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Aliisa Pietilä

Work Recovery in Self-Managing Organizations

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Supervisor:	Professor of Practice Risto Sarvas, DSc (Tech.)
Advisor:	Frank Martela, PhD

Author:	Aliisa Pietilä
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Advisor:	Frank Martela, PhD		

Self-organizing and self-leadership have become the business buzzwords of the decade. Meanwhile, burnout and other problems with work well-being have been recognized as a relevant problem amongst expert work. This thesis studies the intersection of the two phenomena, focusing on work recovery and how self-managing organizations can aid their expert employees to recover and work in a sustainable way.

The research is a qualitative study built around three case companies, all of them Finnish software consultancies working in a self-organizing way. The main body of data was gathered in semi-structured thematic interviews with 15 consultants from the case companies. To support the main data, interviews and a co-design workshop were arranged with the HR specialists of the case companies.

The results of the study indicate that even though the experts do not need supervisors to excel in their work tasks as such, they need support in organizing their work and scaling their workload. Furthermore, even when functioning in a very self-organizing way, acknowledged structures and practices help the employees in their daily work and in difficult situations, such as burnout.

The results also indicate that recovery is not a well-known subject in the everyday context. The experts' everyday practices do not support recovery, and they are not very familiar with the concept unless they have discussed it with a health care professional due to a burnout situation or other similar problems.

The research contributes to the ongoing conversations and the growing amount of literature about self-organization and well-being. The practical contribution of the research is related to increased understanding of how organizations can promote and enable recovery as well as well-being amongst their employees.

Keywords:	work recovery, work well-being, burnout, self-leadership, self-organizing organizations
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Itsensä johtaminen ja itseohjautuvat organisaatiot ovat nousseet viime vuosina puheenaiheeksi niin yritysmaailmassa kuin mediassakin. Samaan aikaan myös työhyvinvointi asiantuntijatyössä on noussut yhä enemmän esille. Tämä diplomityö tutkii näitä kahta teemaa ja tapoja joilla itseohjautuvissa organisaatioissa voidaan tukea työstä palautumista ja kestäviä työtapoja.

Työ on laadullinen tutkimus, jossa tutkitaan kolmea suomalaista ohjelmistokonsulttiyritystä, joista jokaisessa on jo pitkään työskennelty hyvin itseohjautuvasti. Tutkimusaineisto kerättiin pääasiassa haastattelemalla yritysten työntekijöitä. Haastattelut olivat puolistrukturoituja ja niitä tehtiin yhteensä 15. Varsinaisen haastatteluaineiston tueksi haastateltiin myös yritysten HR-asiantuntijoita, joiden kanssa järjestettiin myös yhteinen työpaja.

Tutkimuksen tulosten perusteella vaikuttaa siltä, että vaikka työntekijät eivät tarvitse lähiesimiehiä varsinaisen työnteon tueksi, tuki on kuitenkin tarpeen työn organisoinnissa ja työkuorman hallinnassa. Lisäksi tunnistetut rakenteet ja yhteiset käytännöt auttavat asiantuntijoita sekä heidän päivittäisissä työtehtävissään että ongelmatilanteissa, kuten esimerkiksi työuupumuksen iskiessä.

Tulokset myös antavat viitteitä siitä, ettei työstä palautumista tunneta kovin hyvin, eivätkä asiantuntijoiden arkiset työskentelytavat tue palautumista. Ne haastateltavat, jotka olivat tutustuneet aiheeseen tarkemmin, olivat keskustelleet siitä terveydenhuollon ammattilaisten kanssa.

Tämä työ on osa ajankohtaista keskustelua sekä syventää aiempaa tutkimusta itseohjautuvuudesta ja työhyvinvoinnista. Työ tarjoaa ehdotuksia käytännön toimiksi sekä tutkimukseen osallistuneille yrityksille että muille vastaaville organisaatioille, jotka haluavat tukea työntekijöidensä työhyvinvointia.

Asiasanat:	työstä palautuminen, työhyvinvointi, työuupumus, itsensä johtaminen, itseohjautuvat organisaatiot
Kieli:	englanti

Foreword

I am truly happy I got to do my thesis about such an interesting and relevant subject. For that, and for the fact that this really is finished now, I am grateful to many:

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Writing this page is not only the last part of this thesis, but also the last part of my studies. For the last eight years, all the learning opportunities and all the adventures I want to thank everyone involved. Thanks to HTMK12 with whom it all started, Dionysus for being the best support group in thesis writing and in life, Athene for being an amazing community, and SIK for always being a home, even if I will never have the slightest idea of what electricity is.

Otaniemi, 30 September 2019

Aliisa Pietilä

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Chapter 1

Introduction

This thesis studies the recovery methods and work well-being in highly intensive consulting work in mature self-managing organizations. The thesis aims to find out how the absence of traditional hierarchical leadership affects the employees' well-being, and how such self-managing organizations can support their employees well-being and sustainable working practices.

The first chapter describes the background of the study and explains why the subject is motivating and topical. This chapter also presents the research questions the study aims to answer and outlines the structure of the thesis.

1.1 Background and motivation

People have been concerned about technology development wiping out jobs for at least two centuries (Autor, 2015) but it has yet to occur, even though there have been major changes in the kind of jobs that exist and the way they are performed. While researchers agree on the upcoming shift within work due to automation and computerization (Arntz et al., 2016; Frey and Osborne, 2017; Pajarinen and Rouvinen, 2014), there is no consensus about the manner and the extent to which working life is expected to change. For example, Pajarinen and Rouvinen (2014) predict that one third of Finnish

employment will be threatened by computerization, although their estimate does not take into account the upcoming shifts in the content of tasks within occupations or changes in occupational structures. In turn, Frey and Osborne (2017) estimate that as much as 47% of US employment will be automated over the next few decades. However, a report on 21 OECD countries predicts that on average only 9% of jobs will be automatable in the near future (Arntz et al., 2016).

While there will still be work for people in the future, it will consist of tasks that are difficult or impossible to automate, such as those involving human interaction or creative expertise (Arntz et al., 2016; Martela and Jarenko, 2017). To manage these new kinds of jobs, people will also need more extensive education (Autor, 2015) since the amount of knowledge work is growing. Knowledge work is work that requires the intellectual capital of skilled professionals (Pearce and Manz, 2005). In the knowledge-based economy, ideas and expertise are the main source of value creation rather than material goods (Lee and Edmondson, 2017).

Change in work also entails a change in leadership. According to Pearce and Manz (2005), traditional forms of leadership fail to encourage creativity and innovation. In traditional organizations, formal leaders have been expected to think and be creative while others should "just do their job." This system is incompatible with knowledge work which requires creative problem solving from each member of the organization. Furthermore, when the work focuses on complex problems, it is impossible for one leader to possess all the expertise required. Expert individuals are the best specialists at their own work, and they do not require direct supervision (Pearce and Manz, 2005). Hence, more and more organizations are adopting self-managing practices and, from an individual and an organizational perspective, self-leadership is becoming increasingly important.

As the organizations and the working life are changing, a growing section of the workforce finds their work burdensome, although not physically demanding. Working life is becoming more unpredictable, and organizational

changes of all kinds are more common than before (Lyly-Yrjänäinen, 2018). Recently, both self-management and work well-being have been the subject of numerous news articles (e.g. Gronow, 2019; Junttila, 2017) and works of nonfiction. Books popularizing the science behind well-being and effectiveness have become international bestsellers, such as *The Power of Habit* by the journalist Charles Duhigg (published in 2012) or *Why we sleep* by professor Matthew Walker (published in 2017).

General interest in work well-being is increasing. One reason may be the previously mentioned changes in working life and its challenges. Moreover, mental health and coping problems are understood better than before, and it is also becoming more and more acceptable to talk about mental health issues aloud and in public (Baxter et al., 2014). In Finland, one recent sign of this shift towards openness has been the members of parliament or government talking about their experiences with burnout while in office (Paakkanen, 2017; Perttu and Silfverberg, 2018; Seuri, 2017).

The growing general interest in well-being and self-management inspired this research. When starting to search for case companies, seven similar consultancies were contacted. The starting hypotheses for the study were as follows:

- The employees of a mature self-organizing organization have a great responsibility not only for their work but also for their own well-being.

- In a consultancy organization with highly engaged employees, work recovery rises as a specific concern.

- The consultancy business model of maximizing the utilization rate of highly skilled and high hourly rate professionals is in conflict with having employees investing time in work recovery.

All of the seven companies recognized the presented hypotheses and found the research subject very interesting. This was the first validation of the demand for this kind of study.

1.2   Research objective and questions

The objective of this study is to present suggestions as to how self-managing organizations can support their employees' work recovery and encourage their employees to work in a sustainable way. This approach is motivated by the self-managing way of working of the case organizations. Their employees are mostly free to organize their work as they prefer, and the organizations do not want to force the practices any more than is absolutely necessary. Nevertheless, the organizations can still affect their employees' practices and ways of working. When promoting work well-being in the organizations, the fact that well-being is both a very complex and a very personal thing has to be considered. An employee's work well-being is not a separate entity, but it both affects and is affected by all the other matters in that employee's life. These other matters, however, do not concern the employer.

To understand how work recovery can be supported by the employer, the employees' ways of working, their experiences about self-organizing, and their experiences with work well-being and burnout are investigated. For this, two empirical research questions are formulated as follows:

RQ1: How do the employees in the case organizations experience self-organizing?

RQ2: What kind of experiences do the employees in the case organizations have about work well-being, burnout, and recovery?

The starting hypothesis is that if the way the employees describe their experiences is made transparent, it is possible to see the similarities and differences amongst the experiences. Based on these experiences, actions regarding work recovery and its promotion amongst the organizations can be suggested.

1.3 Structure of the study

This thesis consists of a literature review and an empirical research. The literature review is an overview of contemporary research about self-managing organizations, self-leadership, and work recovery. The empirical study is a qualitative research conducted mainly through thematic interviews.

The theoretical background and existing research about both self-managing organizations and work recovery are presented in Chapter 2. The methodology used to answer the empirical research questions is explained in Chapter 3. The results are presented in Chapter 4 and their analysis in Chapter 5. Chapter 5 also reflects on the findings and the restrictions of the research.

Chapter 2

Background

This chapter establishes the basis for the study. First, an overview of self-organizing organizations and self-leadership is provided to understand the framework of the empirical research. Then, the theoretical background of recovery, work well-being, and burnout is presented to understand the research subject as a whole.

2.1 Self-managing organizations

When discussing self-organization, it is crucial to clarify the difference between individual and organizational points-of-view. In terms of the individual, self-leadership is a quality and skill which can be learned and developed like any other. According to Martela and Jarenko (2017), self-leadership as a quality includes such skills as setting goals, managing time and resources, and prioritization. In addition to these skills, individuals also require self-motivation, a clear goal to work towards and the abilities and skills required to reach that goal to be able to truly lead themselves. Self-leadership is further discussed in Section 2.2.2.

Lee and Edmondson (2017, p. 39) define self-managing organizations (SMOs) as "those that radically decentralize authority in a formal and systematic

way throughout the organization." The most studied examples about these kind of organizations include the US food-processing company Morning Star and the Dutch home-care company Buurtzorg (Laloux, 2016; Martela and Jarenko, 2017). The most radical way of self-organizing is a flat organization with no managers whatsoever and where every employee is at the same level (Bernstein et al., 2016).

2.1.1 From bureaucracy to self-management

Organizations have been characterized by formal managerial hierarchies for over 100 years, even though hierarchies and the way they are formalized vary greatly between organizations. If people from different organizational levels perceive value, deference and control the same way, the organization is probably not very hierarchical; by contrast, the greater the differences the more hierarchical the organization is (Gruenfeld and Tiedens, 2010). A traditional organization with high hierarchy can be seen as a multi-level pyramid where the individual's level is proportionate to the power that person possesses (Lee and Edmondson, 2017). These kind of traditional, bureaucratic organizations include, for example, the armed forces (Laloux, 2016) and old industrial corporations, for example General Motors (Martela and Jarenko, 2017). Hierarchy is an efficient way of organizing when both the goal and how to achieve it are clear but not when an organization is navigating in rapidly changing business environments. Bureaucracy does not encourage innovation or enable quick development of practices, both necessary for an organization to thrive in today's competitive business world (Kostamo and Martela, 2017). For example, General Motors has struggled to respond to more agile competitors such as Toyota or Tesla (Martela and Jarenko, 2017), and Nokia was unable to tackle the rapid shift in the mobile phone business (Kostamo and Martela, 2017).

Hierarchies have been constructed to make roles and responsibilities clear and the coordination of work possible in large organizations. Over the last decades, however, hierarchies have been seen not only as a clear way of work-

ing but also as an organizational limitation (Lee and Edmondson, 2017). A
top-heavy management system is costly, burdensome, and in many cases
in today's world too slow in making decisions (Hamel, 2011). In his book
Reinventing Organizations Laloux (2016) describes how organizations have
developed over time from traditional organizations with stable organization
charts and high hierarchy first to meritocratic innovation organizations and
then to pluralist, consensus-seeking organizations with a values-driven cul-
ture and empowered employees. Next step, according to Laloux, is evolution-
ary or Teal organizations, more or less radical SMOs and other organizations
adopting at least some of the evolutionary organizations' ways of working in
their operations.

Although managerial hierarchy has been a reasonably effective strategy when
executing predefined plans or tasks without the need for rapid changes, it is
not the best way to solve complex, novel, or surprising problems (Lee and Ed-
mondson, 2017). Martela and Jarenko (2017) present three main reasons for
the current emergence of self-organizing organizations. The first is that with
the speed of disruption and information flows of today's global environment
it is impossible to succeed while waiting for all the important decisions to be
taken at a managerial level. The second is that with automation the working
life and work duties are at the biggest turning point since industrialization,
but this time the change is much faster. According to experts the work that
will resist automation for the longest time has to do with creative problem
solving or truly human interaction (Arntz et al., 2016; Martela and Jarenko,
2017), both fields where hierarchical management does not work very well.
The third reason is the rapid development of information technology: new
technologies enable coordination for very large groups without a manager
leading the process.

While self-leadership and SMOs are very timely subjects, they are not novel
concepts. Manz and Sims Jr (1980) already stated that self-management ap-
pears to be beneficial for both individuals and the organizations they work
for. As a matter of fact, there are organizations, both in Finland and glob-
ally, that have operated in a radically self-managing way for decades already

(Laloux, 2016; Martela and Jarenko, 2017). Mature self-managing organizations have proved themselves to be more resilient than most traditional organizations (Laloux, 2016). Even so, attitudes towards self-management vary greatly. One explanation for the different attitudes is the different attitudes towards people. If an employer considers their employees as passive and lazy people who need to be strictly controlled in order to gain profit, self-management does not perhaps seem like a good approach. However, self-management can appear much more appealing if one sees people as active, growth-oriented, and willing to perform well (Kostamo and Martela, 2017).

Even more well-known way of working than radical self-management is self-managed teams within a more traditional organization. This way of working has gained popularity since the 1970s, first in the context of manufacturing and service operations. In most companies self-managed teams emerged in areas that demanded a great level of adaptability while the rest of the company continued with the traditional way of management (Bernstein et al., 2016). Currently there are many companies that keep managerial structures but still operate in a self-managing fashion: authority in matters such as work execution, work design, and work allocation is decentralized amongst individuals and teams, but topics like personnel management or company strategy are still on the hands of the managers (Lee and Edmondson, 2017).

Table 2.1 presents a model by Martela and Jarenko (2017) for dividing organizations according to how both the organization and its employees are organized. This thesis focuses on organizations that are either radically self-managed or somewhere between centrally managed and self-managed and employing self-organized individuals. Some companies with extrinsically organized employees can be considered self-managed, referred as result-controlled organizations in the Table 2.1. However, these are organizations such as Uber, where individual employees are managed by an application, or a so strictly result-oriented organization that the employees do not really have leeway for organizing their work themselves. As this study focuses on knowledge-intensive organizations, this section of organizations remains

outside its scope.

Table 2.1: Organization types according to their level of self-organizing (based on Martela and Jarenko, 2017)

		ORGANIZATIONAL CHARACTERISTICS	
		Centrally managed	Self-managed
PERSONNEL CHARACTER-ISTICS	Self-organized	Participatory organization	Co-organized organization
	Extrinsically organized	Traditional bureaucratic organization	Result-controlled organization

Although most of the discussion about self-management revolves around transforming existing traditional organizations into SMOs, there are companies that have always operated in self-managing fashion. For example, in Finland the most radical SMOs are software consultancies that have been SMOs from day one (Martela and Jarenko, 2017). According to Laloux (2016), it is easier to be a self-managing organization from the beginning than transforming an already existing organization into one, but it is demanding to refrain from reproducing the old management practices.

2.1.2 Characteristics of self-managing organizations

As described before, due to the rapid changes in business environments and the growing amount of complex and creative knowledge-intensive work there is a growing need for empowered employees. While there are various ways of implementing a self-managing organizational structure of some kind, they all enable strong employee empowerment and thus more creativity and innovation than traditional organizations. This is due to the lack of middle management and therefore minimal official hierarchy. Employees are given significant autonomy in decision-making, and in the best-case scenario the organization starts to evolve in an almost organic way with individuals and

teams trying out different solutions and practices and the best ones being adopted throughout the organization (Kostamo and Martela, 2017).

A common misunderstanding about self-management is that if there are no bosses around anyone is free to do whatever pleases them. However, no matter how evolutionary an organization is aiming to be, it is impossible to "just get rid of structures." Structures always exist even if they are not acknowledged by the organization. In order to succeed with self-managing organizational structure it is necessary to consciously build new organizational structures, for example define coordination mechanisms, roles, and processes for decision making, dealing with conflicts within the organization, and so on (Laloux, 2016). This is especially important since conflicts and crises are likely to encourage centralization and concentration of authority, and therefore threaten the self-managing organizational structure (Lee and Edmondson, 2017).

Most of the self-organizing organizations are built around teams rather than divisions, units, or departments. Teams manage, govern, and design themselves within the organization's guidelines. Leadership is often distributed among roles, not individuals, and people usually hold multiple roles on various teams. Responsibilities are continuously shifting as the work goes on and teams evolve (Bernstein et al., 2016). The roles, like everything else as well, are usually negotiated with colleagues (Kostamo and Martela, 2017), and when making decisions people ask for advice, not for permission (Laloux, 2016). The more important the decision, the more people the advice is asked from (Laloux, 2016). In bureaucratic organizations the vision is built and strategic decisions made by only a small group of managers, while the rest are merely executing the plans. In self-managing organizations these decisions are decentralized. This is possible due to the information flow within the organization: important information about the company as a whole is shared with all the employees, thus everyone can make decisions that benefit the whole organization (Kostamo and Martela, 2017).

In order for the SMO and especially the decentralized decision-making to

function properly, the employees are required to be working towards a common goal clear enough for everyone. The organization's purpose can provide enough alignment for the employees to have a shared goal and shared priorities. However, it cannot be a mission statement hollow in practice, but clear enough to be the driving force in the decision-making (Laloux, 2016).

According to Laloux (2016), the goal of revolutionary SMOs' is not to make everyone equal, but to aid and allow everyone to grow into the best version of themselves. Where managers exist, they aim at making themselves as unnecessary as possible and letting the employees thrive in their jobs (Kostamo and Martela, 2017).

SMOs are not only a consequence of the revolutionary changes in work, but also a revolution of leadership themselves. The significance of self-leadership has long been underrated in business life, until the working life has changed so much that it is impossible to ignore it anymore (Åhman, 2004). However, individuals vary on how comfortable they are in radically decentralized organizations and how they feel about the required level of self-leadership. It is important to consider to whom such organizations are the right fit and who is at risk of being left behind (Lee and Edmondson, 2017). And while all the organizations will not become self-managing, it is likely that all companies will adopt some elements of self-organization into use (Bernstein et al., 2016).

2.2 Self-leadership

As the amount of knowledge-intensive work grows, grows also the amount of employees viewing work and employer organizations as places for personal meaning. This motivates employers to both improve employee experiences and move towards self-managing, as many see work as more meaningful when they have more control over it (Lee and Edmondson, 2017). While organizations with self-organized employees can be anywhere in the continuum between centrally managed and self-managed, a knowledge-intensive SMO cannot succeed without self-organized employees. As described in the previ-

ous section, due to the currently ongoing revolutionary changes in working life, a traditional management where a manager tells their subordinates what to do is going down in history.

According to Åhman (2004), expert employees do not require or desire anyone telling them what to do or how to do their job, and such managing would not be a worthwhile task for the manager either. However, self-leadership is a skill and not a self-evident attribute of an employee, and as such it needs to be practised and learned. A successful leader in a SMO helps others to lead themselves by being more of a coach than a manager (Åhman, 2004).

As motivation is one of the most crucial prerequisites for both successful SMOs and successfully self-organized individuals, its different forms are first shortly described in Section 2.2.1 before going into the other characteristics of self-leadership in Section 2.2.2.

2.2.1 Motivation

Self-determination theory (SDT) is a human motivation and personality macro theory concerning innate motivation. SDT differentiates types of motivation and suggests that the type of motivation driving on an employee affects both their well-being as well as their performance at work (Deci et al., 2017). SDT presents the different types of motivation on a continuum (Table 2.2) from amotivation to intrinsic motivation (Ryan and Deci, 2000). When people engage in an activity with willingness, volition, and choice, the motivation behind that engagement is considered autonomous.

Table 2.2:   Different types of motivation on the self-determination theory continuum (based on Ryan and Deci, 2000)

MOTIVATION	REGULATORY STYLES	SOURCE OF MOTIVATION	REGULATORY PROCESSES
Amotivation	Non-regulation	Impersonal	Nonintentional, nonvaluing, incompetence, lack of control
Extrinsic motivation	External regulation	External	Compliance, external, rewards and punishments
	Introjected regulation	Somewhat external	Self-control, ego-involvement, internal rewards and punishments
	Identified regulation	Somewhat internal	Personal importance, conscious valuing
	Integrated regulation	Internal	Congruence, awareness, synthesis with self
Intrinsic motivation	Intrinsic regulation	Internal	Interest, enjoyment, inherent satisfaction

While most autonomously regulated activities are intrinsically motivated, some extrinsically motivated activities can also be autonomously regulated (Deci et al., 2017). Intrinsic motivation refers to the motivation behind the activities that one does spontaneously when they are free to choose their activity according to their inner interests (Deci and Ryan, 2000). An intrinsically motivated activity itself is so rewarding that other incentives are not required.

The other form of autonomous motivation, integrated regulation, refers to one finding the activity so important, interesting, or so aligned with one's values that they experience a strong willingness to perform it (Kostamo and Martela, 2017). In work, integrated regulation can be enhanced by communicating the worth and purpose of the activity clearly, thus increasing the autonomy and feeling of ownership in the task (Deci et al., 2017).

The other, non-autonomous forms of motivation are more or less controlled, meaning the source of motivation is not internal (Deci and Ryan, 2000). For example, if one engages in something because someone will pay for it, their

motivation is controlled, not autonomous. In practice, the different motivational types often overlap and vary. However, extrinsic rewards can make people feel controlled, therefore undermining otherwise intrinsic motivations (Deci and Ryan, 2000).

SDT defines three basic psychological needs on which autonomous motivation is dependant. These needs are competence or effectance, autonomy or self-determination, and relatedness or belongingness (Deci et al., 2017). According to SDT, these basic needs are innate, psychological requirements for ongoing psychological growth, integrity, and well-being. Workplaces supporting the satisfaction of these needs do not only facilitate autonomous motivation amongst their employees but also enhance their work performance and well-being (Deci and Ryan, 2000). In knowledge-intensive work autonomous motivation is crucial, and for SMOs its importance is especially increased. Without motivated employees who want to perform well and organize their work in the best possible way there would not be SMOs (Kostamo and Martela, 2017).

2.2.2 Characteristics of self-leadership

Manz and Sims Jr (1980) state that from an individual's perspective self-management includes setting personal goals, making decisions in order to achieve those goals, and working on one's own behaviour patterns. Stewart et al. (2011) present self-leadership not as a discrete construct but rather a continuum ranging from externally managed work where an individual has no say on what, how, and why they work to fully empowered self-leadership where the individual gets to influence it all (Table 2.3). On the externally managed end of the continuum all the incentives are extrinsic, whereas on the self-leadership end there are at least some intrinsic motivations for the work.

Table 2.3: Continuum of self-leadership at individual and team levels (based on Stewart et al., 2011)

EXTERNALLY MANAGED	SELF-MANAGEMENT	SELF-LEADERSHIP
No influence over **what**, **how**, and **why** of work	Influence over **how** of work	Influence over **what**, **how**, and **why** of work
Dependent only on extrinsic incentives	Mainly dependent on extrinsic incentives	Dependent on intrinsic and extrinsic incentives

Åhman (2004) divides self-leadership into nine components: professional expertise, target-orientation, leading one's own mind, physical condition, managing one's financial situation, time-management, social situation, knowing oneself, and fulfilling oneself. The different components are not separate from each other but rather overlap and influence each other in various ways. Åhman especially highlights the importance of leading one's own mind. "Leading" does not, in this context, mean controlling, but knowing oneself and steering the mind into the right direction whether it is about one's feelings, thoughts, or will.

While there are various different ways to describe self-leadership, common threads amongst most of them are in accordance with the continuum in Table 2.3: self-leadership requires the ability to set goals and targets, motivation to work towards them, and a satisfactory skill set to both organize one's work and reach the goals. According to Laloux (2016), self-leadership and the ongoing upheaval in work life also requires revision of work in its entirety. For example, people often have strong ideas about what is appropriate at work or in a work context and what is not, and self-leadership often means letting those ideas go (Laloux, 2016).

From an organizational perspective self-leadership is beneficial for numerous reasons. Giving employees more autonomy can lead to stronger collegiality amongst the employees, but also higher loyalty towards the organization (Hamel, 2011). Maximizing employee motivation and empowerment can affect the company's earnings in a very positive way (Hamel, 2011; Kostamo and Martela, 2017). However, successful self-leadership from the employees'

part also requires support from the organization's part. Facilitating self-leadership within an organization does not mean letting everyone do what they think is best. Instead, finding a shared direction towards a common goal is important. Self-leading employees do not necessarily make the company's leader's job easier but it changes and maybe becomes even more interesting with new challenges (Åhman, 2004).

2.3 Burnout, work-engagement and recovery

The first research articles naming and defining burnout date to the 1970s (Maslach and Schaufeli, 2017). Maslach et al. (2001, p. 397) define burnout as follows: "burnout is a prolonged response to chronic emotional and interpersonal stressors on the job, and is defined by the three dimensions of exhaustion, cynicism, and inefficacy." Out of these three dimensions exhaustion is the most well known and most analysed. Cynicism refers to cynicism towards work and depersonalization by the attempt to put distance between oneself and one's work. Inefficacy refers to reduced personal accomplishment (Maslach et al., 2001).

Bakker et al. (2008, pp.187-188) define work engagement as "a positive, fulfilling, affective-motivational state of work-related well-being." Burnout and work engagement are often presented as opposites, although there is no consensus amongst researchers whether work engagement is an exact opposite of burnout or rather an independent concept negatively related to burnout (Bakker et al., 2014). However, work engagement is characterized by energy, involvement, and efficacy, which are the opposites of burnout characteristics exhaustion, cynicism, and ineffectiveness (Bakker et al., 2008). Work engagement has been found to be an important factor protecting an employee from burnout (Bakker et al., 2014; Hakanen, 2011).

According to Hakanen (2011), in practice an employee experiencing work engagement is usually content to go to work in the morning, finds their job meaningful, and enjoy their work. This does not implicate that only people

who find their work pleasant could be engaged in it. Conversely, work engagement increases an employee's resiliency in difficult situations (Hakanen, 2011) and, in turn, increasing demands in one's work can boost their work engagement (Bakker et al., 2014). Furthermore, engaged employees find their work enriching their whole life, are more satisfied with their roles as a partner or a parent, and are altogether happier than their peers (Hakanen, 2011).

In addition to the benefits work engagement has for the employee experiencing it, engagement is a desirable phenomenon also from an organizational perspective. Engaged employees perform better in their work than non-engaged employees (Bakker et al., 2008). One of the reasons for the better performance is their better psychological and physical health, which in turn benefits the employer (Bakker et al., 2014, 2008). Another benefit for the employer — and also a reason for the engaged employees' better performance — is that engaged employees tend to transfer their engagement to others around them, thus creating a positive vortex (Bakker et al., 2008). In addition, engaged employees also invoke customer satisfaction, take initiative in their work, commit to their employer, and want to continue their career longer than their peers (Hakanen, 2011).

2.3.1 Job demands-resources model

The job demands-resources model (JD-R model) is an occupational stress model describing the effect job demands and job resources have on work engagement and burnout; in short, job demands may lead to exhaustion or other health problems, whereas job resources may incite learning, commitment, and work engagement, therefore affecting on employee well-being positively (Bakker and Demerouti, 2007). Job demands refer to those aspects of the job that require sustained physical, cognitive, or emotional effort, whereas job resources refer to those aspects that either reduce job demands or help to empower an employee, for example by helping them to achieve work goals or stimulating their personal growth (Bakker et al., 2014).

Job demands are not necessarily negative aspects but they are factors that may turn into job stressors if the situation is excessively prolonged or there are too many demands and too little opportunities to recover from stressors. For example, a pressured situation at work is not necessarily a hindrance. However, if such situation continues for too long, it turns into a strain (Bakker and Demerouti, 2007).

Job resources include, for instance, getting social support from colleagues, getting feedback from performance, and supervisory coaching (Bakker et al., 2014). While instruments for dealing with jobs demands are a part of job resources, the resources are necessary also in their own right (Bakker and Demerouti, 2007).

In addition to job resources and job demands, personal resources and job crafting are also included in the JD-R model presented in Figure 2.1. Personal resources are positive views on self including self-esteem, optimism and self-efficacy. Personal resources and work engagement predict job resources, and vice versa (Bakker et al., 2014).

According to Wrzesniewski and Dutton (2001), job crafting refers to actions of adjustment or reform regarding the work tasks, their implementation, the work environment, or other work aspects. Such crafting alters work meanings and work identity by affecting the job design as well as the social environment of the job. These transformations to the social environment include altering the interactions and relationships with others at work (Wrzesniewski and Dutton, 2001).
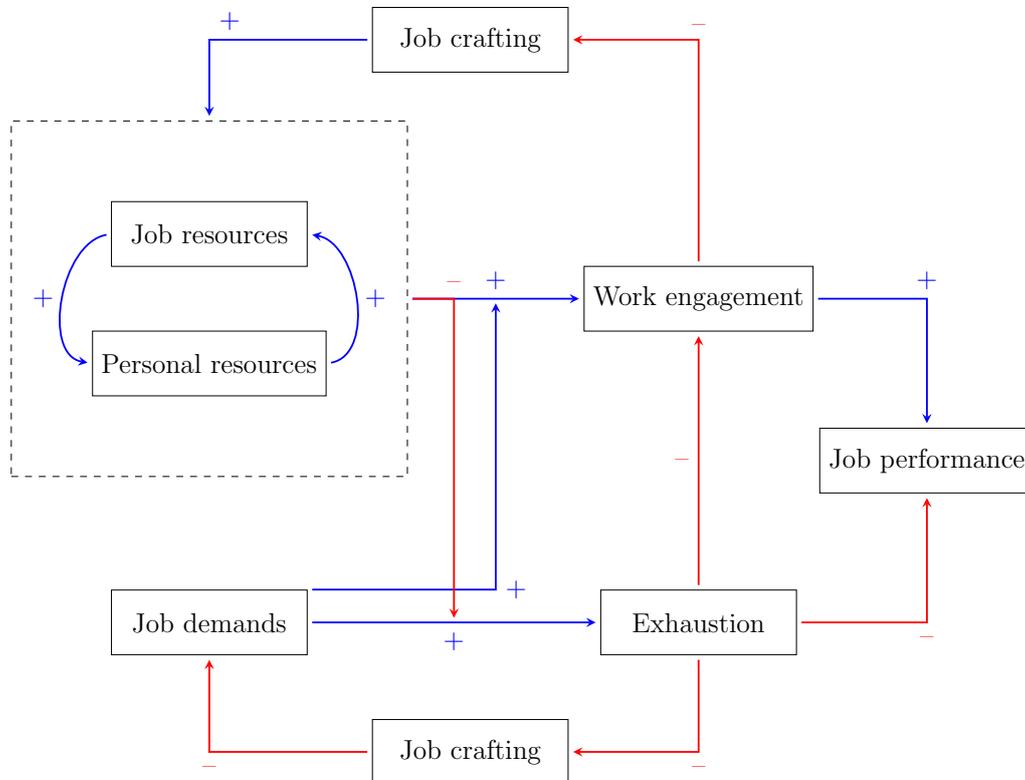
Figure 2.1: The job demands-resources model (based on Bakker et al., 2014)

The JD-R model in Figure 2.1 also presents the two-way interaction between job demands and resources in predicting occupational well-being. The first interaction is the buffer effect resources have on job demands, in other words, job resources prevent the development of job demands into strain. The second interaction is the amplifying effect job demands have on the impact of job resources on engagement; that is, the higher the job demands, the more the job resources affect work engagement.

To summarize, an organization can reduce the risk factors for burnout by enhancing job resources and reducing straining job demands as well as enabling work engagement amongst the employees. The development of burnout and its effects on an individual are briefly discussed in Section 2.3.2 to better understand the concept of recovery discussed in Section 2.3.3.

2.3.2 Development of burnout

As described in the beginning of Section 2.3, burnout is a state of disorder caused by prolonged occupational stress. "Stress" as a term is not used unambiguously in literature, but in this literature review the definitions from Le Fevre et al. (2003, p.728) are used: *stressor* for "an external force or situation acting on the individual", and *stress* "the deformation or changes produced in the individual as a result of those forces." Stress itself is a vital concept, as it is the human reaction mechanism for disruptions of homeostasis or threats to well-being (Ulrich-Lai and Herman, 2009). That reaction can be perceived by the human as pleasant, when stress can be called *eustress*, or unpleasant in the case of *distress* (Le Fevre et al., 2003). Whichever the case, the physical reaction is the same.

According to Ahola et al. (2012), stress is often measured based on self-evaluation, but it can be measured by other means as well. Perhaps the most well-known way is by measuring heart rate variability, which reflects the status of autonomous nervous system. The more relaxed the individual is, the greater their heart rate variability. When the activation level increases, sympathetic nervous system activates and the heart rate variability decreases (Ahola et al., 2012). Heart rate variability alone is not a sufficient measurement for burnout, as it can be affected by various different things, such as illnesses. Measuring heart rate variability can, however, give some indications on whether a person is recovering from stress or not (Seppänen, 2012).

Burnout itself is not an illness, although an increased risk for many illnesses as well as work-related accidents is related to it. Burnout is characterized by severe exhaustion, cynicism towards work, and reduced professional efficacy (Maslach et al., 2001). According to Hakanen (2004), the development of burnout starts with gradually increasing exhaustion, when job demands and pressures are too high and recovery from them is insufficient. As the exhaustion grows more severe, the employee starts to shelter from the pressures and guilt caused by exhaustion. This, in turn, leads to growing cynicism and

questioning the meaning of work. In the end, exhaustion, cynicism, and the feeling of inadequacy caused by them together have a negative effect on the employee's self-image and their professional self-esteem (Hakanen, 2004).

If an individual's ability to work is reduced or general ability to function is affected by the burnout, a sick leave may be required (Tuunainen et al., 2011). This thesis does not cover the medical aspects of burnout or take a stand on its treatment. Nevertheless, it should be noted that every burnout situation is unique, to the point where the usefulness of taking a sick leave varies between individuals. For some it might be more beneficial to continue at work even if their ability to work is lower than usual (Tuunainen et al., 2011).

2.3.3 Recovery from work

Recovery from work is a psycho–physiological process during which the employee's stress and strain levels descend to the level they were before the work day (Siltaloppi and Kinnunen, 2007). Even though the importance of recovery is evident in particularly demanding situations or jobs with an expressly high strain level, it is crucial also for employees with high levels of work engagement and enthusiasm about their work. According to Hakanen (2011), employees highly engaged in work tend to be more devoted to work than others. Such devotion in turn can lead them to accept more work tasks or help their colleagues. Such actions increase the workload and are tiring, however rewarding they may be (Hakanen, 2011).

On a psychological level, recovery means reduction in the experienced stress and exhaustion. A recovered individual feels ready to face new challenges or continue their current activities. On a physiological level, recovery means the individual's activation and stress levels reduce to the prestressor level (Siltaloppi and Kinnunen, 2007).

Sonnentag and Fritz (2007) present four mechanisms for recovery:

1. *Psychological detachment*, which refers to a state of mental disengagement from work. This happens when one is not occupied by work-related duties or actively engaging in job-related activities. In other words, it is not enough to physically leave the workplace to recover from work, but one also needs to think about other matters than work. If the mind continuously revolves around work-related matters, recovery cannot occur fully.

2. *Relaxation*, which refers to a state of low activation and increased positive affect. Decreased activation helps restoring the prestressor state after prolonged activation, and positive emotions reduce negative affect caused by job stress. Relaxation can be achieved, for example, by meditation or taking a light walk outdoors.

3. *Mastery experiences* refer to challenging experiences and learning opportunities unrelated to work. Examples of such activities include learning a new language, climbing a mountain, and volunteer work. Mastery experiences can, in turn, put additional demands on the individual, but their impact on recovery is based on the effect they eventually have in building new personal resources for the individual.

4. *Control during leisure time*, which refers to the degree to which an individual can decide how they spend their free time. Control during leisure time affects recovery due to the innate need to control events of one's own life. Perceived inability to react and influence one's social world can augment their distress levels, whereas control can increase one's self-efficacy and feelings of competence which in turn enhance well-being.

Age can also affect on an individual's abilities to recover. A Finnish study conducted amongst over 16 000 participants aged from 18 to 65 found that the older individuals had stronger stress reactions and their recovery was weaker than the younger individuals, whereas the younger individuals were stressed more often (Föhr et al., 2016).

Due to the growing amount of knowledge work as well as the technological development, a growing amount of work is done at home. The line between work and free time vacillates more than before. This makes detachment from work more difficult than before (Siltaloppi and Kinnunen, 2007). The importance of psychological detachment does not mean that it is always harmful to think work-related matters during free time (Sallinen and Ahola, 2012). In contrast, it can be beneficial for recovery, for example in difficult situations when a solution to a work-related problem comes to mind during free time, causing positive emotions and reducing stress (Sonnentag and Fritz, 2007).

Physical activity can be a factor in psychological detachment, mastery experiences, or control during leisure time, but it in itself has also an effect on recovery. In the short term physical activity can disturb recovery during the following night, but in the long term regular physical activity enhances recovery during sleep (Föhr et al., 2016).

While evenings, weekends, and holidays are the main time for recovery, the rhythm of the working day also plays an important role in recovery. Controlling the workload and taking breaks during the day can significantly reduce stress and therefore make recovery easier after work (Sallinen and Ahola, 2012). Sianoja et al. (2018) found that when employees engaged either in slow park walks or relaxation exercises during their lunch break, they experienced increased concentration and decreased fatigue and strain in the afternoon. However, in an interview with *Helsingin Sanomat* Jessica de Bloom, one of the researchers, remarked that even though the research participants enjoyed the experiment, very few of them continued this lunch break routine after the experiment ended (Junttila, 2017).

In addition to working day and free time activities, sleep is vital for recovery. During sleep the body and brain recover from the day (Sonnentag and Fritz, 2007). However, it is important to realize that not all time spent asleep is recovering. A Finnish physiological analytics provider, Firstbeat, conducts heart rate variability measurements. According to their data of

30 000 Finnish people, most of them in work life, on average only 60% of time spent asleep is recovery time (Nyman, 2017).

To recapitulate, recovery is significant for everyone. The more one experiences stress, the more they should invest in recovery, whether the stress is positive or negative. The main factors affecting recovery are sleep, physical activity, workload, taking breaks during the working day, psychological detachment from work during free time, relaxation, learning opportunities unrelated to work, and having control over how to spend one's free time.

Chapter 3

Methodology

This chapter describes the methods used and data of the research. First, an overview to the research approach and the methods is given. Then, the case companies and their selection process is described. Afterwards, the data collection process is described and the chosen data collection methods justified. To conclude, the data analysis process is explained. The actual results of the data analysis are presented in Chapter 4.

3.1 Research approach

The goal of the study is to understand how the case companies, as well as other similar organizations, can aid their employees' work recovery. As defined in Section 1.2, the research questions are as follows:

RQ1: How do the employees in the case organizations experience self-organizing?

RQ2: What kind of experiences do the employees in the case organizations have about work well-being, burnout, and recovery?

The aim of the research questions is to comprehend human behaviour, opinions and experiences, and the goal of the study is to build an understanding of the issues related to work well-being from a novel perspective. Hence, a qualitative approach is required (Kothari, 2004; Seaman, 1999). More precisely, a design science research approach was chosen for this study because "it is aimed at designing actionable knowledge to address field problems" and it considers "knowledge as a means, not as an end" (Van Aken, 2015, p.1).

Van Aken (2015) also states that design science research consists of three different phases: an explanatory part where the problem is analysed and framed, a design part where an intervention is designed, and a testing part to see whether the intervention is suitable for solving the problem. In this study, the explanatory phase is performed, and, based on the analysis, suggestions for the interventions are made. However, the testing part is outside the scope of this research.

3.2   Case companies

The research was conducted within three case companies, all Finnish software consultancies. During the planning phase of the research, a total of seven companies were contacted. The criteria for the case companies was that they were mature software consultancy companies working in a self-organized manner. Here, mature meant that the companies had several years' experience with this working method. The companies were also required to be relatively advanced in matters regarding employee well-being. This is because rather than addressing major existing well-being challenges the research focuses on what successful companies can do to facilitate their employees' work recovery.

Out of the contacted seven companies, three ended up participating in the research: Nitor Group oy, Solita oy, and Vincit oyj. However, all the contacted companies found the subject very relevant and confirmed that they recognize the research subject as something worth studying. This validated

the need for the research in a broader context.

Two of the case companies had a similar, very flat organizational structure. In Nitor, the CEO was the manager of all of their employees, approximately 200 in total. Previously, Vincit had a same kind of organizational structure, but they had altered it about a year before this research started. Instead of having only one manager for everyone, they had six different units in Finland and one in California, and these units had one manager each. Vincit had over 450 employees. Solita was larger with over 800 employees, and had a more traditional organizational structure. No matter the structure, their way of working was very similar to the other two. As previously stated, all the companies were very self-managing and their employees had the power to organize their own work.

The research examined the three case companies collectively, and no distinction was made between them. This approach is due to the nature of the research: the goal of this research is to investigate shared experiences and problems in the field of SMOs rather than study a specific company. This also helps to ensure the research participants' anonymity. Anonymity is essential, since the research topic is of a delicate nature.

3.3   Data collection

The main data is collected through one-on-one interviews with the case companies' expert employees. This data is analysed to answer the research questions. In addition to this main data, the various interactions between the researcher and the case companies' HR specialists are also considered as part of the research data. These include the interviews with the case companies' HR specialists at the start of the research project, the workshop with the HR specialists, and the discussions about the preliminary results after the interviews. This additional data enables triangulation and exploring the findings from the main data from different perspectives. As described in Section 3.1, the implementation and testing of the interventions suggested on the grounds

of the research findings are outside the scope of this thesis. Therefore, the workshop and other discussions with the HR specialists are the primary way of validating the research findings.

The different phases of the empirical research are presented in Table 3.1. The literature review in Chapter 2 was written concurrently with the empirical research. In the following subsections the different data collection methods are presented in a chronological order: the interviews with the HR specialists in Section 3.3.1, the interviews with the experts in Section 3.3.2, and the workshop in Section 3.3.3.

Table 3.1: The empirical research timeline, 2019

10 January – 27 February	Negotiations with possible case companies
28 February	Three case companies signed up
27–29 March	Interviews with the HR specialists from each company
1–18 April	Interviews with the experts
1 April – 6 May	Preliminary analysis of the interviews
9 May	Workshop with the HR specialists
10 May – 26 August	Further analysis of the interviews
3–6 June	The meetings with the HR specialists

3.3.1 Interviews with HR specialists

To start the research process, HR specialists from all three case companies were interviewed. In two of the interviews there were several specialists present and in the third interview only one. The main goal of these interviews was for the researcher to get to know the case companies better. Although there were some preliminary discussions about the companies' ways of working and the challenges they are facing in the negotiation phase before starting the study, it was necessary to know more so that the theme interviews with

the experts could be planned in the best possible way.

The interviews consisted of three different themes: the vision of the organization, well-being in the organization, and the organization's practices related to self-organizing and well-being. Full interview structure can be found from Appendix A. The themes were chosen to understand the organization's background, goals, and ways of working as well as the organizational structures and practices. The interviews lasted 1 hour and 2 minutes, 1 hour and 4 minutes, and 1 hour and 39 minutes.

3.3.2 Theme interviews with experts

Theme interviews were chosen as the main data collection method due to the nature of the research: in order to build an understanding about the employees' experiences it is crucial to know *how* they express their feelings and thoughts about well-being and self-leadership themselves. Altogether 15 experts were interviewed: four from Solita, five from Vincit, and six from Nitor. The number of participants varied due to the number of people who volunteered for participation. The only specification for the participants was that they had experienced some kind of difficulties with coping with work. This description was chosen for two reason, regardless of the presumption that it suits almost any employee. The first reason for not defining the criteria more specifically, for instance limiting the interviewees only to those who had experienced burnout, was the explorative nature of the study. It was the intention to hear different kinds of experiences and viewpoints on the subject. The second reason for the somewhat broad definition was concern about whether people will want to be interviewed about such delicate subject.

As the interviews focused mainly on the interviewees' personal experiences, the interviews were semi-structured consisting mainly of open-ended questions. While it was important to have the same outline for all the interviews, due to the broad criteria for the interviewees the interview questions varied according to the interviewee's experiences.

The employees of the case companies were contacted by e-mail explaining the research subject and how they could participate. In two of the case companies the invitation to participate was forwarded through a general communication channel and the experts willing to participate contacted the researcher directly, so that no one else in the organization knew they were going to participate in the research. For anonymity reasons the research participants from these companies were also offered a possibility to hold the interview in some other place than their office. Due to some practical reasons, most of the interviews with the employees from the third company were held in their office and an HR specialist helped the researcher by contacting people they thought might be willing to participate. There was no other incentive for research participation than goodwill and willingness to help in the research.

All interviews were conducted face-to-face with only the researcher and the interviewee present. The interviews were conducted in Finnish, recorded and transcribed. The interviews varied in length from 32 minutes to 78 minutes. All the interviewees were Finnish, aged from 30 to 46. Four out of the 15 participants were female, and there was at least one female interviewee from each of the companies. The uneven gender ratio was not in any way intentional, but did not come as a surprise considering the uneven gender ratio within the IT field.

In the beginning of the interview a short introduction into the study was given, the anonymity explained, and permission for recording asked. Then some background questions about the interviewee's education and their role in the case organization were asked. After this three themes were covered in the interview: the interviewee's own story and experiences about the company and coping with work, well-being in the company in general from the interviewee's point-of-view, and the interviewee's experiences and viewpoints about the ways of working in general in the company. Most often this lead the conversation first into more private questions and then into more general ones, but it was necessary to discuss the interviewee's experiences about coping with work first to make sure the time did not run out before that main theme. Full interview structure can be found in Appendix B, although due

to the interviews' thematic nature the questions were not exactly the same for everyone.

During the interview the researcher's goal was to focus fully on the interviewee. Therefore no notes were taken during the interview. After each interview the researcher made brief notes about the main themes and ideas that came up in that interview. Furthermore, after the first interviews some alterations were made to the interview questions. These alterations were due either to noticed unclarities or gaps in the interview questions.

3.3.3   Workshop

After the expert interviews and their preliminary analysis, a co-design workshop with the case companies' HR specialists was arranged. There were altogether eight participants in the workshop, three from two of the companies and two from the third. All of the HR specialists who were interviewed in the beginning of the project (as described in Section 3.3.1) participated in the workshop, and in addition there were two more participants.

In addition to the actual participants, the researcher and the supervisor of this thesis were also present. They co-operated in designing and running the workshop.

The workshop consisted of three different phases:

1. Presentation of the main interview findings

2. Two workshop exercises to address the presented problems

3. Presentation of the preliminary hypotheses based on the interview findings

The main findings from the interviews were first presented by the researcher without going into the question of how to solve these issues. At this point, the findings presented were about hidden hierarchies within the organizations, social pressures and hidden values the interviewees perceived, and how

the interviewees' own beliefs and mindsets affect their ways of working and organizing. (As the data analysis was finalized after the workshop, the amount of findings increased. A full account of the research findings can be found in Chapter 4.) In addition to the themes, some direct quotes from the interviews were also included to make the findings more concrete and easier to relate to for the workshop participants.

After this, two different workshop exercises were carried out. The eight workshop participants were divided into two groups of four people. The first exercise was a playful one to warm the participants up. In the exercise one group had to come up with suggestions for how a very authoritarian organization would solve the problems by rules. The second group's task was to brainstorm ideas about how a kindergarten would solve the problems by building the right kind of environment.

The second exercise brought the discussion back to the context of the case companies. Both groups were trying to figure out the best practices for their field of business to tackle the problems.

To conclude the workshop, the researcher presented their thoughts about the interview findings. At this point, there were two main conclusions or hypotheses based on the preliminary data analysis. The first was that successful self-leadership is not something that is done alone, but that social constructions around the individual are an important part of self-leadership. The second was that there are three paths leading to burnout: not slowing down at work when something wearing is happening in one's personal life, pushing oneself over limits when no-one is watching or preventing it from happening, and extrinsic motivations coming in the way of work engagement and intrinsic motivation.

During the workshop, both the researcher and the thesis supervisor made notes about the questions that arose, the case companies' existing practices that were brought up, the problems the participants found the most relevant, and the ideas for solutions to those problems.

About four weeks after the workshop the researcher met all the workshop

participants and a few additional HR specialists again, each organization individually. In two of the organizations the participants in the meetings were the same as in the workshop, and in the third one there were also two more people present. In these meetings the findings were presented again to refresh memory about the workshop, and then the ideas about potential next steps were discussed. These meetings were especially important for the researcher to get feedback from the workshop and the research in general, and they also provided an opportunity to discuss and clarify the results in greater detail, as at this point the results were not elaborated in writing.

The feedback from the workshop was positive and the HR specialists found the workshop useful. The presented results did not come as a surprise for the HR specialists, but they found it valuable that the experiences were collected and the findings distilled. Discussions in the meetings after the workshop were not recorded, but the researcher made notes of the feedback, questions, and the HR specialists' ideas for the next steps in their company.

Both the workshop and the discussion after the workshop were valuable for validating the research findings. Furthermore, the feedback and questions from the HR specialists aided in formulating Chapters 4 and 5 of this thesis as informative as possible.

3.4 Data analysis

Due to the explorative nature of the study and the aim to build an understanding of a newly identified problem, grounded theory was chosen as the data analysis method. As grounded theory enables generating theory initially from the data and involves the theory generation and the social research in the same process (Strauss and Corbin, 1994), it suited this research well.

According to Green et al. (2007), there are four steps of data analysis for generating qualitative evidence:

1. Data immersion

2. Coding

3. Creating categories

4. Identifying themes

The same steps were followed in the data analysis of this study. The first step, immersion in the data, begun already when conducting the interviews and continued through the preliminary data analysis as the interview notes and transcripts were read time after time. Immersion in the data makes the data analysis more manageable as the researcher already starts to build ideas about the analysis (Green et al., 2007).

The second step, coding, was conducted using open or initial coding (Saldaña, 2013). The coding was done by using ATLAS.ti. Interview quotations were assigned codes, and new codes were created as they emerged. After all the interviews were coded, the codes were looked through to see if some of them overlapped enough to merge them into one code.

In the third step, creating categories, the codes were grouped in a couple of different ways to build a comprehensive understanding about the findings and how they are linked to each other. After this the findings were reflected in the research questions to see which findings are significant for answering the research questions and which, in the end, are unrelated to them.

Finally the fourth step, identifying themes, was taken to present the results in a comprehensive manner. According to Green et al. (2007), generating the themes is more about interpreting the issue under investigation rather than only describing the problem. As the objective of the study was to create actionable knowledge for the case companies, some interpretation of the findings was required in order to provide the practical implications in

Section 5.2. Therefore, after the main findings and themes were identified, they were were listed and divided according to the research question they were related to.

In relation to RQ1 *(How do the employees in the case organizations experience self-organizing?)*, three main themes were identified. These themes were management and self-management, organizational structures, and the somewhat hidden factors affecting the employees' ways of working and how they organize their own work. These factors include hidden values, social pressures, and the individuals' own beliefs and mindsets. All the research findings concerning RQ1 came under one of these themes.

Similarly, regarding RQ2 *(What kind of experiences do the employees in the case organizations have about work well-being, burnout, and recovery?)* the identified main themes were work recovery, main reasons behind burnout and other coping problems, and experiences in the burnout situations.

Once the themes around the main findings had been identified, the interview transcriptions were coded once more according to which main finding and which theme they most related to. This was done to help the writing process and to find the most illuminating quotes to make the results (Chapter 4) more comprehensible and interesting for the reader.

Chapter 4

Results

This chapter presents the answers to the two empirical research questions by looking at the theme interviews. The answers to the first research question *(RQ1: How do the employees in the case organizations experience self-organizing?)* are presented in Section 4.1 and the answers to the second research question *(RQ2: What kind of experiences do the employees in the case organizations have about work well-being, burnout, and recovery?)* in Section 4.2. The results are further discussed in Chapter 5.

The quotes in this chapter are from the interviews but they have been translated from Finnish into English and, in some cases, been compacted. The tone of the quotes has been kept to the best of the researcher's ability. All of the findings presented in the results have been found from multiple interviews but, due to the qualitative nature of the study, they are still individual experiences. Thus, the experiences are real but this research does not take a stand on their generalizability.

4.1 Experiencing self-organizing

The main findings concerning the first research question *(RQ1: How do the employees in the case organizations experience self-organizing?)* are first

briefly listed here, and then discussed more thoroughly in the subsections, one by one.

Findings concerning management and self-management:

– For many, the self-managing way of working is difficult at first

– In general, the experts enjoy the self-managing way of working

– Sometimes it is difficult to get support or feedback, especially if it is unclear from whom to ask for them

– The experts are willing to take responsibility and sometimes think that some aspects cannot be influenced by the employer

– The experts do not need supervisors in their work tasks as such

– Several interviewees brought up a desire for stronger leadership

Findings concerning the organizational structures:

– In case of more traditional organizational structures experts experience the same level of autonomy in their work as in more radical SMOs

– The formal, more traditional, organizational structures support employees

– Self-management is often associated with a perceived lack of structures and hierarchy

– The experts perceive hidden structures and hierarchies in their organizations

Perceived hidden values, social pressures and the individuals' own beliefs and mindsets have a strong effect on the experts and how they organize their work. These include the following issues:

– What kind of employees are valued within the organization

– How the employees compare themselves to others

– How constant busyness and the use of time are discussed

– Pressures from the client and the need to please the client as much as possible

– The difference in value between billable and non-billable work

- The ability to draw the line between work and free time
- What is perceived as work or working
- Monetary incentives to work in a certain way

4.1.1 Management and self-management

4.1.1.1 For many, the self-managing way of working is difficult at first

Many interviewees brought up how it took some time to get used to the self-managing way of working, and how even if they know they could make a certain decision, they do not necessarily dare to do it. One interviewee mentioned it took them at least two years before they dared to start operating in the self-managing fashion of the company. Another told about their difficulties in adapting to company practices:

> "But then in the beginning I was a little like, our team lead, I sought all kinds of things from them, like tomorrow I'll come to work at eight or tomorrow at ten, and then they were like 'I'm really not very interested'. So then — but at first I needed some help with it, but then I caught on."

The interviewees who mentioned the difficulties in the beginning also expressed positive feelings about self-management at present. Some of them pointed out how it might be difficult to work in any other way once they have adopted the self-managing way of working:

> "At first it was a bit surprising that I can really decide things myself, I can buy what I need, like online courses or whatever. To have permission to do things. It was confusing but now it is such a built-in property that it would be strange if I had to ask for permission, and someone said that no, you can't do something."

4.1.1.2 In general, the experts enjoy the self-managing way of working

All of the interviewees expressed mainly positive feelings about working in an SMO, and all of them were more or less happy with their current employer. Many of the interviewees had ended up in the case companies after some bad experiences in more traditional organizations. When asked about how starting work in their current company felt like, one of them described their feelings as follows:

> "I escaped the culture [of the previous employer]. Someone I knew who already worked here had praised the culture. And starting here felt wonderful: Here people take you seriously, practicalities were taken care of right away, your workstation is set up as quickly as possible, so that you can get your hands on actual work."

The company culture and its significance for the experts recurred in many interviews. One interviewee described their view on the culture as follows:

> "This is a culture company anyway, so the aim is not to make the most profit ever but work in a nice environment and do meaningful things."

The culture was repeated in the answers also when asked what they thought were the best things about their employer. Many brought up the freedom to make decisions, such as this interviewee:

> "The flexibility and freedom with everything [are the best things in the company], you can freely bring up issues, and everything can be negotiated."

The cultural flexibility and freedom were also brought up by this next interviewee, who expressed that the company culture is one that allows itself and the company practices to be altered when needed:

> "On no account I consider changing to another company, no...
> Probably our best competitors have a very similar culture, but it
> wouldn't be worth changing, because I believe that I can change
> things here if I come up with the next best thing."

4.1.1.3 The experts do not need supervisors in their work tasks as such

No matter the different organizational structures, the interviewees from all of
the case companies experienced a similar, very high level of self-management
in their work. They all expressed strong feelings of autonomy in their work
and positive feelings about it, and found the idea of supervisors affecting
their daily work tasks useless:

> "I don't think it [not having supervisors] affects the project work
> in any way. Or, what I get my salary for, that has nothing to do
> with a supervisor, the work doesn't require a supervisor."

The fact that the employers trust their employees to be the best experts of
their own jobs appears to be very significant to the experts. Being trusted
was brought up as the best thing in the company by several interviewees:

> "The best thing here is the trust you are given, I'm the best
> authority of my own work."

> "Here, you are trusted to do the right things, no one tries to tell
> you how you should achieve your outcome."

Especially the interviewees who had had unpleasant experiences with their
previous employer(s) found the trust and autonomy a remarkable thing in
the organization:

"[With a previous employer] I felt like I was just part of a machine, a system I could not affect at all. After previous experiences it was shocking to actually get to decide how I do my own job. It's refreshing to choose how to do things."

4.1.1.4 Sometimes it is difficult to get support or feedback, especially if it is unclear from whom to ask for them

Some of the interviewees brought up difficulties in getting instructions or support for their decisions. It seems that even though the experts can, in theory, make decisions quite freely, they often find it challenging in practice. This can happen with very practical details, such as selecting the cost pool on which to log certain working hours, or with organizing the work, like how much time one uses on internal development rather than billable consulting work.

This might be the other side of the trust described in the Section 4.1.1.3. In some cases, the culture of trusting that everyone can make the best decisions can even override a direct question:

"I asked my manager which project I should log certain hours to, that I find it difficult to know, and before [bringing up the issue] they've been saying that 'use your own judgement, you know how these are done.' But then I didn't dare say that I don't actually know. I didn't know how to bring it up, really."

Furthermore, especially in the case of the more radical SMOs, the problem of not knowing from whom to ask arises sometimes, as there are no supervisors. One of the interviewees compared their current situation with the course of action of their previous employer as follows:

"And if I have something to ask, with my previous employer, it was very easy to just ask my team supervisor. But here I still

[even after a while] don't know from whom to ask. Usually I ask someone who has been here longer than me, and then they say that 'I don't know, ask someone else.' It's difficult in a way, and sometimes annoying."

4.1.1.5 The experts are willing to take responsibility and sometimes think that some aspects cannot be influenced by the employer

Perhaps due to the self-managing culture and the freedom to make decisions, some of the experts do not even expect much leadership from their employer. In some cases, they find that their employer cannot do anything about certain problems. This feeling can arise in situations where they work very closely with a client and maybe even on the client's premises, so that many practical matters are decided by the client rather than their own employer, or in situations where they simply feel they should tackle the problem themself because they are used to everything being their own responsibility.

It seems that especially the way one organizes their work is considered a personal matter rather than something the employer could affect by leadership or instructions. One example of this viewpoint is the following comment:

> "We don't have many boundaries here, and that can be risky too, that you are the only one who can determine how you work. So of course you can lead yourself either to a total burnout or find your way to bloom and continuously get positive feedback."

The interviewees were asked about how they thought their colleagues were doing and coping with their work. One of the answers to this question brought up the interviewee's doubts about whether the employer can affect the employees' work well-being or not:

> "I think there already is [a problem with work well-being], if I was on the board of directors I would have already raised a red flag,

like what we should do differently [so people would feel better].
But then again, I don't know what the company could do, most
of the time we work so closely with the client anyway."

Both of these quotations emphasize the importance of personal responsibility,
rather than considering the employer as an entity with an active role in their
employees' working conditions.

4.1.1.6 Several interviewees brought up a desire for stronger leadership

Even though the experts underline their own personal responsibility and do
not long for a supervisor in their daily tasks, several interviewees expressed
a desire for stronger leadership in their company. This happened in various
different contexts. For example, one interviewee pointed out that it would
be good to have clearer goals:

"It would be nice if some clear lines were drawn. I feel like I'm
still a bit young or don't really have the seniority to make certain
decisions. It would be nice if some kind of suggestions came from
higher in the organization about the course we're going to take.
I don't want micromanaging at all, but if you only got a very
vague goal which is moving all the time it's really difficult to go
towards it."

Another interviewee told about their experience when starting in the company and the difficulties to adopt the radical self-managing way of working:

"After about six months [in the company] I got quite a crisis, I
longed for someone to lead me. That we would have a common
meaning on which I could orient myself. But then I just had to
accept that there is no such thing and there is not going to be."

One interviewee brought up the importance of occasionally getting feedback or approval for certain decisions from someone else, and that it might mean more if it came from someone in a higher position:

> "If your peer tells you that this is okay, it doesn't really — it is nice, but it is worth more if it comes from somewhere above you. I want to say I don't appreciate hierarchies much, but then it still... It feels different."

Some of the interviewees pointed out that supervisors might be able to help with scaling the workload and therefore with work well-being, such as in this example:

> "For the most part I think people here are doing great, but sometimes you hear something, there have been some burnouts. It probably is in a sense because there is no manager, for better or for worse... Having managers is difficult, but then again they can take care of these things, see that there isn't too much pressure. Take responsibility for it, kind of."

This desire for stronger leadership appears to be in conflict with the enjoyment the employees express towards the self-managing way of working (Section 4.1.1.2) and their feelings of not requiring supervisors (Section 4.1.1.3). This contradiction is further discussed in Section 5.1.

4.1.2   Organizational structures

4.1.2.1   In the case of more traditional organizational structures experts experience the same level of autonomy in their work as in more radical SMOs

As explained in Section 3.2, one of the case companies had a more traditional organizational structure than the other two whose organization was

very flat. However, the interviewees' experiences of autonomy and the way they view self-organizing did not vary according to their employer's organizational structures. On the contrary, interviewees from all the case companies described their ways of working and power to make decisions regarding their own work in a very similar manner.

One interviewee described their way of working and self-organizing in general in the following manner:

> "For me, self-organizing is about what you want to do and how you want to achieve those things. And that's what I actively do almost every day."

And even in the case of the more traditional organizational structures, the interviewees expressed their responsibility to make decisions themselves:

> "Sometimes it's even a little bit hard, every now and then I'd just like someone to tell me how something is done, but in the end I know I always have to find it out myself."

Furthermore, when asked if there is something they would like to have more power on, or things they would like to decide by themselves but cannot, most of the answers were similar to this example:

> "No, because there is so much you can decide by yourself."

4.1.2.2 The formal, more traditional, organizational structures support employees

In the case of the more traditional organizational structure, the employees feel the structures support them but do not prevent them from anything in relation to self-organizing. They find that their supervisors help them with resources and tough situations, but do not try to affect their daily work tasks:

> "I think our managers are more in a service role, it's not like 'I'm your supervisor, I will lead you.'"

When asked about the supervisor's role, one interviewee described it as follows:

> "I would say they are a coach: I can spar ideas with them, what should I do next, how should I develop my skills and where would I like my career to go."

Several interviewees noted the supervisors' role especially in difficult situations, such as in this example:

> "If I need it, I can always ask for help from my supervisor. When I had to be on sick leave, they said, 'I will take care of everything, you do not have to worry about it at all.'"

4.1.2.3 Self-management is often associated with a perceived lack of structures and hierarchy

When asked about self-management and what it means, many interviewees talked about a lack of hierarchy or organizational structures rather than their own practices. This viewpoint arose regardless of the organizational structure of the interviewee's employer. In the case of the more traditional organizational structures, one interviewee strongly associated self-management with the structures, even though they described their way of working in a very self-managing fashion:

> "Self-management, yes, we work in a self-managing way. In some units it's more prominent than in others. They don't have team structures or anything, but instead do things together."

Additionally, the interviewees from the more radical SMOs often defined self-management as something dependent on their flat organizational structure:

> "What we try to do, and what self-management actually is, is that everyone has the possibility to do things and to have an influence and that we don't have any kind of hierarchy."

It is also worth noting that in some cases, such as in the previous quote, the flat organizational structure was conjoined with a perceived lack of hierarchy. In other words, if the organizational structure is flat, it appears to be easy to consider the emergent hierarchies and structures between the employees nonexistent.

4.1.2.4   The experts perceive hidden structures and hierarchies in their organizations

Conversely to the previous section, many interviewees recognized some kind of hidden or informal hierarchies in the organizations. These can appear in everyday consulting work, such as how someone ends up on a certain case and someone else does not:

> "There has emerged some kind of, you know, certain networks have emerged amongst some people. Like, we are used to working together, so let's do this [next project] together also. There would be room for expanding that personnel a little."

Hidden hierarchies appear also in internal discussions about the organization and, for example, its future or strategy. If people who have worked in a flat organization for a very long time have different opinions about such matters than the managers of the company, it can be a difficult situation for newer employees. The discussion as a whole can feel difficult to understand, as both the managers and the long-time employees seem to have the same authority:

> "Clearly, the board of directors has a different vision [about the company and its future] from those who have been with the company from the beginning. I mean, some of the long-time employees have clearly accepted that the world has changed. And on a certain level, some still want to hang onto how the company was in the beginning. So there's a contradiction there."

Some interviewees did not recognize hidden hierarchies as such, but they did recognize hidden roles or practices. For example, one interviewee pointed out these kinds of roles related to expertise:

> "Meritocracy at least. But in a way it's in relation to what you know, it's not about doing something, it's not that someone can order you to do something or something like that. It's more about, or only about from whom you ask certain things, how a certain thing should be done."

Another interviewee brought up that it is sometimes difficult to know about existing roles and practices that have emerged during the years:

> "Well, there are hidden hierarch—, well maybe hierarchy is not the right word, but there are people who know about certain things, and who are expected to do certain things. For example, there are people who usually organize company events. [...] And you can get in on it too, but there are those kinds of hidden roles and you just need to know them."

In addition to seniority both in the field of business and within the organization, one's personality also affects one's power within the organization:

> "I think it is a matter of personality, if you are a shy person, maybe you are not the first to say that you do not want in on a certain project."

4.1.3   Beliefs, hidden values and social pressures

Perceived hidden values, social pressures and the individuals' own beliefs
and mindsets have a strong effect on the experts and how they organize their
work. The identified issues are described here, one by one.

4.1.3.1   What kind of employees are valued within the organization

Many interviewees brought up the question of what ways of working or per-
sonalities are most appreciated in the organization. One interviewee pointed
out the generally acknowledged behaviour:

> "We can suggest these rewards for colleagues, but they're always
> awarded for going above and beyond and things like that. I mean,
> not always for doing more, but it's never like, 'Pekka went home
> at four' or 'Pekka stayed at home when his child was ill, great
> job Pekka', stuff like that never comes up. Maybe it should be
> emphasized that it's a good thing to keep things in check."

Another viewpoint was that people in the organization tend to be overcon-
scientious. One interviewee brought forward that this is perhaps encouraged
by recruiting employees of a similar nature:

> "And if you could somehow get people to be a little less responsi-
> ble. I mean, we take so much responsibility, I feel like that's partly
> the reason why we burn out. We have a really thorough recruit-
> ment process, and I think that it's somehow, they [recruiters] are
> looking for people with the same nature."

4.1.3.2 How the employees compare themselves to others

Several interviewees told they tend to compare themselves to others, and that even if they realize they have different standards for themselves than for others, they still continue to compare. One example of the conflict on how one sees themselves and how they see others is the following quote:

> "I compare myself to others a lot. Everyone seems to be so efficient and then I think they *are* efficient, too, but it is not really so."

Furthermore, even without directly comparing themselves to colleagues, some interviewees brought up their previous or existing very high standards for themselves. One interviewee described their way of working — preceding their burnout — as follows:

> "I used to work for as long as it took to accomplish everything I was going to accomplish that day, and I never reached that target."

Sometimes the comparisons and very high standards are encouraged by the colleagues' ways of working. For example, one interviewee brought up both their concerns for the well-being of the organization's directors as well as for how the directors' ways of working are inconsistent with their instructions for others:

> "But you always get the feeling that they [the directors] always work their asses off, you can see they are stressed. Sometimes you think that what now, could they talk about it, so that maybe something could be done about it. If I ask them, they sometimes say things like 'yeah, I've accumulated a thousand extra hours during the years'. And of course, the way they work, the hours

accumulate all the time. But then they are a little screwed be-
cause they have brought this kind of work ethic to the company,
and are examples of it."

Similarly, others in the organization might aim at working much more than
what would generally be expected from them, and depending on the individ-
uals, they may be eager to bring this attitude up. One interviewee described
this kind of colleagues in the following manner:

"And then some people — and this I've seen all the time during
my career — some people really fantasize about extra hours, like
it would be great if you had 300 hours extra."

Thus, an example of working more than the usual working hours might come
from both the people higher in the organization as well as from colleagues.
However, the interviewees were unanimous in recounting that working over-
time is not verbally encouraged in the organizations. Quite the opposite, in
every organization it is explicitly stated that one should not work overtime,
at least not on a regular basis. However, it seems that the examples might
have a greater effect on the experts than the instructions have.

4.1.3.3   How constant busyness and the use of time are discussed

Being busy all the time was brought up in many interviews. Not only when
people explained their own situations, but also regarding their perception of
others around them. When asked whether they find it easy to ask help from
their colleagues, one interviewee answered as follows:

"Of course everyone is rather busy, and the interruptions take
away from the efficiency. If they [a co-worker] have just focused
on something, I always try to first figure things out myself and
then I try to balance whether I should keep trying to figure it

out myself or ask someone else for help. Whether I should waste
a little of their time and interrupt their work. I usually ask, if I
know it's the fastest and easiest way to proceed with something."

It is not surprising that a knowledge worker finds it important to respect their
colleagues' time and concentration. On the other hand, they also designated
asking for help as *wasting someone's time.*

Another example of how people perceive others as constantly busy is the
following quote:

"I think, or I know that they [HR personnel] have encountered
evidence about it [that people have coping problems], but I don't
think they've reacted to it in a satisfactory way. Probably partly
because everyone is super busy there too."

This is an example of how people tend to see being busy as a perfectly
sufficient excuse for many things. Furthermore, "*everyone* is super busy there
too" reflects the view that being busy is a norm rather than an exception or
a momentary situation.

4.1.3.4   Pressures from the client and the need to please the client as much as possible

The case companies being consultancies, the need to perform well and even
overachieve is associated especially with client satisfaction. One interviewee
expressed their concerns for their colleagues' ambitions:

"Everyone wants to perform so well for the clients, somehow they
truly want to excel."

Another interviewee described their feelings of wanting to please the client
and being immersed in the work and in the client's situation as follows:

"Even if they don't say there's a deadline, you think that this
has to get done soon anyway. So the pressure comes from there
actually."

4.1.3.5   The difference in value between billable and non-billable work

The interviewees also told they stress about working on internal development
projects rather than doing billable work. They find billable working hours
much more important, even if they know the internal development would be
valuable for the company as well. They described working on non-billable
projects as a cause for guilty conscience and as something that makes them
wonder what their colleagues might think about them.

"Yeah, it bothers me, for example this year I'd had to do quite
a lot of internal stuff, and it's been a struggle with a guilty con-
science."

"Yep, I stress about it. On a low level, but I stress anyway
whether I bill enough or not."

Several interviewees also pointed out that they find their company's internal
development is often falling behind, as nobody really prioritizes it:

"In a way we don't have enough people to take care of internal
development so well, we always say we want to do a top-notch
job, but then our own stuff isn't necessarily such high quality,
because there's not enough time and it's not your number one
priority."

"The internal projects, our internal things are never up scratch
because billable work is prioritized, and primarily for moral rea-
sons — everyone wants to do their job well."

4.1.3.6   The ability to draw the line between work and free time

The ability and willingness to keep free time separate from work varied greatly amongst the interviewees. Some of the interviewees told they are very strict about their free time, but many told they read e-mails or other electronic communication channels regularly also outside the working hours. Several interviewees told they work extra hours at home after their working day. When asked if they log all the hours they work overtime, the answers varied. One of the interviewees told this is something they are currently working on:

> "I've tried to begin to log the hours I do at home. I haven't bothered with it before. But now I try to better monitor what I do."

One recurring reason for working longer than the usual working day was being so immersed with work or having such an interesting problem that it is simply difficult to let go and continue the next day. One interviewee put this feeling into words in the following manner:

> "I try to give a little over my own skill level, I try to be a little bit better. And then it easily, it's typical for me that I can't stop thinking about the problem or I even stay on my computer like, I should actually go home but I just can't stop."

The answers about whether they work extra hours or have difficulties in separating work and free time varied also amongst the interviewees who had experienced burnout. Some told they work more or less in the same way as before burnout, but some had made changes. One interviewee told they now prioritize their free time higher than they used to before burnout:

> "I'm really strict about my free time, if someone says that they will call me after four I say right away that let's talk tomorrow, I

don't work after four and that's it. [...] I haven't done ten hours
a day in a long time, or been sitting at the office all evening."

Nevertheless, there were also interviewees who told they have always kept the working hours in control and that they prioritize other aspects in their life over work. One of the examples is this next quote, where the interviewee describes their other priorities as something that is protecting them from being too immersed in work:

"I've never constantly worked over time, I do seven and a half hours and that's it. Free time, friends, my partner, and family are more important for me. It has saved me from some trouble that I've had these protecting buffers, I've always had my priorities in about the right order."

4.1.3.7   What is perceived as work or working

The interviewees expressed feelings of inadequacy, very critical attitudes towards themselves, and uncertainty about their work performance. This seems to be strongly connected with their views on what actually counts as work or working and what does not. When asked if they sometimes leave some working hours unrecorded, the answers varied. One interviewee said that they log all the hours if they "*really* get something done", indicating that if they work on something but do not produce anything ready, they will not necessarily record it. The fact that knowledge work necessarily requires some time for pondering every once in a while, and that some days are more efficient than others is well understood in theory, but in practice many have difficulties with it:

"It is part of the job that you process things in your head. If you are thinking about work problems it is work even if there are no concrete results right away. I have advised others about this but I do not follow my own instructions."

> "Sometimes you have inefficient days and you just have to accept
> it, okay, this was this kind of day."

Several interviewees told they have problems with defining whether something should be considered as work or not. As examples they brought up questions about how they feel they are not working if they take a walk during the working day, even if it is the time they solve most problems that day, or how they do not feel like working if they are sitting in the coffee room and discussing their current project with their project team. One interviewee described their feelings with this problem as follows:

> "But then in practice — how do you log hours? What is work
> time? What is not? [...] Often if it's a little bit in a grey area,
> then the instruction is that if it feels like it's work time it is work
> time. And I find it to be an extremely confusing instruction. I'd
> rather it was something clear. Like, your supervisor could say
> that okay, that's work time. And not be like well, how do you see
> it."

One interviewee gave an example of how they perceive work as a whole, not only counting the effective, performing part:

> "I've got this thought that if it was a backflip, if someone was
> about to pay you for that flip, it wouldn't mean that you just
> vault and then it's done, but you have to warm up and practice
> and then finally you can do the flip, and then you'd cool down
> afterwards and so on."

4.1.3.8 Monetary incentives to work in a certain way

In some situations monetary incentives can also affect on how the experts organize their work. One interviewee told they would like to switch to a

shorter working week, but do not want to do it because due to a bonus system it would affect their salary more than just according to the decreased amount of working hours. Another expressed their thoughts of the monetary incentives in the following manner:

> "It's bullshit that you could affect your own hourly rate. The only way I can affect my hourly rate is by declining all public sector projects, but so far — maybe I should just try it on principle and see what happens, but then someone would say that you have to be more of a team player now. And then I'd say that our incentive system is dodgy."

4.2 Experiencing work well-being, burnout and recovery

The main findings concerning the second research question *(RQ2: What kind of experiences do the employees in the case organizations have about work well-being, burnout, and recovery?)* are briefly listed here, and then discussed more thoroughly one by one. As described in Section 3.4, the findings concerning the second research question were identified to come under three themes: the employees' experiences about recovery, the main reasons for the employees' burnout situations, and the employees' experiences of the burnout situations.

Findings concerning recovery:
  – Recovery is not a very familiar concept for the experts
  – The experts' everyday practices do not, in most cases, support recovery

Main reasons behind burnout and other coping problems:
  – Difficult situations in customer cases
  – Situations where there are too many responsibilities for one person

– Difficult situations in personal life

– Difficulties with declining demands

– Inability to handle and control the total stress level as a whole

Findings concerning burnout experiences:

– The interviewees have found it difficult to admit their coping problems, even to themselves

– The experts are concerned how their colleagues would react to burnout

– It is important to get help and support as easily and as much as possible, no matter how self-managing the usual way of working

– It is important to share knowledge, give instructions and support and bring up the theme of burnout and work well-being

– Many interviewees pointed out that once they had brought up their coping problems with their colleagues, the colleagues then shared their own experiences

– Many interviewees having experienced burnout found its recurrence possible or even probable

– A clear process is required for burnout situations

4.2.1   Recovery

4.2.1.1   Recovery is not a very familiar concept for the experts

Several interviewees pointed out they do not want to "just do nothing" on their free time, or that if they just stay on the couch watching TV they do not feel any better than after an active evening. Seeing the recovering options as "doing nothing" indicates that they are not necessarily very familiar with recovery and what it means. However, many told they recover best when doing sports or spending time outdoors, but also that they do not have as much time for recovery as they would need. Some of them also had an idea of good and bad recovery methods, bad recovery methods referring to what they often do when they are tired on their free time:

> "My recovery methods have been watching Netflix in the evenings
> and maybe eating ice cream or something. But they're really bad
> recovery methods."

The interviewees having thought recovery the most were the ones who had experienced exhaustion and discussed their problems with a health care professional. Some of the interviewees also told about participating in a recovery assessment. For some the assessment had been an enlightening experience and an initiator for changing their everyday choices:

> "And then one concrete thing was that during the work day there
> should be some small recovery moments, and for me it was red
> [not recovering] all day long. And only nights were green, time
> for recovery. And if it would've gone into the night as well, that
> would've been really dangerous because then I wouldn't have re-
> covered at all. So then it got me thinking, how could I relax and
> recover a little during the day. And I've worked on that, some-
> times I succeed and sometimes I don't, I often notice that the
> whole week has just gone by and I haven't taken a single coffee
> break."

The previous quote is also one of the many examples of how difficult it is to change the practices one is used to.

However, for some the alarming results of their recovery assessment are not necessarily a reason for concern. One interviewee seemed to consider highly intensive exercising or "doing nothing" as the two alternatives for their free time, and did not take their recovery assessment results very seriously:

> "I participated in a recovery assessment, and according to it I'm
> going into overdrive all the time. My recovery methods, I recover
> above all by doing [highly intensive] sports. So I've got either
> positive or negative stress basically all the time except for when

I'm sleeping. [...] According to some guidelines I'm clearly, I should've gotten a burnout a long time ago. [...] Often I don't know, could I be, if I hadn't challenged myself with a difficult training session after a hard day at work, would I be feeling better or worse. [...] And then it annoys me, at night I've got a hazy, remorseful feeling, why didn't I do anything today, and why have I just been here lying around, reading magazines and watching TV, it doesn't make any sense [just to be at home]."

4.2.1.2 The experts' everyday practices do not, in most cases, support recovery

Most of the interviewees told they do not, in general, take breaks during their working days:

> "For me, maybe like 80–90% [of days during the last two weeks] have gone by without any breaks."

Most of them described this way of working as normal and "maybe a little bit bad", but not as a real problem. Some of the interviewees who had experienced burnout told they try to take breaks, and that they now, after experiencing coping problems, consider the lack of breaks a warning sign of having too much on their plate. One of them told that now that they have returned to work after the sick leave they "hope they will start to take breaks", whereas before they thought it would be more effective and cut the day shorter if they did not take any breaks. But even if they had already returned to work, they still had not taken that hope of breaks into practice:

> "Somehow I thought, that I'll be more efficient if I don't take the lunch break, then I work through the whole seven and a half hours. I'll get home half an hour earlier. But it doesn't really work like that. You just can't cope like that. But I try to make my day overly efficient too often."

The interviewees who had experienced burnout told that they now try to think about their recovery and coping mechanisms more, but not all of them had really changed their ways of working:

> "I have discussed it with myself, it's like, we talk about recovery here, and maybe I haven't always had enough recovery time. A week might go by, like this week I've had two ten-hour days and one 12-hour day."

When discussing the working practices, many interviewees expressed their thoughts on the matters as though they did not have full control on their own practices. Instead, they often said they *try* to change something or even *hope* that something will change, such as in this next example:

> "I hope I'll start taking breaks."

4.2.2   Main reasons behind burnout

The reasons for the interviewees' burnouts were manifold and often a combination of different stressors at the same time. In most of the cases there were stressors both in their personal life as well as at work. However, four main categories for the burnout causes were identified: difficult situations in customer cases, situations where there are too many responsibilities for one person, difficult situations in personal life, and difficulties with declining demands.

4.2.2.1   Difficult situations in customer cases

This category consists of different difficulties in the experts' daily project work. Some interviewees told about situations where the project got too intensive or there was simply too much to do, and they got immersed in their work:

> "When the tasks start to pile up and working on a project is
> quite intensive, my nature doesn't allow me to give in, or that I
> would neglect to do some things. I'd rather cut back on my own
> well-being and put more hours into work."

In some situations there was something wrong with the project management,
difficulties with the clients' personnel, or other hindrances in the project
work. Several interviewees told they can, in retrospect, identify the prob-
lems and know what should have been done, but had not realized it at that
moment:

> "I somehow didn't notice it back then, but afterwards I've been
> thinking that it would've been wise to rethink the process there
> [in the project], how it went on. But all in all, it was a really
> complicated palette, there had been a lot of personnel changes in
> the project both from the client and our part as well, there were
> a lot of changes going on at the same time."

4.2.2.2   Situations where there are too many responsibilities for one person

Several interviewees brought up situations when they had too many respon-
sibilities or felt like they were the only one who could do certain things. It
seems that the feelings of being irreplaceable paired with stressors make it
difficult for the experts to ask for help or prioritize their own well-being. One
interviewee described a situation where they were responsible for too many
things, and then found it difficult to bring up their exhaustion, as it would
have been inconvenient for so many people:

> "I managed to make myself rather irreplaceable [in the project].
> It's a painful situation, you should never do that because then
> you can't get out of there. Or if you can get out, then you feel
> guilty about it. I thought about it, what if something happened

> now, if I had to take a sick leave or something like that, it would
> be difficult for everyone."

Some also brought up their concerns for other people regarding their vast amount of responsibilities:

> "In general I think they [colleagues] are doing great, but when
> you pay a little attention you notice that certain responsibilities
> build up to a very small group of people."

4.2.2.3 Difficult situations in personal life

In addition to work-related stressors, difficulties in personal life also have a significant effect on the experts' work well-being. Most of the interviewees who described their personal life stressors also told they were not able to slow down at work, even though they were strained by other problems. It seems that the experts tend to think that they should perform at work on the same level all the time, even though their own energy and strain levels vary.

Most of the straining situations in personal life were related to relationship problems, being a parent, or both at the same time:

> "What with my kids being still small, it strongly determines my
> well-being in the free time. Difficulties with my family ate up my
> resources, and then at the same time I didn't know how to slow
> down at work. I think now I should lower my expectations for
> myself so I could save some resources for family life as well."

> "Just thinking about the whole thing [problems in a relationship],
> it takes quite a lot of energy."

4.2.2.4 Difficulties with declining demands

Many expressed that they have difficulties in controlling their workload by saying no to things. Some said they find it difficult to decline demands because they are easily interested and excited about new things and participating into different projects:

> "Or if I'd got it in my head that I can say no. I usually gather a lot of interesting things to do. If someone asks whether I'd like to participate in this or that, I say yes because I get excited so easily. But then I have to learn to first think or take some time to think if I have enough time, if I could do this. And only after that I should say yes or no."

Others told they want to help their colleagues whenever they can, even if they did not have the time or energy:

> "There are a few reasons, I've become aware that I want to be nice to others and I want to help, my personality is one of the reasons why I often say 'yes' and 'of course I'll help' and things like that."

Not declining demands seems to also be a habit that die hard, similar to not taking breaks (Section 4.2.1.2) or not doing work-related things in free time (Section 4.1.3.6):

> "I've again become aware of it, a year has passed [since the burnout] and I start to forget that sometimes I could say no to things and take better care of myself."

4.2.2.5 Inability to handle and control the total stress as a whole

All in all, the results indicate that the main reason for burnout situations is the inability to handle the total stress as a whole. In other words, the

experts do not seem to alter their ways of working according to their general strain or energy levels. One interviewee described this kind of situation in the following manner:

> "It was more like, I've had a lot of worries in my personal life. And then when it was a little harder at work, when a project ended and a new one would've begun. And then it was really unclear, is there something to do or isn't there and where is there something to do and all, so as a whole it was too much. And then I went to occupational health care to talk and they said that 'yeah, you'll take a sick leave now'."

While many of the interviewees had had troubles in realizing how exhausted or stressed they are, some interviewees told they had known they are too strained, but tried to pushed through anyway for one reason or another:

> "Yeah, I was aware of it the whole time that there was too much pressure all the time. But there are so many things you just have to take care of, like children's matters."

For some, burnout had been a reason to change their working practices. One interviewee indicated they have learned to take distance and control how immersed they are in their work, but still find it difficult:

> "It's been quite a lesson for myself, you just go from project to project and want to give one hundred per cent for the project. So to learn to define that now I can give this much, you won't get any more, even though I'd like to be there for the client, body and soul, I just have to be able to step back."

It seems that the experts do not feel like they can control their ways of working or their strain levels. One interviewee, who had managed to avoid severe exhaustion, told they have serious doubts about how they will cope with their work in the future:

"I've been thinking about it for like five years, that at this rate, will I be able to cope after 2020."

4.2.3   Burnout experiences

4.2.3.1   The interviewees have found it difficult to admit their coping problems, even to themselves

When asked about their burnout or other coping problems, the interviewees told they had not realized the gravity of the issue, or at least had not told about it to anyone until the situation was very bad. Some were deliberately hiding their exhaustion from others at work, like this interviewee:

> "And then my supervisor said that they were totally taken by surprise that I was exhausted. They hadn't noticed anything like that. But then I was content with it, because that was my intent."

Several interviewees told that their close ones had noticed that they were not doing well, and asked whether they should perhaps do something about the situation. In some cases colleagues had also asked if everything is okay, but the interviewees had not admitted the problems to them.

When asked about how they finally admitted the situation and the fact that they need help, many told about situations with a physical reaction of some sort. One could not go to work one morning because they could not stop crying, another did not have the strength to get up, and so on. One interviewee told how they burst into tears when they were asked about their situation at work:

> "I think I'm quite good at hiding that I can't cope, especially at work it doesn't come up before you're tearful in the meeting. I was confused, like, what the hell, why am I crying here, this is a neutral situation, what is happening."

Even after the situation had emerged, occupational health care had been contacted, and others at work were aware of the situation, many found it difficult to accept their own burnout situation. One interviewee recounted their feelings of guilty conscience:

> "But it hadn't yet culminated to that point, that I would have been so tired that I wouldn't have slept at all. And anyway it's difficult for me to admit, even when I started the sick leave, I had a guilty conscience all the time, that I could be at work nevertheless. I would probably still be able to manage working, if I tried."

Furthermore, many interviewees thought that now, after experiencing exhaustion, they would better recognize the signs and would be able to tell about the situation to others, if it were to recur. When asked about would they tell others now, if they were experiencing similar symptoms as before, one interviewee answered as follows:

> "Probably, yes, because now I've already once confronted the shame that I couldn't cope. And it was okay and I didn't die. Now I can say in time that I can't cope."

4.2.3.2   The experts are concerned how their colleagues would react to burnout

When asked about why they were trying to hide their coping problems, the interviewees told about their concerns about what their colleagues might think of them. For example, they were disappointed that they "were not able to cope like the others", and were afraid that others would perceive them as weak, or otherwise think something undesirable:

> "But I just, how I was handling it, I wasn't eager to bring it up. [...] I felt that everyone will think something about me that I don't want them to think."

Another reason for not bringing up the coping problems was the feeling of being irreplaceable or otherwise causing others nuisance by taking a sick leave or working less than usually:

> "And I've got this really strong view that you shouldn't bother others. And it's related to that you don't want to tell anyone if you aren't able to do something. Because it causes more pressure to someone else, if I can't do something."

4.2.3.3 It is important to get help and support as easily and as much as possible, no matter how self-managing the usual way of working

In the case of the more traditional organizational structures, several interviewees told the actions of their supervisor were of great consequence in their burnout situation or other work well-being matters. Many of them shared an experience of the supervisor sending them home via occupational health care once their supervisor noticed the situation, such as in this case:

> "When I was dozing and practically almost fell asleep at my desk, and the supervisor happened to be sitting next to me, they literally sent me home; go home and visit occupational health care."

In the case of the more radical SMOs, the interviewees brought up how it can be problematic if the self-managing way of taking action and making decisions is expected even from those who are exhausted:

> "I would've wanted something more in that situation. Real practical actions. Yeah you get advice, but then it's up to the listener to put them into practice. And if you're tired enough, and exhausted and stressed, you can't be trusted that you will do anything."

One interviewee said that the "really strong culture of personal responsibility" in the organization is another burden for an already exhausted mind. Another described their feelings in the burnout situation as follows:

> "I think we should have some kind of — I had such a big need to pull an emergency break, that if someone would've come to say 'okay, now I'll take these tasks away from you and you may work on them a little, if you want to, but for now your only job is to recover from this', I would've been breathing much more easily. [...] And if there was someone who would've said 'hey, now this thing is more important than anything else, let's go and talk about this', if there would've been some kind of — maybe some kind of checklist or a process, that maybe. It would've been nice, if some kind of process would have begun there, because this happens all the time."

The interviewees recognize that they are not the only ones who have experienced severe coping problems and struggled to find their feet again. They brought up the lack of leadership and concrete actions towards better working practices:

> "It's a clear and explicit wish that people would work at a sustainable rate, but no-one intervenes in your work so that it would actually happen."

4.2.3.4 It is important to share knowledge, give instructions and support, and bring up the themes of burnout and work well-being

The interviewees brought up different ways they hope their organizations would highlight the importance of well-being and help the employees to cope better at work. They found it important that burnout and coping problems are discussed openly and knowledge about the problems is shared widely.

However, they also mentioned that it is challenging to know how to bring the issues up in an efficient way.

> "Some kind of broader discussion would be good but how and where, I don't know."

> "Maybe if they tried to bring this up preventatively, that it's okay and it happens to everyone. Those are difficult things to notice, especially if the employee is hiding it, I understand it very well. But maybe there could be some kind of info package or something like that readily available or something like that."

Some of them also made concrete propositions about how they could help each other in practice:

> "And maybe just, you know, if we sat down with the project team on a regular basis and talked about that subject and tried to survey if there are some signs in the air or is the way of working going in the wrong direction or something."

The case companies conduct more or less regular online surveys asking questions of employee well-being. Some of the interviewees pointed out it does not come naturally from them to answer the surveys or to react to online calls to action:

> "Someone should come and talk to me in person. And I think there are those of us who will fail to answer that kind of [survey], even if you're feeling a little insecure, and then, well."

4.2.3.5 Many interviewees pointed out that once they had brought up their coping problems with their colleagues, the colleagues then shared their own experiences

In accordance with how difficult it was for the interviewees to admit their coping problems even to themselves, they told that once they did bring up their situation with colleagues, the colleagues then shared their own struggles:

> "And then others have also said, that actually they've been struggling with it too, it's pretty common that they are thinking about these burnout things and so on."

> "And it's like, if you tell them that you've had a burnout, then they tell you that they've had a burnout too, but they wouldn't say it otherwise."

Their colleagues had not dared to talk about their issues either, but once someone opened the subject up for discussion, the others got courage too. One interviewee mentioned that they had taken note about a colleague's dark humour and even inappropriate jokes about burnout, and when they had said something about it to that colleague, the colleague then had told about their own severe coping problems. All in all, the interviewees shared the impression that coping problems are more common than is reputed out loud.

Most of the interviewees told that once they had realized their burnout situation, they had been open about it to others at work. However, there were also interviewees who preferred to not to say anything about their situation to their colleagues. Furthermore, while the interviewees reported mostly positive reactions from their colleagues' part, some of them also told it had been awkward to talk about the situation:

> "No-one realized it, if I didn't say it myself. It was like, I had to say 'hey, the time I was away, it was because of a burnout, and

> now I'm recovering from it so I'm not working on full capacity
> now.' And then they were like 'oh, that's really unfortunate', a
> little awkwardly."

It seems that burnout and other coping problems, perhaps similar to mental
health issues, are not considered the same way as illnesses and other health
problems that are more familiar to the masses.

4.2.3.6   Many interviewees having experienced burnout found its recurrence possible or even probable

When asked if they think the burnout situation could recur, all the intervie-
wees answered in the affirmative.

> "Definitely yes, it's a slippery slope."

> "I hope not but you never know. Like I said, somehow there is
> work all the time, if you don't take care of it it easily slips again.
> It can happen again but I'm going to try and fight it so that it
> doesn't happen again."

For some the situation's recurrence seemed even probable, such as this next
interviewee:

> "Yes, easily. Let's say, I don't — if we look back five or ten years
> from now, I'd be surprised if there hasn't been a similar situation
> again."

One of the reasons for these views is maybe the difficulties the employees
experience in changing their daily practices and way of working, as described
in Sections 4.2.1.2 and 4.2.2.5.

> "I work in the same way as before. These last few weeks even
> more I think, I start my vacation now and it's a damn good thing
> too."

4.2.3.7   A clear process is required for burnout situations

For many the burnout situation was also a reason to further reflect their views on work and what they think work or working full time actually means (see also Section 4.1.3.7):

> "I remember now actually, one really important thing the psychologist said was, we discussed the percentual work efficiency, what I feel it is [at that moment], and I said that maybe 40%. And the psychologist said that okay, do that much. Do 40% of the tasks [you would normally try to do]. And it was rather difficult, but also liberating, I could actually set the pace of my days like that. That I work here and today I'll do 40% of it [what I would normally aim at] and then I'm satisfied with that 40%. [...] And that maybe got me into thinking that what the hell is that 100% I'm setting it against."

Furthermore, for recovering from burnout it is important for the employee how their returning to work goes, e.g. how much they work when starting to work again, how they are supported by the employer, and so on. One interviewee brought up their view on the matter in the following way:

> "But maybe this kind of, how you're received back to work [from sick leave] kind of process is still missing from us. That maybe simply having coffee together isn't enough. In that situation there was maybe a little bit too much room for wondering how will this continue. How you feel you're welcome to that environment, that you'd get enough support or it would be even offered to you at that point, even if you don't know to ask."

The interviewees also described how important it was for them that their reception back to work was considerate, both regarding to their work tasks as well as their colleagues' reactions:

"And then the most surprising thing was that when I got back to work, everything was calm, I was able to think things through. I knew I would change to another project soon, I got to start to do something new, something that I knew would be significant for me. [...] I noticed that everything will be okay, I'll be able to cope with this. It was a big thing."

"Everyone has been super understanding and wonderful at work. Like, 'oh, so nice you're back, and this and this we've been doing here while you were away.'"

Chapter 5

Conclusions

The goal of this research was to study the case companies' employees' experiences about self-organizing and work well-being, and come up with suggestions as to how self-organizing organizations could facilitate their employees' work recovery and help their employees to work in a sustainable way. This chapter presents the discussion of the empirical research results and practical suggestions based on them. Finally, the thesis is concluded by evaluating the study.

5.1 Discussion

To provide the practical suggestions for facilitating employees' work recovery, the results of the empirical research (presented in Chapter 4) are reflected to the literature review (Chapter 2) and further discussed in this section. As presented in Section 1.2, the research questions set for the empirical research were as follows:

RQ1: How do the employees in the case organizations experience self-organizing?

RQ2: What kind of experiences do the employees in the case

organizations have about work well-being, burnout, and recovery?

To briefly summarize the results presented in the previous chapter, the employees of the case organizations enjoy the self-organizing way of working, even if it might be difficult to adopt at first. They feel a great personal responsibility in their work, but enjoy the trust and autonomy they are given. However, they brought up their hopes for stronger leadership and getting support and feedback more easily. Their ways of working and organizing their work are strongly affected by the somewhat hidden values and social pressures they perceive around them.

Regarding work recovery, the most important research findings were that it was not a well-known concept amongst the experts, and that the experts' daily working practices did not support it. The experts' burnout experiences were strongly related to their inability to control their total stress as a whole, most often when having straining situations both at work as well as in personal life at the same time.

As presented in Section 2.3.3, recovery happens mostly during one's free time. However, there are important factors that take or can take place during the working day, the most important one being controlling one's workload and setting the pace of the working day. So, the "sustainable way of working" the organizations want to promote could mean, for example, pacing one's working day so that, in addition to working, taking relaxing breaks is part of each day. Furthermore, working in a sustainable way would require the total workload to be reasonable. Such sustainable working practices would both help the employees to recover from work, but also reduce the strain from which they need to recover from.

The results indicated that the experts' everyday work practices were not, for the most part, something that could be described as sustainable. They did not take breaks regularly; they set too high standards for themselves; they compared themselves to others, always seeing themselves as less competent than the others; and they struggled in defining what is work and working, and what is not. These are things that could be affected by open discussion and

some kind of guidelines. However, the examples set by others, especially by the ones higher in hierarchy (whether it is an official or perceived hierarchy, see Section 4.1.2.4), seem to be more important than instructions.

Regarding the employees' views about leadership and supervisors, the results were somewhat conflicting. While the interviewees expressed they enjoyed the self-managing way of working (Section 4.1.1.2) and that they did not require supervisors in their work tasks (Section 4.1.1.3), they still brought up a desire for stronger leadership (Section 4.1.1.6). They expressed that they enjoyed being considered the best experts of their own jobs, and that they did not need anyone micromanaging their days. However, they also expressed feelings of inadequate support and instructions. Thus, it seems that the experts want to hang on to their autonomy and freedom, but get feedback and instructions more easily. This is not an evident balance to keep, and requires much skills from the leaders in the organization and open communication with everyone involved.

While the employer cannot affect their employees' free time activities directly, they can increase the employees' knowledge about recovery, thus being a potential mediator in their recovery in free time as well. According to the results, recovery from work is not a very well-known concept amongst the experts, and they hope that recovery, burnout, and coping with work would be more openly discussed in their organizations. Furthermore, there should be clear guidelines for employees, HR personnel, and supervisors to follow in case of burnout or other coping problems. In these situations, the one having the coping problems cannot be the one responsible for taking action.

When discussing the results with the HR specialists of the case companies in the workshop and other meetings (for further information see Section 3.3.3), it became clear that the results did not come as a surprise to them. This was not a disappointment, neither to the HR specialists nor to the researcher, as it did not mean the research was unnecessary. On the contrary, it showed that the problems were indeed similar in all the case companies. It was evident from the start that this study would not solve burnout or coping problems,

but enlighten the employee experiences about them in the self-organizing consultancy context. The value of the study is that the results were brought together and linked to each other as a whole.

5.2 Practical implications of the study

In this section, some practical measures on how to support expert employees' sustainable working practices and work recovery are proposed. These are targeted for organizations operating in a very self-managing fashion in the field of highly intensive consulting work, although they can be suitable for other organizations as well.

Validate if the findings of this study represent the feelings and experiences of the employees of your organization. Find out what problems are most relevant in the organization. Investigate what kinds of hidden values, social pressures, or beliefs affect your employees' ways of working (see Section 4.1.3). When planning a validation of findings it should be noted that several interviewees pointed out that they had not brought up their thoughts and feelings about stress and other coping difficulties in the questionnaires used by the organization. Instead, they felt that, for them to tell about those things, they should have been asked about them by another person in a face-to-face interaction.

Provide education about recovery and what it means in an everyday context. According to the research results, employees are not necessarily familiar with recovery as a concept. For example, many interviewees associated recovery with "doing nothing", even if lying on the couch is not often the best recovery method. Employees' knowledge about the variety of ways recovery can be enhanced as well as its importance (further discussed in Section 2.3.3) has to be increased. If the employees do not know what recovery is, why their mind and body need it, and how the lack of recovery affects them, they probably do not think about it at all or prioritize it in their daily lives.

When you talk about recovery and sustainable working practices, do not only talk about work. Work well-being and well-being in general are often discussed in separate contexts, but in reality, they are two sides of the same thing. When getting to know the case companies, one of the first things the HR specialists brought up was that they had noticed that the employees' coping problems seemed to have increased as the average age of the employees had increased. This is not only due to their age but also because most of them now have children and are in a different situation in life than they were before. It should be natural and evident to everyone that if their personal life is currently more straining than usually, they cannot work in their usual manner either. However, the employees struggle with setting their own standards on a reasonable level and with controlling their total stress and strain levels. Instead, they should be able to look at their lives as a whole and consider how they need to adjust their practices according to their current situation.

Provide a recovery assessment for your employees. Seeing one's own results is one way of becoming aware of the situation, although it is not evident that everyone will take the results seriously. Nevertheless, for many of the interviewees, a recovery assessment had been a wake-up call of some kind regarding their daily practices both at work as well as in their free time.

Consider how self-organizing and self-leadership are discussed in your organization. Do you, for example, combine "not having managers and everyone being equal" with the employees' freedom to make decisions? If so, is it really necessary, or even true? This kind of communication can lead to a fear of new roles and structures within the organization. Consider also whether the employees see a certain lack of leadership as a natural part of your organization. Leadership from the employer's part and empowering employees' self-leadership should not be exclusionary. The employees should be able to trust their employer to support them when they need it. In relation to supporting your employees, consider in which subjects you could give more guidelines and instructions without losing anything regarding the self-organizing way of working. Especially in very practical matters, such

as logging working hours, instructions could save both time and energy of the employees. Additionally, if your organization has supervisors or other supporting roles, consider how you can enhance their abilities to provide support for others.

Consider how busyness is discussed in your organization. Is it considered normal that everyone is busy all the time? If you ask someone how they are doing, are "a little busy" or "I've got a little too much to do" the usual answers? If so, why is that? Being really busy should not be the norm, but an exception to the norm. Busyness is a common issue, not a problem of self-managing organizations in particular. However, according to the research results, employees of a self-managing organization tend to look for examples in each other and take great personal responsibility for their work. These factors increase the importance of tackling the norm of being busy.

Promote sustainable working pace and practices by setting good examples, communicating, and giving concrete suggestions for such practices. The first thing you can do is change your own working practices by taking more breaks and examining your schedule and to-do lists to see whether they are realistic or overestimated. (If, at first, this sounds like something you would like to do, but simply cannot because your calendar and to-do lists are too full, it is probably even more important that you do this.)

5.3 Limitations and evaluation

In this section, the limitations of the study are first discussed. After that, the validity of the study is evaluated according to the criteria presented by Whittemore et al. (2001).

5.3.1 Limitations

One of the main limitations of this research is the lack of experience of the researcher. The researcher had previous experience of interviewing people for research, but practically none of research design, the used data analysis method, or presenting results of such a large study. This issue was mainly tackled by getting help in planning the research and reporting the findings, mainly from the thesis supervisor and advisor. In relation to this limitation, it should be noted that the most important goal of a master's thesis is to learn about conducting research, not the research results.

Another important limitation is the number of research participants: fifteen interviewees from three organizations. While the amount of participants is limited, the data gathered from the interviews is valuable and multivoiced. Furthermore, the recommended time for the whole master's thesis process is six months. This thesis took seven months from start to finish, but increasing the number of participants would have most probably increased that time or limited the quality of this written end result.

Regarding the literature review, in addition to peer-reviewed research papers, also some more popularized sources were used. However, the non-refereed sources were carefully chosen. These sources have either had a significant impact within the subject field, such as *Reinventing Organizations* by Frédéric Laloux, or have been written by known researchers who have published both peer-reviewed articles and other works related to the same subject, such as *Menestyvä johtaminen* by Helena Åhman.

5.3.2 Evaluation

The evaluation of the study is done according to the criteria defined by Whittemore et al. (2001). These include four primary criteria, credibility, authenticity, criticality, and integrity, and six secondary criteria, explicitness, vividness, creativity, thoroughness, congruence, and sensitivity. In the

following paragraphs, the definition for each criterion by Whittemore et al. (2001, p.534) is presented first, and then the study is assessed accordingly. In the text, the primary criteria are emboldened and the secondary criteria are italicized.

Credibility refers to whether the context or the experiences of the participants were reflected in a believable way. The participants described their experiences in their own words in the interviews. The interviews were conducted with only the interviewee and the researcher present, so the participants had the opportunity to express their thoughts and experiences freely.

Authenticity refers to the awareness of the subtle differences in contexts, voices, and situations of the participants. While conducting the interviews, clarifications have been asked from the interviewees when needed. The results have been presented with both quotes and paraphrases. Even though the quotes have been translated and are therefore not directly from the data, both their content and tone have been kept to the best of the researcher's ability, and they should present the experiences relatively accurately. Paraphrases have been used to keep the authenticity in narrating the phenomena and experiences the interviewees described when the quotes would have been too long or very incoherent.

Criticality is about whether the research process "demonstrates evidence of critical appraisal." The literature review presents its topics from different viewpoints. The results of the empirical study have been put in context with the literature. In addition, the limitations of the study have been discussed in Section 5.3.1.

Integrity refers to whether the validity of the study has been recursively and repetitively checked and the findings presented in a humble manner. The research process, as well as the interview questions, were structured with help from the thesis supervisor, the thesis advisor, or both. When presenting the results, the researcher has invested in making it clear that the findings are based on individual experiences and that the conclusions made from them are the researcher's own.

Explicitness refers to addressing methodological decisions and interpretations. Methodological decisions have been described in Chapter 3. Interpretations of the researcher have been separated from the views presented in the source literature as well as from the experiences of the interviewees.

Vividness refers to portraying the phenomena, experiences, and contexts with clarity while preserving the details, meanings, and motivations. The results in Chapter 4 have been presented in a detailed manner and the style of writing has been kept as clear as possible. Quotes have been included to make the experiences more understandable and real for the reader.

Creativity refers to the imaginative way of "organizing, presenting, and analysing data." During the data analysis, the different themes and findings were organized in various different ways to find the connections between them and to find a way to present them in an interesting way. The structure of the presentation of the research findings in Chapter 4 has been designed to build a comprehensive narrative of the themes around the research subject.

Thoroughness is about the findings "convincingly addressing the questions posed." The research questions have been answered in Chapter 4 in a detailed manner, and based on that, the research results as well as their practical implications have been discussed in Sections 5.1 and 5.2.

Congruence refers to whether the research process and its results are in line with each other, and whether the findings fit into a larger context outside the study situation. The research process has been planned based on existing practices and examples of similar research contexts. As discussed in Section 5.1, the results seem to be in line with both the existing literature as well as the experiences of the HR specialists of the different case companies.

Sensitivity is about whether the research has been implemented in a way that is "sensitive to the nature of human, cultural, and social contexts." Different perspectives and voices have been reported in the findings of the study. The research, as well as its presentation, has been planned in a manner that protects the anonymity of the participants. Meetings with the research participants were scheduled according to their convenience and timetables. The

participants did not directly benefit from the research, but their participation was based entirely on voluntariness.

5.4 Summary

The aim of this thesis was to present recommendations as to how self-managing organizations can aid their employees' work recovery. In order to produce suggestions for organizational practices, the case organizations' employees' experiences about self-organization (RQ1) and work well-being, recovery, and burnout (RQ2) were studied. The empirical study was conducted through theme interviews, and based on the analysis of the interviews, the research questions were answered by identifying and describing common themes within the interviewees' experiences. Based on the empirical results, suggestions were made for practical actions for the case companies and other similar organizations.

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Appendix A

Theme interviews with the HR specialists

All interviews with HR experts were held in Finnish, although the question structure here has been translated into English. Depending on the case company, there was either one or more HR experts present in the interview. Being thematic interviews, these questions only guided the interviews and not all of them were asked. In addition to the questions presented here, other questions were also asked based on the interviewees' answers.

Background and introduction

– Can the interview be recorded?

– The aim of this interview is to find out more about the company and your ways of working. For the later phases of the research it is crucial to piece together how people in the company work, and how you take care of matters related to work well-being. Some questions may feel self-explanatory to you, but please answer them anyway.

– The data from these interviews will be used anonymously.

– What is your current role in the organization? How long have you been in the organization?

The vision of the organization

1. When was the organization founded and why? Who were the founders? What happened?

2. What kind of organizational changes have then taken place since? Why?

3. Have some of the changes been reverted? Is there something that has not changed since the beginning?

4. Do you have any organizational ideals?

5. What are the organization's current challenges?

Well-being in the organization

1. How are your employees doing in general? How do they cope with their work?

2. What kind of challenges regarding well-being have been identified in the organization? What has been done regarding the challenges?

3. Do any recent examples about well-being problems come to mind? How have you coped with burnout cases? Do the employees who have experienced burnout still work within the organization?

4. How do you promote well-being in the organization? Where and how do the employees get help if they need it?

5. How and in what kind of situations do you discuss well-being and burnout? How do you familiarize new employees with the organization's policies and practices?

6. How do you recognize it if someone is not feeling well? Whose responsibility it is to react?

Practices related to self-organizing and well-being

1. What kind of leadership philosophy do you have?

2. Who is leading in your company and how?

3. What kind of hierarchies there are in the organization? Do you recognize any hidden hierarchies?

4. Are you a self-organizing organization? In what way? In what way perhaps not so much?

5. How do you recruit new people? Who participate in the recruiting process?

6. What kind of characteristics are emphasized in recruitment? Why? What kind of words are used to describe your organization, its ways of working, and the desired qualities of the employees?

7. Have you had any experiences with failing to recruit the right kind of people? What have you done then?

8. How do you staff your projects and roles in practice? How do you take care that everyone gets meaningful projects? What if someone wants to switch project?

9. How do you follow the working hours? How is it connected to invoicing?

10. How are the salaries determined? Do you have some kind of bonuses? Are the salaries public information within the organization? Do you discuss the salaries frequently?

11. How do you cope with conflict situations? What usually happens then?

12. What kind of education or training possibilities and practices do you have?

Is there something else that comes to mind regarding your practices, well-being, or self-organizing? Is there something you assumed would be asked but was not?

Appendix B

Theme interviews with the experts

All interviews with the experts were held in Finnish, although the question structure here has been translated into English. Being thematic interviews, these questions only guided the interviews and not all of them were asked. In addition to the questions presented here, other questions were also asked based on the interviewees' answers.

Background and introduction

– Can the interview be recorded?

– This a research about work well-being and work recovery in self-organizing organizations. There are three case companies participating to the research.

– The data from these interviews will be used anonymously and only for research purposes.

– What is your educational background?

– What is your current role in the organization? How long have you worked here?

Own story

1. How did you end up working for this company? Why? How did it feel like to start working here?

2. Have you experienced some kind of difficulties with coping with work? What kind of difficulties? How did they start?

3. How and when did you notice that everything is not okay? Did someone else bring it up with you?

4. How has your life changed since? Do you feel like you yourself have changed somehow?

5. From where did you get help and how?

6. How did your employer support you? Was there something interfering with your recovery? What more could your employer have done to help you?

7. How did you get on with the situation? What happened next?

8. How do you feel about your work and working now?

9. How do you feel about your free time?

10. Do you think the same kind of difficulties could happen again?

Well-being in general

1. How do you think your colleagues are coping with their work?

2. How and when is well-being discussed in the company?

3. Do you think some kind of well-being challenges have been recognized in the company?

4. Do you know how to get help if needed? Do you think your colleagues know it?

5. How does your employer promote well-being?

6. How are the practices introduced to new employees?

7. Have you noticed any well-being problems amongst your colleagues? How? Have you stepped in somehow? Has someone else stepped in?

Ways of working in general

1. Who is leading in the company and how? What does leading mean in practice in the company?

2. How would you define self-organizing? Do you think the company is self-organizing? In what way? In what way is it not?

3. Do you feel like you get to work on meaningful projects? How are the projects assigned? Do you get to select your projects?

4. How much do you work? Do you do work-related things on your free time?

5. Is work recovery something you have thought of? What do you think it means?

6. How does your typical working day look like? Do you take breaks? What kind of breaks?

7. Do you think about your work on your free time? Do you find it easy to detach yourself from work?

8. What do you like the most about working in this company? What would you change if you could?

Is there something else that comes to mind regarding to well-being, self-organizing, or your ways of working? Is there something you assumed would be asked but was not?