandemic situation? And how?	Accountants, Businesses and Customers.	Face-to face thematic Interviews and questionnaires.	Data analysis and results.
IQ 4. How did remote working help resolve the challenges presented by COVID-19 and what challenges arose from this technique?	Remote working and its models. Advantages and disadvantages	Face-to face thematic Interviews and questionnaires.	Data analysis and results.

ResearchTask	Theoretical Framework	Research Methods	Results
IQ 5. What strategies were applied in accounting firms to mitigate the negative impacts of COVID-19 on accounting firms?	The followed strategies to reduce the effects of this pandemic.	Face-to face thematic Interviews and questionnaires.	Data analysis and results.

1.3 Delimitation

In this thesis the writer is focusing and studying what has been changed during the period of COVID-19 for accountants working from offices in accounting firms or those who are entrepreneurs accountants, to what extent have accountants and their services been affected negatively or positively, for example, the limitation for direct interactions with customers, the difficulty of completing some tasks because it might require office existence and direct interaction with people, higher workload and more stress, saving time, working flexible and getting more customers, as well as the strategies that have been implemented to adapt to this situation.

1.4 Benefits

Well, this thesis has no commissioning company due to the fact that the author will interview different accountants from different accounting companies. But for the benefits, interacting with accountants and interviewing them, see how they react to the sudden pandemic, how negatively and positively they got affected, how they dealt with the problem and what tasks and processes have changed during the pandemic, all of those are considered as knowledge and experience for the author, because when managing interviews with accountants and discover their reactions and thoughts, will enrich his skills and knowledge as well as the experience gained from this research. It is not an easy task to find accountants, especially at this time, but the author will do his best. Moreover, there will be a lot of information to digest which will support the author's learning, and expand his business circle for the future.

1.5 Key Concepts

The next subchapters will explain and present the five key concepts of this thesis which are: Accountant, accounting, accounting services, remote working and COVID-19.

1.5.1 Accountant

A person who is in charge of maintaining and interpreting financial records. Most accountants are in charge of a variety of financial activities, whether for individual clients or for bigger enterprises

and organizations that hire them. Not all bookkeepers are accountants, and not all accountants are bookkeepers. (Miller 2019.)

1.5.2 **Accounting**

It is the process of gathering, compiling, calculating and reporting information on business and financial transactions. It is a broad phrase that refers to a variety of professional titles and roles inside businesses. Public accountants, management accountants, and government accountants are the three primary types of accountants, each focusing on a different part of the profession. (Miller 2019.)

1.5.3 **Accounting services**

Encompass a wide range of responsibilities performed by accountants, including tax preparation and advice, spending and income tracking, and much more. Accounting is concerned with the creation of accurate financial records and the maintenance of efficient recordkeeping procedures. (Savage 2021.)

1.5.4 **Remote work**

Known as work from home (WFH) is a type of flexible working style in which an employee works from a location other than the business office. This arrangement can help ensure a balance between work and life, access to work opportunities, or mitigate commutation costs for staff who can achieve work offsite. Increased employee satisfaction and retention, higher efficiency and productivity, and cost savings on physical resources are all advantages for the business. (Warchol 2022.)

1.5.5 **COVID-19**

An infectious respiratory disease that was spread around the whole world in 2019. The majority of those infected with the virus will have mild to moderate respiratory symptoms and will recover without the need for medical attention. Some, on the other hand, will become critically unwell and have a bad condition, and require medical assistance. (World Health Organization 2022.)

2 Financial Accounting Services and Remote Working

The theoretical framework is divided into five subchapters which are designed carefully to meet the thesis objectives. Some concepts and theories will be explained and discussed, the accounting services will be defined and the theory behind them. The accounting services are bookkeeping, financial accounting, reporting, tax accounting and payroll accounting. The author will also present some evidence to relate this part with the empirical part by showing the impact of the COVID-19 on accountants and their services, how did remote work contribute to this situation and what are its advantages and disadvantages, moreover, some challenges faced due to COVID-19 and remote work.

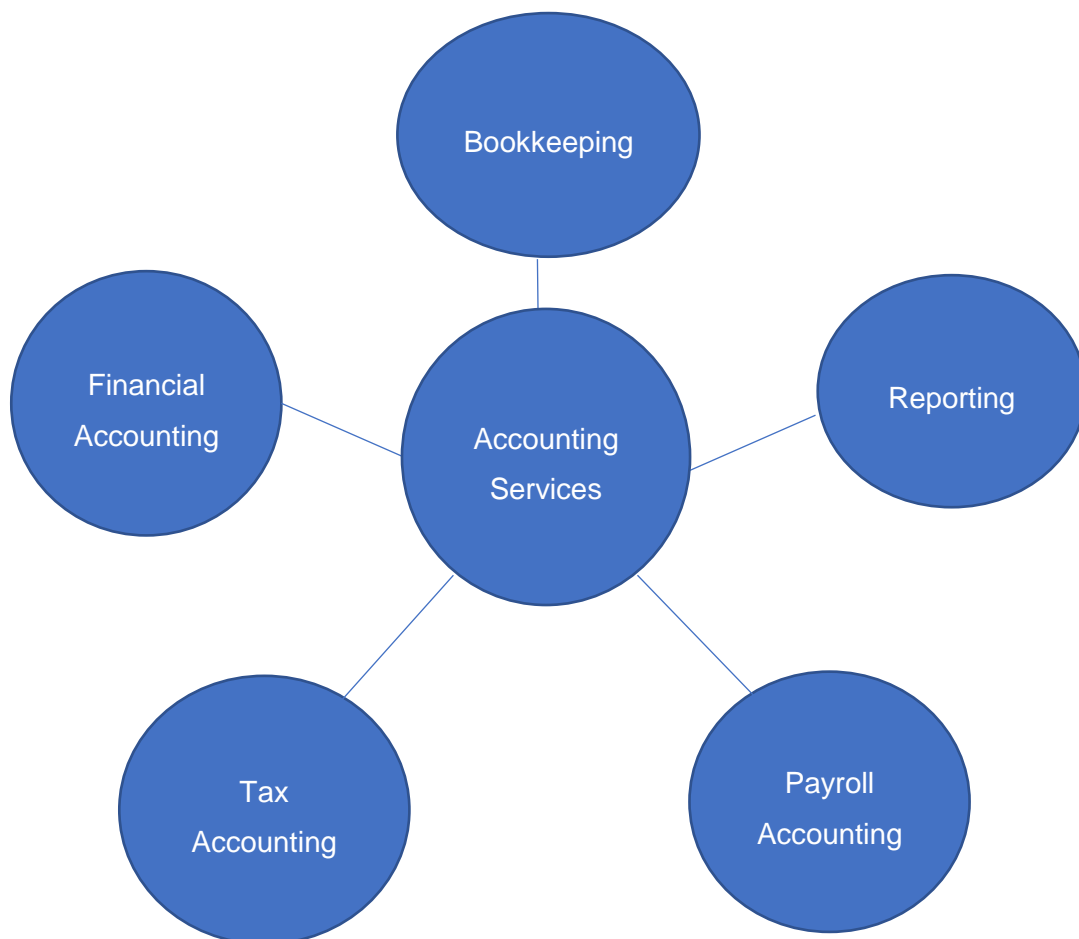


Figure 1. The Types of Accounting Services.

2.1 Accounting Services

Accounting services refer to the measurement, handling, and communication of financial information about economic entities. This includes financial accounting, managerial accounting, bookkeeping, controlling costs and auditing services, taxation, and accounting information systems. (Savage 2021.)

As a result of the lockdowns' extensive use of digitalized financial services, the COVID-19 crisis encourages the exploitation of vulnerabilities. Due to the large online presence that has placed significant strain on the cyber resilience capabilities of various-sized companies, the operational and reputational risks have significantly evolved and grown globally. Businesses face dangers from both internal management and/or employees as well as external outsiders. (Alareeni & Hamdan 2022, 12.)

The data seen in a company's income statement, balance sheet, statement of cash flow, and progress reports, such as the cost of providing customer service or running an advertising campaign, is also provided by accounting systems. Managers utilize this data to make decisions about the tasks, enterprises, or functional divisions they are in charge of. (Datar & Rajan 2017, 22.)

Accounting systems are used to report economic activities and transactions, such as sales and the acquisition of materials, and to transform the resulting data into knowledge that can be used by managers, salespeople, production managers, and other stakeholders. Collecting, categorizing, summarizing, and evaluating data are necessary steps in processing any commercial transaction. (Datar & Rajan 2017, 22.)

The common accounting services used by accountants working in accounting firms or freelance accountants in Finland are illustrated below. (Azets 2022.)

2.1.1 Bookkeeping

The act of daily documenting, recording and tracking the company's financial transactions into arranged accounts is known as bookkeeping. It may also refer to the many recording methods that companies may employ. For several reasons, bookkeeping is a crucial step in the accounting process. Updating transaction data allows the bookkeeper to produce accurate financial reports that aid in monitoring the performance of the company, make key operating, investing, and financing decisions. Additionally, thorough records will be useful if there is a tax audit. (Carlson 2020.)

Individuals that monitor all of a company's financial data are called bookkeepers. Bookkeepers have to be detail-oriented and like to work with numbers, because their work is based on numbers

and calculations all day. Without bookkeepers, businesses would be unaware of both their internal activities and present financial situation. (Kelly 2015, 19-20.)

Many small-business owners start as their own bookkeepers until their company grows to the point where they can engage a dedicated bookkeeper. Most small firms use bookkeepers (either on the payroll or on a self-employed basis) to act as the eyes and ears of outside accountants rather than having accountants on staff to review the books and create official financial reports. (Kelly 2015, 20.)

The goal is to guarantee that the system adheres to strong accounting standards and that the analysis it offers is in line with what the business needs. The individual has to become familiar with the basic accounting phrases before he can take on bookkeeping and begin keeping the books. (Baxter 2022.)

Some of the terms are: Balance sheet, its accounts are assets, liabilities, and capital. Income statement, its accounts are revenue, expenses, cost of goods sold and profits... (Kelly 2015, 21-22.)

Tasks of bookkeeper:

1. Creating and managing a ledger.

Terms like books, ledgers, journals, and accounts may cause confusion. The majority of these terms originated from old-fashioned bookkeeping techniques when transactions were manually recorded in enormous leather-bound ledgers. Because they resemble books, this practice is known as bookkeeping, or simply keeping financial records in the books. (Kelly 2015, 11.)

Ledgers or journals are other names for the books. Typically, would have three books: one for sales, one for purchases, and one general book (often known as the General Ledger). Businesses occasionally would additionally maintain a different cash book to keep track of cash paid and received. (Kelly 2015, 11.)

The majority of people now perform their accounting on computers to make their life easier. The simplest set of accounts can be created using a spreadsheet, but doing so is not advised because errors are likely to occur and the bookkeeper may find it challenging to ensure that the books are balanced. The terms "sales ledger," "purchase ledger," "nominal ledger," or "general ledger" are typically used in developed accounting information systems, and as a result, the bookkeeper will typically discover these items. (Kelly 2015, 11-12.)

2. Record transactions accurately every day using bookkeeping tools.

In many small firms nowadays, a bookkeeper conducts daily financial transactions while working for the company. The accountant reviews the transactions for reliability and creates financial statements such as the Profit and Loss after receiving summary reports from the bookkeeper at the end of each month or quarter. (CFI Team 2022).

➤ Monitoring Sales

Everyone is curious about the status of sales. A bookkeeper can simply obtain those figures on a daily basis while maintaining correct and up-to-date books. He can keep an eye on sales trends on a daily, weekly, or monthly basis. Utilize the data gathered by the bookkeeping system to keep tabs on sales, evaluate customer discounts, and monitor product returns. Monitoring the performance of the sales of your products depends on all three factors. (Kelly 2015, 12-13.)

➤ Tracking Inventory

Regular monitoring of the costs of the goods to sell is essential for controlling the profit potential if the company keeps stock on hand or in warehouses. To keep the profit margin intact when noticing stock costs rising, it might need to modify its prices. Users most certainly would not like to hold off on learning how much the shares cost them until the end of the year. Additionally, bookkeepers need to pay close attention to how much stock the business has on hand and how much has been sold. The actual stock counts may differ from the counts that have in the books because merchandise can be lost, damaged, or stolen. Perform a physical count from time to time; ideally daily for active retail outlets and at least monthly for most other enterprises. (Kelly 2015, 13-14.)

3. Implementing Accuracy Tests

If regular testing is not done continuously to ensure that the transactions have been entered correctly, keeping track of them is a waste of time. When it comes to bookkeeping, the saying "Garbage in, garbage out" is especially true: if the numbers entered into the system are junk, the reports you create using those data will likewise be junk. This may be accomplished by examining the cash and bank accounts, doing balance checks, comprehending your VAT, making bookkeeping adjustments, generating financial reports such as the balance sheet and the profit and loss statement and managing payrolls. (Kelly 2015, 14-16.)

2.1.2 Financial Accounting

Financial accounting is the discipline of tracking all the money that enters and leaves the company. It entails recording, categorizing, compiling, and evaluating all financial transactions. Transactions are either recorded as a credit or a debit. It is a credit when money enters a company and a debit when the money goes out. To categorize different sorts of transactions, there are numerous categories used. (Datar & Rajan 2017, 22.)

Assets: This is the value of the firm, all that it owns fall in this category. (CFI Team 2022.)

Liabilities: What a company owes. (Freshbooks 2021.)

Equity: This is what remains after liabilities are subtracted from assets. It belongs to the shareholders and the business owner. (Datar & Rajan 2017, 247.)

As you are aware, financial accounting focuses on providing external parties with financial information based on generally accepted accounting principles, including investors, governments, banks, and suppliers (GAAP). The most significant way that financial accounting data influences managers' decisions and behavior is through compensation, which is frequently based in part on data from financial statements. (Datar & Rajan 2017, 22.)

2.1.3 Reporting

The process of recording and disseminating financial performance across certain time periods is known as financial reporting. Financial reports are produced by accountants using accounting data from a company, and they are commonly done on a monthly or quarterly or annual basis. Financial reports are used by businesses to compile accounting data and present their current financial situation. Numerous financial data are available for public access and are crucial for making forecasts of future profitability, industry position, and growth. (Oliver 2020.)

Those reports are distributed to a company's external stakeholders and are audited to verify correctness and validity. They demonstrate an organization's financial success over a time frame known as an accounting period. (Diamond, Stice, & Stice 2000, 6 & 27.)

Financial reporting mainly entails publishing financial statements, which include the income statement, balance sheet, and statement of cash flows. These documents' information satisfies a number of crucial financial reporting goals, including tracking cash flow, evaluating assets and liabilities, examining shareholder equity, and calculating profitability. (Diamond, Stice, & Stice 2000, 6, 9 & 25.)

The key components of financial reports are:

Income Statement: It is a financial statement that presents the revenues, costs, and profitability of a business for a specific period of time. It is also sometimes referred to as an earnings statement or a profit-and-loss (P&L) statement. It also shows the sales revenue, the costs associated with generating that revenue and running the firm, as well as the net income (or profit) that is left over after these costs. Different time periods may be covered by income statements. The company's most recent fiscal year is covered in year-end financial statements. Interim income statements may

be prepared by businesses on a monthly, quarterly, or semi-annual basis. A business owner might use an income statement to determine whether they can increase profits by boosting revenues, cutting costs, or doing both. It also demonstrates the viability of the goals the company set at the start of a given fiscal year. To determine whether the tactics were successful, the business owners might consult this paper. The best ways to increase profit can be developed based on their study. (Diamond, Stice, & Stice 2000, 38-39.)

Balance Sheet: This report, often called a statement of financial position, gives a snapshot of the financial situation of a company at a specific time. Equity, liabilities, and assets are considered. Investors, analysts, and shareholders examine balance sheets to determine the financial strength of a company. It is used to track changes in a company's finances by comparing them to earlier balance sheets. (Diamond, Stice, & Stice 2000, 28-29.)

Cash Flow: The statement of cash flows, as its names indicate, is a report that shows the inflow and outflow of cash for an organization over a certain period. This report is used by stakeholders to evaluate how successfully a company manages its cash flow. (Diamond, Stice, & Stice 2000, 7, 23 & 50.)

The three main forms of cash flows included in the report are operational activities, investing activities and financing activities. (Diamond, Stice, & Stice 2000, 42.)

This statement, which goes along with the balance sheet and income statement, aids in assessing the financial stability of a company. The stronger a company's financial position and the more capital it has to invest and expand are directly correlated. While a company with inadequate cash flow poses a risk to lenders and investors. (Hayes 2022.)

2.1.4 Tax Accounting

The principles used to create tax assets and liabilities in a person's or company's accounting entries are referred to as tax accounting. In contrast to financial statement preparation, tax accounting places a greater emphasis on tax returns and payments. The amount of money generated through tax accounting may differ from the amount of income shown on an individual's income statement. The divergence is due to the possibility that tax regulations could hasten or postpone the recognition of certain costs that would typically be recorded in the accounting periods. (AccountingTools 2022.)

On their international income, businesses located in Finland are required to pay Finnish corporate income tax (CIT) such as unlimited tax liability. Additionally, non-resident corporations' Finnish permanent establishment (PEs) are liable to Finnish CIT on their worldwide income related to the PE.

20% is the CIT rate. A few services are also exempt from the VAT, including several financial, insurance, and educational services. (Worldwide Tax Summaries 2022.)

Finland's standard VAT rate is 24 %. VAT for food products is 14%, it is 10% for printed goods, pharmaceuticals, cultural activities, and services. Within the European Union, there is no sales tax applied to the exchange of goods between businesses that are situated in different EU nations. VAT on sales of goods and services made outside the EU will, in some circumstances, be zero percent. (FINTEGRA 2022.)

It is obvious that tax accounting focuses on the company's tax liabilities. Tax accountants prepare tax paperwork, such as evaluating financial accounts and balances, financial records, and budgets, to assist businesses in minimizing or eliminating tax payments. One of the most complicated accounting services is this one because it may have legal repercussions. To mitigate risk, tax accounting must adhere to all legal requirements and laws. Relying on a tax accountant is crucial for a business since it ensures that the company's tax finances are accurate and prepared for tax season. (Thuronyi 1998, 5 & 35.)

Tax accounting is more exact when it comes to an individual's income, allowable deductions, grants, and investment profit and loss. Tax accounting for businesses is far more complicated than tax accounting for individuals since it takes other factors into account. It increases monitoring of their financial decisions and distinguishes between taxable and non-taxable activities. Tax accounting focuses on how you or your company uses and receives money, whether it be for personal use or commercial. (Shields 2021, 3-6.)

Individual Tax Accounting

As a single taxpayer, all that matters in terms of tax accounting is the income, allowable deductions, and any profits or losses on investments. Employing a tax accountant is optional because the owner might complete the task himself due to the limited data to monitor and the ease of financial transactions for tax return reasons. (Shields 2021, 6-7.)

Business Tax Accounting

Employing a tax accountant might be required, depending on the type, scale, and complexity of the firm. Even while the procedures for tracking cash are the same for both individuals and businesses, the former can include more complicated usage of funds for certain liabilities or costs. These could include specific company costs that don't apply to people and payments to owners, particularly corporate shareholders. (Shields 2021, 7.)

Daily tasks for a tax accountant:

- For clients, conduct research and keep financial and tax records.
- To assist clients in staying within their budgets, and creating workable budgets and plans.
- Prepare, finish, and submit tax returns for both individuals and businesses.
- Follow up on and reply to letters from the tax office.
- Use accounting practices to spot any potential fraud threats.
- Offer guidance and ideas for lowering expenses and boosting revenue.
- Create tax paperwork and forms.
- Support clients during tax audits.
- Determine any taxes that are due or will be received.
- The Benefits of Tax Accounting for the Business. (AccountingTools 2022.)

Any business needs to employ tax accounting to ensure that it is following the law's requirements. A tax accountant prepares income tax returns and presents the business with a strategy for avoiding legal issues with the government. Individuals are legally required to file tax returns and pay the appropriate amount of taxes on their income, which makes this the most crucial reason for tax accounting. If they don't, it causes serious problems. (Shields 2021, 7.)

2.1.5 Payroll Accounting

All payroll records for employees must be prepared, created, and maintained as part of payroll accounting. This information contains the wages, taxes, incentives, and bonuses that each employee gets. Payroll Accounting assures that all data complies with legal requirements. Payroll accounting enables businesses to guarantee employee payments, precise tax returns, and reliable report filing. Payroll accounting is crucial for companies of all sizes, so keep that in mind. (Bragg 2003, 2-7.)

Payroll accountants handle paychecks and create employee salary statements. They produce reports and keep payroll files. Payroll accountants guarantee that payroll procedures are in conformity with governmental rules and policies. (Bieg & Toland 2013, 24.)

All employers in Finland are required to offer their employees accident and group life insurance by the Finnish Collective Bargaining Agreements law. The expense varies depending on the sector, job function, and individual salary. In Finland, a full-time workweek is 40 hours. If an employer requests overtime, the employee must first consent to it. Only 138 hours of overtime may be worked in a 4-month period and 250 hours in a 12-month period. The required compensation is 150% for the first 2 hours of overtime and 200% for any further hours. Employer taxes of about 27.22%,

no minimum salary, and accident and group life insurance are all required by stringent local laws in Finland. (PeoplePay 2022.)

The only aspect of a firm that is almost fully subjected to many federal, state, and municipal laws and regulations is the payroll accounting system. Who is an employee, how much time is considered to be worked, when overtime must be paid, what deductions are allowed, when to pay an employee, and when taxes are due are all determined by the rules. Fines and back pay may be awarded for violations of certain rules and regulations. (Bieg & Toland 2013, 24.)

A payroll accountant in their first position gathers, examines, confirms, and records work schedules. Additionally, the accountant maintains the attendance logs for personal, sick, and vacation days. He checks the data after a paycheck is done to make sure that each employee's pay statement is accurate. Time-worked data, changes in pay rate and tax rate, employee-authorized payroll deductions, new employee details, marital and employee allowance adjustments, among other things, will all need to be entered into the payroll system. (Bieg & Toland 2013, 24.)

Tasks for a payroll accountant:

- Monitoring employee salaries and wages.
- Audits of payroll should be attended.
- Verify the accuracy of tax and payroll documentation.
- Make sure all tax and payroll accounting regulations are followed.
- Update the payroll and general ledger files.
- Create accounting records, timetables, and files.
- Determine net salaries after taking deductions and withholdings into account.
- Handle holiday deductions or overtime pay.
- Fix the payroll issues (e.g. overlooked company holidays, delayed payments, etc.)
- Watch over both paid and unpaid leaves.
- Respond to inquiries from employees about payroll. (Bragg 2003, 2-7.)

2.2 Remote Working

In this chapter, the author deals with the remote working perspective. The following chapters are explaining its models as well as its advantages and disadvantages, to understand the practices in each model, and to see how accountants might react to the pandemic situation. The author also explains some of the challenges faced by accountants due to COVID-19 and working remotely.

A flexible work method known as remote work doesn't require employees to be physically present in an office environment in order to do their tasks. Workers instead use digital platforms and tools

to access work, engage with coworkers, and complete tasks remotely. In other words, it is the practice of employees who work from their homes instead of in an office. The COVID-19, which forced the majority of the world's population to stay at home and finish their job without going to their offices, is actually when the idea of remote work first gained popularity. (Yang, Liu, Qian & Parker 2020, 17.)

Remote working has changed the concept of work and turned the scales, making remote work more effective in some areas. Anything has become possible, we see the possibility of working through the internet and accomplishing various tasks, no matter how complicated they are, regardless of where you are, remote workers can operate from almost anywhere in the world, whether it is at home, in a cafe, in nature or in another country. It's crucial for remote workers to manage and use these technologies correctly because doing so can provide them an advantage over those who work on-site. The success of any program involving remote work is also heavily dependent on managers, who must spell out the rules for such programs and develop policies that will make them successful. (Roseberry 2008, 3.)

Nearly half of the 100 million people who shifted to working from home during the pandemic did so for the first time. Employees picked up on the advantages of remote work rapidly, causing this change to happen quickly. These might include reduced stress and freedom from commuting, more time for self-care, and higher productivity. (The Conversation 2022.)

In the post-pandemic period, working remotely is no longer seen to be a pleasure. It is essentially required. According to a recent Gartner survey, 82% of business executives want to permit team members to continue working remotely when the epidemic is over. (Kosy 2022.)

Due to COVID-19, most activities inside the companies employ online tools such as remote working and other platforms including zoom and teams, and numerous procedures and practices follow pandemic safety precautions. (Alareeni & Hamdan 2022, 3.)

2.3 Remote Working Models

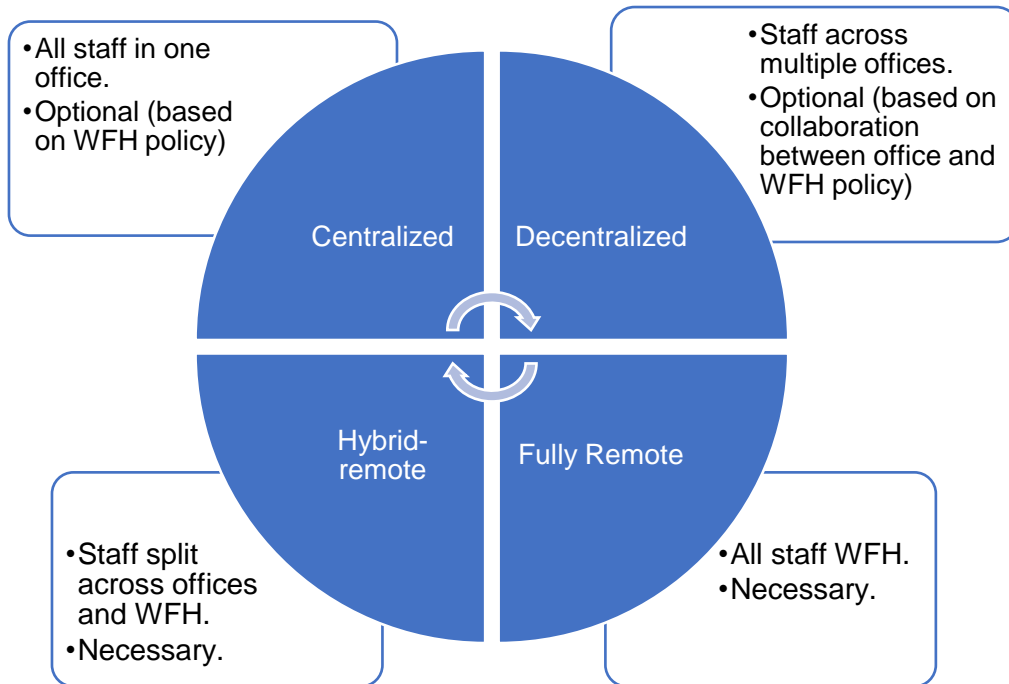


Figure 2. Remote Working Models. (Kosy 2022.)

According to figure 2, the four models of working remotely are as follows: Centralized, decentralized, hybrid-remote, and fully remote. The author explains them clearly and presents all the points that support the idea.

2.3.1 Centralized

Unless they permit team members to work periodically from home, some firms enjoy the luxury of only having one office and do not need to take remote-first working principles into account. The majority of businesses are aware that now is not the appropriate time to adopt a rigid position against remote labor. They may not be publicly stating their opposition, but it does not imply that they are in favor of it. Many businesses will insist that their team members return to the office as we gradually adjust to our new normal, relying on the old phrases of "solid culture" and "greater cooperation." This should only last a short while. The longer these businesses put off creating an environment that supports remote work, the more challenging it will be for them to make the switch whenever they are forced to compete with leaders who encourage remote work. (Kosy 2022.)

Significant change is difficult, but for businesses to remain competitive in the future, they will eventually need to embrace remote working. Starting doesn't need to dive in headfirst, though. A slight shift will be more successful than a dramatic one for which the business is unprepared. (Kosy 2022.)

2.3.2 Decentralized

Team members in a decentralized company are dispersed across many locations. Companies with more than 300 employees tend to be decentralized. Decentralized businesses may need to adhere to remote working principles in order to promote communication and cooperation between teams, depending on the degree of collaboration required across locations. It might not be required for every organization to adopt a totally remote work model right once locations are largely autonomous and segregated. Most decentralized businesses are now trying to combine the new and the old, making flexible workspaces that allow for a more distributed workforce. They are introducing flexibility. (Kosy 2022.)

Every location may function quite independently from one another in some decentralized businesses. The majority of the time, nevertheless, there is some sort of cooperation among the locations. As a result, if colleagues communicate without sharing a physical space, a remote-first strategy should be used. A decentralized business might, for instance, have marketing teams in both its US and EMEA offices. However, they also operate independently to tailor marketing strategies to the needs of their particular locale. In this case, implementing remote-first principles enables both marketing teams to maintain alignment and collaborate on larger initiatives while retaining autonomy over localized activity. (Kosy 2022.)

2.3.3 Hybrid-Remote

A flexible strategy called hybrid remote work (Remote-first is necessary) enables a combination of remote and office work. Employees can choose to spend some time at the office and some time at home under the hybrid work model. Working remotely and in an office together offers the best of both worlds. With hybrid work, employees can do their tasks in the comfort of their own homes without interruptions, but they also get the chance to collaborate with coworkers and managers in person. Even though switching to a hybrid approach may enable many more occupations to be partially performed remotely by accountants who spend at least some time in the office, not everyone can work fully remotely. (Pozen & Samuel 2021, 4 & 134-136.)

In hybrid-remote businesses, some of the team members are entirely remote while others are based in the office. Any business where some or all of the team members do not physically work together should adopt a remote-first strategy since it allows for the best possible communication. The remote-first strategy makes sure that all corporate procedures and channels of communication function well for both on-premise and remote team members. Teams now have more freedom to

work efficiently without being constrained by outdated technologies. A hybrid approach where, subject to team needs, the company gives employees the freedom to select where they work and how many days they work each week. (Pozen & Samuel 2021, 274.)

When employees use the hybrid model, they are part of an ecosystem that includes co-working spaces, their home office, and other locations outside of the traditional corporate office. Depending on the job that has to be done, team members can move between several places. (Pozen & Samuel 2021, 8-9.)

Additionally, a remote-first strategy can offer flexibility by allowing employees to split their work-week between in-person and virtual activities. These advantages can improve the company's ability to recruit, hire, and keep skilled people outside of its geographic area. Although startups and small-to-medium-sized businesses have used hybrid models for years, large enterprises are currently undergoing difficult changes. However, creating a totally remote work style is considered preferable in the long run. (Kosy 2022.)

According to Nakeita Norman, Vice-President, CFO Solutions at LPL Financial, mentioned that since working from home and being free from interruptions makes it easier to enter a flow state, I don't want to spend COVID-19 in an office where I'd have to worry about germs. If I had my choice, I would work primarily from home either half the time or perhaps 70% of the time, and 30% in the office. It would be nice to interact with coworkers and colleagues outside of the office. (Pozen & Samuel 2021, 266-267.)

Certain sorts of work may be required to be completed on-site while working for firms that use a hybrid strategy. This influences how effectively employees utilize their days when working remotely. They will be considerably more efficient with their time both inside and outside of the office if they can customize the distribution of their on-site and remote work to the specific requirements of their jobs as well as their personal circumstances. (Pozen & Samuel 2021, 254.)

2.3.4 Fully Remote

Fully remote work is any job or profession that enables you to work from home or anywhere outside the office. Instead, you work remotely, giving you the opportunity to travel. You can work while traveling to Spain or Greece, for instance, if your company is based in Finland or London. All you need for a digital nomadic lifestyle is a reliable internet connection. People might also work while relaxing on their sofa, which is what they were forced to do for a period because of COVID-19. (Time Doctor 2022.)

There is only one option for work location when running a fully remote business: remote. The majority of team members work entirely from a place of their choosing, typically their own home, in this particular model, which is arguably the first one that comes to mind when hearing the term "remote work." Fully remote work arrangements are not new. Businesses like InVision, Automattic, and others have long supported remote-only employment. Even in the midst of a global pandemic, these businesses have benefited from the capacity to quickly adjust to change and support team members working from their homes. (Kosy 2022.)

Businesses usually find ways to stay in touch frequently online, such as through a virtual office, while also making sure to get together in person once or twice a year for company-wide off-sites to add some flavor. (Kosy 2022.)

2.4 Advantages and Disadvantages of Remote Work

Advantages:

- Balance between responsibilities of work and family.
- The reduction of unnecessary commute time.
- Reduction in the cost of the office space.
- More favorable work-life balance.
- Flexibility.
- Efficient geographic coverage.
- Improve motivation and productivity.
- Saves money and time.
- Protecting people during a pandemic and keeping them safe.
- Employee satisfaction.
- Less interruption. (Nickson & Siddons 2004, 2-3.)

Disadvantages:

- Data and cybersecurity concerns.
- Longer working hours.
- Conflicts between personal and professional life.
- Intensity of work.
- Isolation.
- Strain on teams.
- Poor morale.
- Causes stress.
- Minimal Training.

- High self-discipline is required.
- Lack of social interaction at work.
- Complete reliance on technology.
- Home distractions
- More meetings are required. (Kłopotek 2017, 43 & 45.)

2.5 Challenges due to COVID-19 and Remote Working on Accountants and Their Services

Hussain claims that the main challenges facing accounting professionals are increased workloads, higher stress, more emails and meetings, blind contact, and isolation. Alternative performance appraisals, technology developments, and skill development are the main effects of COVID-19 on the accounting profession. (Hossain 2021, 1.)

Every difficulty has both advantages and disadvantages. The accounting industry is facing numerous difficulties as a result of COVID-19, but there is also much potential for innovation. This epidemic has an impact on both the job and emotional health of accounting professionals. The whole service (including "accounting and tax practice," "staff engagement," and "client services") is impacted by COVID-19 since this epidemic has increased the pressure on the accounting profession's adherence to professional and ethical standards. Accounting professionals that provide tax services face difficulties since deadlines are constantly changing and shifting, and because they work remotely, they encounter issues with clients' insufficient information. It has become difficult to maintain uninterrupted communication with the client and the team. For accounting professionals, holding the paper-based exam and physical preparation are additional obstacles. The accounting industry is currently dealing with the following difficulties as a result of the aforementioned limitations. (Hossain 2021, 1-2.)

Propagation of fraud: Since the majority of the accounting industry's work is now done online, many cybersecurity-related frauds are also being attempted, such as widespread data theft, business network hacking, and identity theft. (Hossain 2021, 3.)

Reduction in the number of employees: Another difficulty for the accounting industry is layoffs. Due to the economic slump, many businesses are being forced to lay off part of their staff. It is difficult to decide how to choose who will join them and who won't. Fewer resources could result in completed but ineffective tasks. (Hossain 2021, 2.)

Making decisions under time constraints: During this pandemic, accountants are having trouble gathering information. Accounting professionals are making decisions without properly taking a risk and ethical concerns into account since decision-making has grown too frequent at this time. They

aren't attending the required training sessions; thus neither their capacity nor their decision-making skills are developing. (Hossain 2021, 2.)

Working remotely: Since many professionals are doing their jobs from a distance during this pandemic, it can be difficult to monitor their progress. There are certain moral issues raised by this as well. For instance, whether workers are truly putting in more time or whether they are just doing so to increase their billable hours. (Hossain 2021, 2.)

Accounting standards consideration: The accounting profession includes using accounting standards. COVID-19 has changed how such standards are taken into account. Impairment indicators must be taken into account by organizations. Inventory appraisal at lower of cost and NRV (net realizable value) has become difficult during this economic slump. Because COVID-19 makes it harder for borrowers to make payments, it has an impact on IFRS-9's provision for projected credit loss. Measuring fair value is increasingly difficult because of the market's downward trend. The impact of COVID-19 is also felt by organizations' status as going concerns and circumstances for contract violation. COVID-19 has an impact on tax matters as well. (Hossain 2021, 3.)

While mobile equipment advancements and upgrades have made life easier for remote employees, they have also introduced brand-new difficulties. In the past, having a few pennies in the pocket for calls and a strong case full of paperwork for travel was plenty. (Roseberry 2008, 3.)

Creating the projections required to calculate the recoverable quantities of assets, which necessitates impairment testing for those assets susceptible to considerable uncertainty, can be extremely difficult for accountants. In terms of anticipated credit losses, the COVID-19 pandemic's impact on customers' cash flow needs to be taken into account in the economic unit's projections of the future state of affairs. (Ardiny 2020, 215.)

Due to some lenders' default, recognized losses in the measurement of credit obligations may result, as may higher default losses brought on by a potential decline in financial security contracts and other assets. Especially for the reporting periods, accountants should take special care when preparing financial statements that showed the effects of the uncertainty resulting from the events caused by COVID-19. These financial statements will require accounting treatments, disclosures, and special care by accountants. Accountants must also put great effort into making reasonable estimates and preparing documents that support these estimates as well as the key assumptions used when estimating these effects. (Ardiny 2020, 215.)

For instance, a forensic accountant working remotely is unable to review all of the documentation. The inability of forensic accountants to read the body language of witnesses and suspected people using online platforms like Zoom also remains a huge issue due to the lack of physical interaction.

Similar to attorneys, internal auditors, experts, and other teams that are no longer together, forensic accountants collaborate with them. Due to the epidemic, tasks like asset tracing are no longer possible, which has placed forensic accounting on hold. (Alareeni & Hamdan 2022, 25.)

It is likewise important to note that forensic accountants encounter challenges when attempting to carry out their regular duties during the epidemic when courts are closed and it is challenging to set up in-person interviews and investigations. (Alareeni & Hamdan 2022, 25.)

3 Research Methods

This chapter is devoted to research techniques. It provides details on the methodology and design of the research. The methods of the research used and the findings of the fundamental research are also presented in this chapter. The chosen research methods are first explained, along with an overview of how they were applied to the IQ questions. Moreover, this chapter discusses data collection and analysis.

The qualitative method can be defined as gathering and evaluating non-numerical data like texts, documents, audio or videos in order to better comprehend concepts, opinions, or experiences. It can be employed to obtain in-depth perspectives on a topic or to generate fresh research ideas. In other words, it is a market research technique that focuses on gathering information through open-ended and conversational contact. This strategy considers not just "what" people think, but also "why" they think that way. (Wong 2008, 14.)

In the humanities and social sciences, qualitative research is often employed in areas such as sociology, education, health sciences, history, and so on. The qualitative method is used to discover more about how people see the world. While there are numerous ways to qualitative research, they all have the flexibility of preserving rich meaning when evaluating data. (Bhandari 2020.)

The chosen research approach is qualitative research since the author studied the impact of COVID-19 on accountants that work in accounting firms in Finland as well as the services they provide, and how remote working can play an essential role in mitigating possible challenges of the progress of those companies by providing the opportunity for the accountants to work remotely from home or anywhere. By interviewing accountants from different accounting companies, the information will be based on qualitative data. The information and data that needed to be answered in the IQs are to know how accountants and the services they provide got affected (positively or negatively) by COVID-19 and what strategies are they using to avoid and mitigate possible challenges.

3.1 Research Design

The entire technique used to carry out research that establishes a concise and logical framework to confront identified research questions through data collection, evaluation, analysis, and discussion is referred to as research design. (McCombes 2021.)

The most typical types of research data collection methods are face-to-face thematic interviews and questionnaires, because they provide respondents with more freedom to respond and

give interviewers more flexibility to ask follow-up questions or rearrange the pattern of questions based on the interviewee's responses. (McCombes 2021.)

The research design consists of one phase which includes the interviewee (accountants) that the author interviewed, as well as the data collection methods used in this research and which are face-to-face thematic interviews and questionnaires. The issue is better understood using the qualitative research approach, which is also used to justify the sources of the information gathered at this phase.

Research on impacts, behaviors, beliefs, attitudes, experiences, perspectives, and perceptions is done qualitatively. Qualitative research, as opposed to quantitative research, places more emphasis on words than figures, making it an appropriate research strategy for this thesis. Additionally, a goal of qualitative research is to go deeper into smaller samples. (Pathak, Jena, & Kalra 2013, 192.)

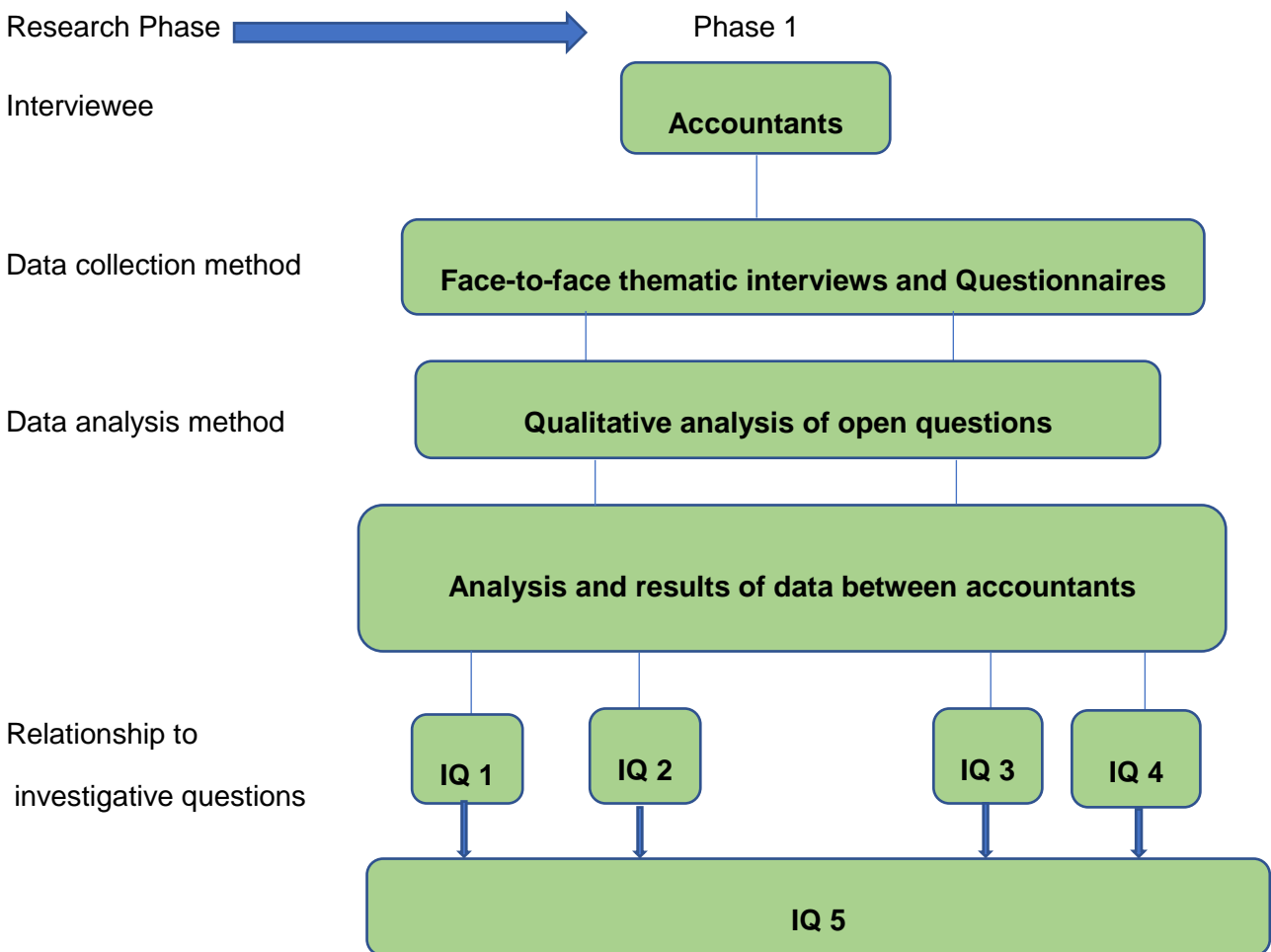


Figure 3: Research design that shows how and from where the data will be collected to answer the IQs.

According to the research design figure above, the data collection process is clearly set, it is a qualitative method with open questions to give an overview of the process of data collection. The author interviewed seven accountants, five of them work in different accounting firms, and the other two, the first one works for a museum and the second one works for a healthcare products distribution company in Finland. The author collected the data using two data collection methods: face-to-face thematic interviews and questionnaires. The purpose of these interviews and data collection is to analyze and find answers to the investigative questions as well as the research question to which the thesis is subjected.

Motivation can be done in several ways by telling them that the interviews will not take so much time from them and that the questions are not a lot, also they can understand more and see the consequences of COVID-19 from a new vision because having some questions that need their answers, require them to think and consider the possible aspects so they can create an overview about what was positive and what was negative.

3.2 Population and Sample

A population is a whole group from whom you want to extract conclusions. It could be a collection of things, a group of people, etc. It serves as the study's data set. While a sample is a narrower representation of the population as a whole. It is an accurate representation of the study's population. The people who are invited to participate in interviews are considered the sample while conducting them. As a result, a sample is a subset or subgroup of the population. The sample can be examined to learn more about the characteristics or actions of the total population. (Levy 1999, 3-4.)

The search for patterns among a set of things commonly referred to as the population; is one of the social sciences' fundamental goals. A researcher would be in a position to make deterministic claims if he could gather all the data needed on the phenomena that interest people. However, it is impossible to get the necessary data from all of the population's objects since the population under consideration is frequently too vast to be observed on its whole. (Wesselman 1987, 1.)

For this purpose, only a sample of objects drawn at random from the population is used to witness the phenomenon. Let's presume that a set of vectors can adequately describe the generated collection of observations. A dataset known as the sample contains the observed vectors. Given that the sample reflects the phenomenon to be examined, the postulated structures in the population must reflect similar relations in the sample observations. By using the sample data, it is possible to estimate the real-world pattern. (Wesselman 1987, 1.)

In this thesis the population is accountants working inside accounting companies that are responsible for accounting services in Finland, the author selected and interviewed a sample from it to get the needed information to study and analyze those data. It's a bit hard to interview the whole population because it is unrealistic to go through all the accountants that work inside accounting companies in Finland. So what it can be done is choosing a sample and collecting data from them, as well as a certain number of firms to compare, and see what impacts that they have encountered and how they managed to overcome the possible challenges during COVID-19.

The size of the sample is about 40 companies. According to the author's question distribution, seven accountants responded to answer the interview questions, five of them from different accounting firms and the other two are from other companies in Finland. Despite the negative effects, there are also positive impacts resulting from COVID-19 as mentioned by the accountants interviewed.

3.3 Data Collection

The information and data were collected from different sources for instance academic books and interviews that were done, as well as the data that were driven from the accountants that work in accounting firms and other companies. The researcher's interview subjects were chosen depending on their availability and readiness.

The author was able to get help from his workplace as well, since his employer helped him to reach one accountant of his acquaintances who works for an accounting firm, but it was not enough. He got access to more accountants by contacting more accounting companies, and that's what the author did.

Only seven accountants were available to take part in the interviews. Those interviewees work in various small and medium-sized firms that take care of accounting services for various customers. The data collection was a blend between face-to-face thematic interviews and questionnaires.

Four of them were only able to answer the questions by e-mail while the rest were through face-to-face thematic interviews, although the data was collected through face-to-face interviews all three accountants rejected the idea of an audio recording of the interview, so the author was writing the answers directly using the laptop. Those data were kept in a portfolio to be analyzed and reported as they should, to know exactly how COVID-19 impacted those accountants and their services. Which helped in finding the answers to the investigative questions, as well as the research question.

3.4 Data Analysis

In qualitative research, data analysis is defined as the act of systematically finding and organizing interview transcripts, participant observations, or other non-textual resources accumulated by the researcher to better comprehend the phenomenon. The majority of the time, the process of analyzing qualitative data entails coding or categorizing the data. Essentially, it entails making more sense of massive volumes of data by lowering the volume of unstructured information, then recognizing crucial patterns, generating insights from data, and eventually establishing a logical sequence of evidence. (Wong 2008, 14.)

Data analysis is the component of qualitative research that most distinguish it from quantitative research methodologies. It is more of a dynamic, spontaneous, and creative process of inductive logic, thinking, and speculating than a technical exercise like quantitative approaches. (Wong 2008, 14.)

Qualitative data is commonly subjective, rich, and contains detailed info that is normally communicated through words. The process of reading a large number of transcripts in search of similarities and differences, identifying themes, and defining categories are all included in the qualitative data analysis. (Wong 2008, 14.)

When the author collected the data from the interviewees, he kept them in a portfolio to report and analyze the data. The data were divided and arranged separately, each accountant has his answers written in the document. The data is analyzed using the qualitative data analysis method to get the desired results and to draw out conclusions that prove the ability of the author of answering the investigative questions as well as the research question. All the answers were taken into consideration and were studied carefully to see the impact of COVID-19 on those accountants as well as their services, and as mentioned previously, this impact might be positive and negative. Moreover, to see whether there are similarities and differences in the results among the accountants.

4 Data Analysis and Results

This chapter shows the analysis and results of the research reached by the author through interviews and questionnaires done with accountants working in accounting firms and others working in other firms in Finland. The results analysis is visually exhibited with tables, accompanied by some explanations and clarifications that emphasize the most intriguing findings to answer the investigative questions as well as the research question. A small summary of the results shows what the author has reached in this research at the end of this chapter.

Table 2. The services and duties of each accountant.

Person 1	An accountant working in a museum. Her duties include daily payment transactions, accounting, payroll, financial statements, and tax returns. Also responsible for the purchase and sales ledger, as well as customer service and marketing, and she acts as the supervisor of the customer service employees.
Person 2	Accounting manager at a healthcare products distribution company. It is a Nordic organization focusing on the distribution of healthcare products within the Nordic and Baltic regions. Responsible for all matters related to financial management, bookkeeping, taxes, payroll, etc...
Person 3	Entrepreneur/sole worker at an accounting agency. Bookkeeping, accounting, payroll, tax preparation, financial statements, consultation on the client side, and everything else on our side.
Person 4	A sole proprietor in her own accounting firm, she is an accountant who is solely responsible for the clients' accounting, payroll, financial statements, bookkeeping, tax declarations, and any other official declarations.
Person 5	Accountant in an accounting office. Responsible for preparing financial statements, filling out tax returns and doing a little salary calculation. Part of the customer base is in electronic financial management and the rest is in traditional paper file bookkeeping.
Person 6	An accountant working in an accounting office. Handling the financial management tasks, bookkeeping and tax returns of client companies on time.

Person 7	An accountant working in an accounting office. Payroll administration, tax advisory – both individual and company, bookkeeping, and compilation of financial statements.
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The table above explains the duties of each accountant and the accounting services he/she is responsible for, which gives a background overview of their work.

4.1 How were the service processes of accounting companies got affected by COVID-19? March 2020 till now.

The interviews and the questionnaires took place between the 20th of September and until 19th of October. The author got only 7 respondents out of 40 accountants contacted from different companies to answer the interview questions. The respondents are accountants, 5 of them working in accounting firms, while the last two, one of them works in a museum and the other one works in a healthcare products distribution company. The participating accountants will be referred to as person 1, person 2...

Table 3. Impacts of COVID-19.

Person 1	Positive and negative.
Person 2	Positive.
Person 3	Positive and negative.
Person 4	Positive and negative.
Person 5	Positive and negative.
Person 6	Positive.
Person 7	Positive.

The table above shows how did COVID-19 affect the interviewed accountants as well as their services and duties, as you can see all of them got affected positively while only four of them got negative effects as well.

According to person 1, COVID-19 has affected her positively and negatively at the same time. The workload has increased could be viewed as a negative impact since she has to work extra hours. When there were no customer service difficulties, it may be viewed positively that work activities could be completed in peace, moreover, both the summers of 2020 and 2021 had an increase in

tourists and have been profitable financially, changes in technology, alternative performance measures, more income were added to her salary due to extra work, and skill modification are all taken into account as benefits. In 2020 and 2021, she worked from home remotely, most services were done from home due to the closure of their customer service center. In the early phases of the pandemic in the spring of 2020, when there was no income from client visits, she had to prepare a variety of financial reports and more meticulous spending tracking, which increased her workload. However, once the COVID-19 waves faded, financial forecasting, cost analysis, and financial statements preparations returned back to the standard level. Returning to regular life lessened surface wiping, and COVID-19 instructions as well, and returned the customer service experience back to normal. When they were able to re-open the doors to the public, they created guidelines for both workers and clients.

When the cleaning was increased and daily disinfection of workspaces and consumer spaces was performed, they all received new tasks. Given that they wiped door handles and other contact surfaces numerous times per day at offices, this also had an impact on the workflow and services since it hindered the speedy completion of some accounting operations. The pandemic, which resulted in some layoffs, had an impact on the payroll in part, the monitoring of daily payment traffic was hampered and there were fewer purchase and sales invoices. After COVID-19, things are simpler because they have greater freedom to operate remotely rather than in an office.

Person 2 is an accounting manager, who got affected only positively, as he used more technologies, new working methods, and meetings with Microsoft employees to handle problems remotely. The workload did not get affected by COVID-19 and it was normal. There are more options to perform professional duties with better equipment, and working remotely is an option. The majority of the services were completed as normal. All the employees who could do so, including the corporate executives, salespeople, and accountants, worked remotely. When COVID-19 was at its peak, only the sale support team who takes care of the purchases and deliveries and worked full-time in the office. Person 2 claimed that completing accounting services before or after COVID-19 did not differ in difficulty, but COVID-19 was beneficial to their company as new technologies were acquired to perform time-consuming jobs more effectively, so COVID-19 was not an obstacle for them to perform any accounting task where alternative ways have been devised to do so, and those services are always completed on time.

Person 3 answered that although most of the effects were positive, there were minor negative effects. When preparing the financial accounts and bookkeeping for some customers, created a bit of hassle and difficulties due to the increase in the workload and responsibilities during COVID-19, which raised the income and created more stress in doing the accounting services. The fact that

work was done from home during COVID-19 implies that the commute time was shorter and it enabled him to spend more time with the family and have more leisure, that's why he preferred the work after COVID-19. COVID-19 has no noticeable negative effects on his job or obligations in terms of health. The impact was brought on by actions taken against COVID-19. Although the workload has increased, it is a plus point that clients recognized his skills and experience and trusted his work, which has resulted in higher profits during the first period of COVID-19 in the long run. The accounting for some customers took a little longer than expected, but everyone was aware of the delay's causes, so it wasn't a major deal.

Persons 4 and 5 stated that the positive effects were more than the negative effects. The company's accounting continued as usual, with the exception of a little increase in workload that required to work longer hours than usual and delayed the completion of accounting for some clients. These can be regarded as minor negative consequences. Electronic financial management helped in making the work and schedule easier as well as providing more freedom, which allowed them to spend more time with the family. Being away from direct customer contact also allowed them to be more productive in preparing financial statements, keeping records, and performing other tasks. Stress was a result of the slight increase in workload since deadlines should be met. Because it was a little difficult to collect the information from some clients, some challenges were presented in preparing the financial statements and tax declarations, which means that there were delays in completing the accounting for some clients. However, both have stated that after the pandemic, due to the freedom and flexibility provided by working remotely, work became simpler. The majority of the clients send their receipts via email or an electronic financial management platform. But those who still provide the accounting materials on paper did so by bringing them to the office, after informing them in advance. But COVID-19 has no immediate negative effects on their abilities to perform their work and obligations.

According to persons 6 and 7, they explained that COVID-19 had affected their work and services positively. Both of their workloads have increased, this is mostly because of customer support applications. In order to complete the tasks by the deadline, they must put in more hours. It was possible to finish the daily tasks in peace when there were no customer service concerns. They have enhanced their capability to adapt, adopted alternative performance standards, obtained more options for managing their work obligations with better tools and technology, and have the willingness to function remotely. Everything that has been discussed has aided them in their professional endeavors. For instance, giving them a flexible schedule, increasing their productivity and effectiveness, and saving time and money. The pace of bookkeeping and reporting increased due to an increase in the workload, leading to an increase in working hours, which increased earnings. They both preferred and appreciated the work after COVID-19 since they switched to operating remotely

from home. When person 6 got infected with COVID-19, the quarantine merely stopped her from doing some work for clients, which caused a delay in the preparation of several financial reports. Since the seventh person received all the data on time and offered remote services to the clients during COVID-19, there was no delay or problem in her providing the services for the clients.

4.2 What changes have been implemented to adapt to COVID-19?

Depending on the collected data from the respondents, it was so clear that all of them have implemented the same changes and procedures to adapt to the situation of COVID-19. Those changes and procedures can be illustrated by: The appropriate guidelines from the employer were strictly followed, as well as the public instructions and recommendations from the government and THL. Additionally, getting vaccinated, utilizing developed platforms to work remotely and communicate with customers, hand sanitizers and masks were used, and a safe distance was maintained.

According to person 1, employees in customer service were temporarily laid off in 2020. The remaining employees weren't laid off, because their work is not entirely linked to customer service, despite of being a popular tourist location. As an accountant handling the bookkeeping for a museum has a lot of background work to undertake that is hidden from view. She also stated that the board and supervisory board's first meeting was called off since the members could not attend. The following meetings were already enabled in Teams, and all participants used this application to join the meetings. The approval of the financial statements and the activity report were handled by email.

Based on the information obtained from the respondents about the nature of the training before and after Covid-19, it was found that all of them agreed that the training sessions before Covid-19 were conducted in training centers or accounting offices, and that required the full physical presence of the trainees. While the After the spread of Covid-19, training is done remotely through online sessions and courses, and other communication programs used for this purpose which became famous in light of this pandemic, such as Teams, Zoom, and other tools.

Looking at the recorded data and after analyzing it, it was found that all the respondents matched their answers in terms of laying off workers, and that is by taking into consideration that all the answers stipulate that no layoffs took place for these accountants due to the fact that 71.42% of the respondents are working in accounting firms and their work is considered very important for other businesses, with the exception of person 1 who works as an accountant in a museum, mentioned previously that some workers who work in the customer service department were laid off, but not the accountants. Also, 6 of them have mentioned that they prefer the way of work after COVID-19

since it provided a better and easier work and life atmosphere. Except for person 4 who had another opinion that attending the training at the training center was more pleasant because she could focus better. Now, it's so easy to become distracted and lose some important thoughts when staring at the computer screen with headphones on the head for several hours.

Table 4. The period needed by the accountants to adapt to COVID-19.

Person 1	Two months.
Person 2	One week.
Person 3	One month.
Person 4	Month and a half.
Person 5	Two months.
Person 6	One month.
Person 7	One Month.

As you can see from the above table, it clearly presents the period needed by each interviewed accountant to adapt to COVID-19 and cope with it. It seems from the research answers analysis that the period that accountants need to cope with COVID-19 is from one week to two months.

After asking the respondents about the extent of the difference in accounting services before and after Covid-19, and after analyzing the collected data, it was found that all the respondents agreed that there was no significant difference in these services, as they normally performed these services before COVID-19 in the office or workplace, while after Covid-19, the completion of these services has become remotely from home.

This means that COVID-19 has enforced accountants to use virtual communication programs and other technologies to complete accounting services and other business-related meetings remotely. It also enforced them to follow strict precautions and even harsh rules and guidelines from the government so they can cope with this pandemic.

4.3 Who in this service process got affected the most during this pandemic situation? And how?

All the respondents stated that the accounting firms and their customers got affected by COVID-19. Since there were many layoffs and shutdowns, the business's performance got affected, as well as

the accounting firm's workflow, use of new technologies and computerized methods, remote working and other life responsibilities.

According to person 1, they saw an upsurge in domestic tourism as a result of the epidemic; for instance, the number of tourists in July, the first pandemic season, was larger than in 25 years. As a result, they received additional work to perform and bonuses. The consequences on the company were favorable throughout the first summer, but when strictures returned in the fall, it was quickly apparent that tourist numbers had plummeted, badly impacting the economy as well. Despite being a private museum that is not owned by the state or municipality, the repercussions on the area as a tourist destination were evident in the fact that they had to keep the museum closed due to the general policy. Then, after the pandemic subsided, they held smaller events, so initially, the names and contact details of the attendees were obtained via phone or email. This is because they could have informed them that an exposure had occurred if there had been a report of someone becoming ill.

Person 2 stated that while he is not currently working in the accounting company, he previously worked there for more than 20 years before working for a healthcare products distribution company. The accounting firms experienced a change that was greater than the change to their clients. Accounting firms have acquired new computerized methods for conducting business accounting and dealing with clients remotely which were done previously at the office and face-to-face. But the sales of the company were not significantly affected by COVID-19. The cost of shipments increased and there was a shortage of supplies, making it difficult for them to get the majority of the needed purchased goods. Which for a set duration halted purchases and deliveries to clients; as a result, delivery times became longer.

According to persons 3, 4, 5 and 6, new technological methods of performing accounting were acquired as well as communication with clients was done remotely, while before, it was face-to-face simple communication. There were occasional delays in finishing the work for some clients as the workload rose and some deadlines were not met. Person 3 customers got a variety of aid and assistance programs offered by the government that helped to cope with the effects of COVID-19 which resulted in some additional billable work. Person 6 noted that the shutdown forced several of her clients to close, which resulted in significant losses.

As believed by person 4, school and daycare-age kids must be taken care of, school closings and the sickness of the kids reduced the working hours for a couple of weeks. The monthly VAT statements were very challenging at times, but her clients have fully appreciated the significant burdens that fall on a sole proprietor who works from home while still raising a family. Person 5 had to deal with the family and job at the same time, which had an impact on the working hours.

In accordance with person 7, the workload increased, used alternative performance metrics, she learned how to use developed technology and remote work, which contributed to the continuity of the work and provided great protection from being infected, which can lead to the suspension of work for several days and affect her business. There wasn't any delay in completing the services, as the data was gathered from the clients on time.

All respondents mentioned that the food business in general, such as restaurants, had the most negative impacts due to COVID-19, due to the temporary closure resulting in heavy losses for the restaurants. In addition, they all claimed that food delivery companies such as Wolt and Foodora, have gained wide popularity in light of the Covid-19 crisis when restaurants got permission to open their doors only for takeaways, which led to an increase in the demand for fast food from various restaurants in Finland, thus, increased the revenues of food delivery companies since delivery services are done through them, so people order food from restaurants and the courier partner delivers the food to them. Person 4 added that businesses that provide wellness and gym services have taken a lot of damage. Despite the frequent delays in supplies of construction materials, the construction companies were operating as usual. Based on person 5, also added that the suffering was particularly severe for hairdressers and beauticians whose work demands personal contact or client visits. Referring to person 6, the pandemic caused the most damage to all of those businesses that had to shut down.

So it seems from the results that accounting firms, their customers, restaurants and food delivery companies and other businesses, altogether got impacted by Covid-19. COVID-19 has made it a bit complicated for some accountants since they have other responsibilities to deal with, home and life for instance, and to use a new way of working.

4.4 How did remote working help resolve the challenges presented by COVID-19 and what challenges arose from this technique?

Based on the respondents' answers, it was found that persons 1, 2, 4, 5 and 6 had used a hybrid remote working model to be able to continue their work normally during COVID-19. Except for Persons 3 and 7 who stated that they had used a fully remote working model. Person 1 added that by using this model, they were able to maintain continuity; if a member of one team had fallen ill, another would have been able to work.

The reason why no one of the respondents has used the centralized and decentralized remote working model is due to the fact that those accountants are working in small and medium-sized

companies, while in order to fulfill the decentralized or centralized model, it needs a lot of employees to achieve them under specific conditions. Therefore, they all used either a hybrid or fully remote model.

Table 5. The remote working model used by each respondent.

Person 1	Hybrid remote.
Person 2	Hybrid remote.
Person 3	Fully remote.
Person 4	Hybrid remote.
Person 5	Hybrid remote.
Person 6	Hybrid remote.
Person 7	Fully remote.

This table shows what remote working models were used by the respondents. This means that 5 of them which correspond to 71.42% used a hybrid remote working model, while only 2 of them which correspond to 28.58% used a fully remote working model.

According to persons 1, 4 and 5 the hybrid remote working model was done by working 3 days from home and 2 days from the office or vice versa. So this is what the work model looked like per week.

Person 2 stated that meetings took place on Microsoft Teams and financial management software is located in the cloud. Accounting is done entirely online. Work was split evenly between being done at home and in the office; on some days, it was done remotely and on other days, at the office.

In accordance with person 3, there was no need to worry about being sick, paying for transportation, or getting up early to be prepared for work, because all of the accounting services and tasks were done remotely. The fact that all the work was done fully remotely from home made it flexible and efficient.

As claimed by person 4, she employs the comprehensive financial management software Finago Procountor to manage the clients' finances. The program is used to create all of the customer's sales invoices, purchase invoices, and receipts. When customers bring their documents on paper,

she receives their receipts either scanned as an email attachment or scanned directly into the computer. She occasionally needs to be at the office to discuss some materials with the clients or complete some work there.

Person 6 worked both in the office and at home. Since there was a requirement to meet with some clients in person and discuss accounting-related topics with them or complete other accounting responsibilities, the job was divided into 4 days of remote work from home and one or two days of office work. The tasks were completed remotely from home using a laptop and a phone.

Based on person 7, customers were using email to deliver their bookkeeping documents. Meetings were conducted over Teams, Zoom, or telephone. Due to digitalization and other technological advancements, she was able to perform all of the services remotely from home.

As claimed by all of the respondents regarding working remotely from home, it enables more freedom, flexibility, and efficiency, as well as time and money savings, and it makes life easier. Since they had more time to focus on work peacefully and effectively without interruptions, they became more efficient and productive. Additionally, it provided protection and reduced the chance of being infected by COVID-19. It guaranteed the continuity of work, allowed opportunities to learn how to use virtual platforms like Zoom or Teams to keep in touch with clients, and helped maintain a healthy work-life balance.

All of the respondents have mentioned that before COVID-19, the workflow and business meetings were proceeding normally from the office in person, while after COVID-19, several tools and technologies were used, such as Microsoft Teams, Zoom, phones, WhatsApp and e-mails, to manage the workflow and business meetings with clients remotely. Moreover, it is being said that no cybersecurity concerns were faced since well-protected laptops with antivirus programs were used, and all the documents were secured before sending them to the customers.

Challenges due to remote work:

Person 1 mentioned that since no one is at home during the day, and there were no longer little children or dogs, so no home distractions. However, there was some stress due to the workload increase and the fact that she was working from home for the first time.

Person 2 stated that there weren't any challenges regarding working from home since the work was done from a private workroom.

Referring to person 3, there were occasionally home distractions, which caused a little bit of stress. He became completely reliant on technology because everything was done in front of a screen remotely, such as gathering data and talking with clients remotely, which led to fatigue and anxiety.

Based on persons 4 and 5, the biggest challenge is dealing with interruptions at home as there are always some distractions going on, when the washing machine is on, when cleaning needs to be done, or when kids are around.

According to person 6, high levels of self-discipline are essential when working remotely, and more meetings are required. She must therefore push herself to remain focused and resist becoming distracted by situations at home. Home distractions exist, but their effects are minimal.

Depending on person 7, since he is not at home alone, there were still some home distractions and stress, even though he worked from his own room. This is common, though, and it wasn't a major deal for him. Personal and professional lives can overlap easily. The long hours spent in front of a screen, such as in virtual meetings, the lack of social interaction at work, loneliness, and social isolation were challenging.

This means that remote work has great advantages for these accountants in light of COVID-19, as it worked to solve many problems and contributed to the continuity of the businesses. However, there were some difficulties faced by the majority of those respondents as a result of working remotely, but they did not have a significant effect overall.

4.5 What strategies were applied by accountants to mitigate the negative impacts of COVID-19 on accounting firms?

In this part, some of the results are a little bit similar to what 4.2 explains. That's because the strategies to reduce the negative impacts of COVID-19 and the changes done to adapt it carry somehow the same steps and measures to do so.

According to all of the respondents, they all mentioned that in order to maintain a safe and good workplace and atmosphere, the government instructions, rules and procedures regarding the lockdowns and quarantine as well as the application of safety guidelines such as wearing a face mask, social distancing, maintaining personal hygiene, staying away from busy crowded areas and getting vaccinated should be followed and adhered.

All communications for any purpose were done through phone, e-mail and other communication tools and software that provide virtual meetings and connections, teams and zoom could be examples to organize and control business stuff remotely. It was easy for all of them to navigate and

choose a suitable virtual work environment since COVID-19 has encouraged the use of these tools more, as they have become within the reach of companies and employers, which facilitated the creation of an easy and secure remote work environment. So we see that most companies today use Zoom, Teams and other software as basic software to do large business tasks.

4.6 Summary

Overall, it was found through the research and analysis, all the respondents were positively affected by their work, while 4 of them were also negatively affected.

The number of respondents who participated in this study is 7 and it was limited.

The workload of most of the respondents increased, which affected other tasks and slowed down the workflow. Some of them consider this a benefit to them due to the increase in working hours and thus the increase in profits. Some of them found it difficult to collect the necessary information and data in order to complete the accounting duties of their employees, which caused obstacles, difficulty and delay in doing the financial statements, bookkeeping and tax statements and declarations. Also do not forget the nature of remote work, as it created challenges and difficulties for these accountants, as this type of work requires high self-discipline and complete focus away from the noise of the house and other noise causes, in addition to online trainings, social isolation, stress and conflicts between personal and professional life. Despite this, these accountants preferred this nature of work as it increased flexibility and freedom and contributed to saving time and money and increased productivity and efficiency of these accountants as well as protected them from being infected. Also, advanced and computerized tools were used by them to be able to perform the work and communication remotely.

The effect on their clients was somewhat representative, with the exception of respondents 1 and 2 who work as accountants, but in other companies. Restaurants and other places were damaged, and a large number of employees were laid off as a result of the lockdown and the losses incurred by these businesses. But the situation improved somewhat after the government allowed them perform as normally step by step.

All the respondents applied and followed the same measures and precautions recommended by the government to protect themselves and their business.

5 Conclusion

The last chapter includes the final parts of this thesis, several aspects were explained including recommendations for further research, how the thesis achieved its reliability and validity, and reflection on learning from this research.

5.1 Recommendations for further research

Since this study included five accountants from small and medium-sized accounting firms, and two other accountants from other companies, it would be worthwhile to investigate the influence of COVID-19 on larger accounting firms and see how it differs from that of small and medium-sized accounting firms. Furthermore, because of the limited size of the chosen sample, it would be interesting to do additional studies or investigate the impacts of COVID-19 on accountants and their services in different nations. In order to achieve a more thorough understanding of how COVID-19 has impacted accountants who work for accounting firms or those who are freelancers and their services as well, it is also crucial to conduct larger studies with more participants and larger accounting firms in the future. Another thing to look into and might be good is focusing on some categories of accounting, for instance, accounts payable or accounts receivable how accountants dealt with customers, also some issues that resulted from COVID-19 like added more pressure on the professional and ethical behavior of the accounting profession, and investigating the influence of COVID-19 exclusively in this area.

If necessary, accounting companies should offer training to guarantee that all accountants are proficient in using all programs related to office or remote work and have the expertise to deliver the finest customer service possible. Another suggestion is that accounting companies consider how they can provide more value to their clients and make sure that the company will survive in the long-run to guarantee that they can satisfy the need of their customers on time.

5.2 Reliability, Validity and Relevance

Concepts like validity and reliability are used to assess the integrity of research. They demonstrate how effectively a methodology, method, or test measures things. Validity is concerned with a measure's accuracy, whereas reliability is concerned with its matching and consistency. (Middleton 2022).

The interviews were conducted in Finland. The researcher ensured that during the interviews, the researcher typed down the answers given by the interviewees, so that the information is preserved. The author accurately interpreted and analyzed participant thoughts, opinions and experiences, to

serve the message to the readers with transparency and sincerity. Before conducting any interviews, the thesis approach was carefully designed. Validity and reliability were taken into account when the author planned the thesis as well as the interview questions, which means that these were among the author's priorities. Learning the regulations, investigating techniques, and contacting accounting firms as well as accountants took a substantial amount of time and hard work. All of the accountants who were interviewed are well-experienced and have extensive backgrounds in accounting. Professionals' responses are based on answers and explanations that they are responsible for based on their personal experiences and situations.

Additionally, when a saturation point is achieved and when the study resolves the issues it set out to investigate, a study's reliability and validity increase. It implies that the results tend to be identical and similar (Middleton 2022). In interviews with accounting firms, respondents provided information on how COVID-19 affected their work and their reactions to it, actions taken, and modifications made by the firms to adhere to the government's instructions to stop COVID-19 from spreading among the workforce, also, they provided insightful work-related experiences. Concerning the accounting tasks and how COVID-19 affected accountants' jobs, including the positive and negative effects and what strategies were used during the pandemic, most of the accountants that were contacted gave similar responses, such as increasing the workload of accounting services, increasing income, some delays in performing the accounting tasks, and some other challenges and positive points faced by accountants due to COVID-19 and remote work.

The theoretical part was also prepared with a variety of sources, including several academic books articles and other websites. This meant that many perspectives on the topic were presented and highlighted, since the author tried his best to keep the theories within the delimitation.

The biggest concern with this study in terms of reliability and validity is the limited number of interviewees. Several companies were contacted but many of them declined to participate in the study. Yet, because the respondents work for diverse accounting firms, it was able to obtain relevant responses to some extent. The author knows that according to the number of accountants who participated in this research, it cannot be assumed that the results of this thesis reflect a comprehensive and unified view of the extent to which accountants are affected by COVID-19 across Finland. But he was able to study the effect of this virus on a number of them and the results were clear and most of them were similar. The most essential part is that the answers claimed by the author from interviewees answer both investigative and research questions.

Ethical issues depend on the company's demand. If it wants its name to be published or some kind of information, the company considers it secret. Of course, everything was discussed with the companies before publishing anything. That's why you can see some accountants prefer this kind of

investigation to be secret and limited. Ethical issues were taken into consideration when the author quoted any information or data from the internet, as well as from interviews done with accountants, references and sources are mentioned, as well as writing the ideas in the author's own words.

5.3 Reflection on Learning

It was a great experience to go through the thesis process, it was both tough and satisfying. The writing process influenced and taught me several things that I would be able to apply not only in my daily life but also in my future profession.

Writing this thesis enabled me to obtain a better and deeper understanding of the thesis process itself, accounting services, tasks, and how COVID-19 has influenced accountants as well as the scientific process. Because of the fact that there aren't many books on this issue due to the novelty of this situation, I spent a lot of time looking for academic materials that support the thesis such as academic books and articles. I gained great knowledge like concepts, theories, and assumptions from reading and searching many academic books and other sources which helped me in writing the thesis. Furthermore, I expanded my knowledge by conducting qualitative research and interviews with accountants from various accounting firms to see how they reacted to the unexpected pandemic, how negatively and positively they were affected, how they dealt with the problem, and what tasks and processes changed during the pandemic. I had the opportunity to discover and learn new knowledge and expand what I already know, which developed my skills and realization as well as my experience.

In addition, during my research, I had to employ my foresight and wisdom regarding the relevance of numerous sources. When doing my interviews, I learned a lot about different research methodologies, both theoretically and how to implement them in a research-based thesis, as well as how to collect and analyze the data. I had to use my network such as from work and other acquaintances to contact possible respondents and interviewees. To maximize the possibilities of a response, I had to use many channels, such as email and phone, connections from the workplace, and use my communication skills.

Last but not least, this thesis has taught me time management, work planning and sequencing, self-commitment, professionalism, critical thinking, creativity, self-confidence, effective note-taking, multi-tasking, internet research tools, and research ethics.

Overall, it was a challenging task to complete this research but at the same time, the results of it are rewarding. It wasn't simple to manage those interviews, especially at this time due to the intense working conditions of accountants and the difficulties in reaching them, but I was able to find

and interview a number of them. Furthermore, I absorbed and processed a large amount of information, which aided my learning and broadened my business circle for the future.

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Appendices

Appendix 1. Interview Questions

IQ 1: How were the service processes of accounting companies got affected by COVID-19? March 2020 till now

- In your job what are your duties or tasks?
- After COVID-19 in general were your duties affected negatively, positively, or in both ways?
- Please explain how were your duties affected.
- How did your workload change after COVID-19?
- What are the impacts of COVID-19 (Positive or negative) on your accounting profession? Please explain.
- What services in your company got affected and how?

For example, Bookkeeping, reporting, financial accounting, tax accounting payroll accounting...

- Do you consider COVID-19 as a benefit to your company? How?
- Was it easier to complete the accounting services before or after COVID-19?
- Did the quarantine prevent you from doing or finalizing some accounting services for some customers or was there any delay in doing those services? Please explain.

IQ 2: What changes have been implemented to adapt to COVID-19?

- What are the procedures that were done during COVID-19 that helped in adapting to the situation?
- Were there any layoffs?
- How was the training provided during the pandemic? What is it about before the pandemic?
- Is there any difference in the accounting services now and before COVID-19? Please explain.
- How long it took from you to adapt to the pandemic?
- As an accountant do you prefer the work before or after COVID-19?

IQ 3: Who in this service process got affected the most during this pandemic situation? And how?

- Who got affected more, accounting firms or their customers?
- What were the effects on your firm?
- How did your customers get affected? For example, delays in completing the services for them...
- What industries got the most effect? From your experience, food businesses, delivery firms... (The effect can be positive or negative.)

IQ 4: How did remote working help resolve the challenges presented by COVID-19 and what challenges arose from this technique?

- What remote working model were you using? For example, fully remote or hybrid?
- According to the remote working model used, please explain briefly how it works.
- How did remote work help you in your profession?
- How did your workflow change after COVID-19? For example, peer-to-peer communication...
- How business meetings were held during the pandemic? What was it like before the pandemic?
- What challenges are you facing when working remotely? For example, stress or home distractions...
- Do you face cybersecurity challenges when you are working remotely? If yes, please give some examples.
- Do you have to use new technology for working remotely? If yes, are you facing a problem with using it?

IQ 5: What strategies were applied by accountants to mitigate the negative impacts of COVID-19 on accounting firms?

- What measures have been taken to reduce the negative effects of COVID-19?
- If there was a need to be in the office during that time, how did you manage to protect yourself or other accountants from being infected?
- How was the communication set up during COVID-19?
- In brief steps, how did your company manage the navigation of a new virtual work environment?

Appendix 2. GANTT chart - Timeline of the Thesis

Thesis Timeline														Legend	
Title	Months of 2022														
	1 1.- 30.1	2 1.- 28.2	3 1.- 31.3	4 1.- 30.4	5 1.- 31.5	6 1.- 30.6	7 1.- 31.7	8 1.- 31.8	9 1.- 30.9	10 1.- 31.10	11 1.- 30.11	12 1.- 31.12			
Work on the thesis														My Work	
Thesis Planning Course														Thesis Courses	
Task 1: Preassignment														Free Time	
Task 2: Academic Writing															
Task 3: RQ, IQs and Demarcation															
Task 4: Theoretical Framework and Key Concepts															
Task 5: Research Design															
Task 6: Thesis Plan (Opposing Version) and Opposing															
Task 7: Final Thesis Plan															
Thesis Phase 2															
Theoretical framework															
Thesis Phase 3															
Empirical Part															
Finalizing Thesis Report															
Final Language Check															
Plagiarism Check															
Final Thesis Assessment															
Maturity Test															
Publishing The Thesis															