Aalto University
School of Business

THE ORGANIZATIONAL CULTURE OF A SELF-MANAGED ORGANIZATION

Master's Thesis
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Abstract of master's thesis

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Abstract

Market disruptions are forcing companies to become more flexible and adaptive. As an effect, organizations are loosening or entirely eliminating their organizational structures to answer to these changes. One organizational model is the self-managed organization, which is built on minimum hierarchy and autonomy. Although there is increased interest in fully self-managed organizations amongst practitioners, scholarly research and understanding on this type of radically decentralized organizing is currently limited. Moreover, most research on self-managed organizations have focused on the general design features of self-managed organizations, however they have not touched on the organizational culture of self-managed organizations. Since culture has a powerful influence on people's behavior, beliefs, values, and attitudes and an effect on organizational performance, it is vital to understand the underlying culture of self-managed organizations to gain more insight into the organizational factors that guide self-management. Therefore, the aim of the study is to increase the understanding of self-managed organizations and especially the cultural aspects that define them by answering the question: What is the organizational culture like within a self-managed organization?

The study was carried out as a qualitative study in a self-managed organization. The data was collected with semi-structured interviews and analyzed using thematic analysis. The analysis resulted in four higher level cultural themes; 1) autonomy, 2) openness and transparency, 3) learning and development, and 4) human-centricity. The findings were then analyzed against a theoretical cultural framework created based on the literature review.

The findings suggest that a self-managed organization fosters a culture of autonomy, openness and transparency, learning and development, caring and appreciation, and trust. In addition to these, the study offers novel findings into self-managed organizations. For example, the study suggests that although self-managed organizations have abolished formal hierarchies, hidden informal hierarchies may exist. Also, although autonomous employees can make decisions without asking for permission, a culture of asking for advice from peers was present. Moreover, the findings indicate the lack of a formal mission and vision within the studied company, which was replaced with a strong and shared underlying value base that guides employees' behavior. Lastly, the study also sheds light into the challenges of the information sharing practices of a self-managed organization.

As a result, the study contributes to the limited scholarly understanding of fully self-managed organizations and provides additional insight into the cultural characteristics that define self-managed organizations. The study also offers practical implications on practices that can be used to foster a culture that supports self-management.

Keywords self-managed organization, organizational culture, self-management, autonomy

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Tiivistelmä

Nykypäivän markkinat vaativat organisaatioita mukautumaan ja joustamaan, jonka myötä organisaatiot ovat purkaneet rakenteitaan vastatakseen markkinahäiriöihin. Yksi organisaatiomalli on minimihierarkialle ja autonomialle pohjautuva itseohjautuva organisaatio. Vaikka toimijoiden kiinnostus täysin itseohjautuvia organisaatioita kohtaan on lisääntynyt, tieteellistä tutkimusta ja ymmärrystä vastaavanlaisista organisaatioista on vähäistä. Useimmat tutkimukset keskittyvät myös suurimmaksi osin itseohjautuvien organisaatioiden struktuureihin työkulttuurin sijasta. Koska kulttuurilla on voimakas vaikutus ihmisten käyttäytymiseen, uskomuksiin, arvoihin ja asenteisiin sekä organisaation suorituskykyyn, on tärkeää ymmärtää itseohjautuvien organisaatioiden taustalla olevaa kulttuuria saadakseen paremman käsityksen itseohjautuvuudesta ilmiönä. Siksi tämän tutkimuksen tavoitteena on lisätä ymmärrystä itseohjautuvista organisaatioista sekä erityisesti niiden kulttuurillisista tekijöistä vastaamalla kysymykseen: Minkälainen työkulttuuri itseohjautuvassa organisaatiossa on?

Tutkimus suoritettiin kvalitatiivisena tutkimuksena itseohjautuvaan organisaatioon. Aineisto kerättiin puolistrukturoiduilla haastatteluilla ja analysoitiin temaattisella analyysillä. Analyysi johti neljään korkeamman tason teemaan; 1) autonomia, 2) avoimuus ja läpinäkyvyys, 3) oppiminen ja kehittyminen sekä 4) ihmiskeskeisyys. Löydökset analysoitiin kirjallisuuskatsauksen teoreettisen kulttuurillisen viitekehyksen avulla.

Tutkimuksen tulokset havainnollistavat itseohjautuvan organisaation työkulttuurin pohjautuvan autonomiaan, avoimuuteen ja läpinäkyvyyteen, oppimiseen ja kehittymiseen, välittämiseen ja arvostukseen, sekä luottamukseen. Näiden lisäksi tutkimus tarjoaa uusia havaintoja itseohjautuvista organisaatioista. Esimerkiksi, vaikka itseohjautuvissa organisaatiossa ei ole muodollisia hierarkioita, piilevät ja epäviralliset hierarkiat saattavat olla läsnä. Vaikka autonomiset työntekijät voivat tehdä päätöksiä ilman lupaa, työkaverit oletetusti kysyvät kuitenkin neuvoa kollegoiltaan. Lisäksi muodollinen missio ja visio on korvattu tutkitussa organisaatioissa vahvalla, yhteisellä arvopohjalla, joka ohjaa työntekijöiden käyttäytymistä. Tutkimus valaisee myös itseohjautuvan organisaation tiedon jakamisen haasteita.

Tämän seurauksena tutkimus myötävaikuttaa rajalliseen tieteelliseen ymmärrykseen täysin itseohjautuvista organisaatioista ja tarjoaa lisätietoa niiden kulttuurillisista ominaisuuksista. Tutkimus tarjoaa myös käytännön ehdotuksia, kuinka itseohjautuvat yritykset pystyvät edistämään itseohjautumista tukevaa kulttuuria.

Avainsanat itseohjautuva organisaatio, työkulttuuri, itseohjautuvuus, autonomia

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1. Introduction

1.1. Background

Digitalization and globalization are causing the world to develop at an increasing pace continuously. Especially the ever-evolving technological developments are forcing companies to be more flexible and adaptive to market disruptions, which has challenged companies' ways of organizing in turn. Work tasks are also becoming more knowledge-intensive while manual tasks are being automated, impacting organizations so that managers do not have the complete competence to solve organizational challenges. Instead, every organization member needs to contribute. (Kostamo and Martela, 2017.) Moreover, the younger generation values meaningful work over financial compensation, which pressures companies to change how they operate (De Hauw and De Vos, 2010; Savaspuro, 2019, p. 40).

As an effect, organizations are loosening or eliminating their organizational structures to answer to these changes (Lee and Edmondson, 2017; Kostamo and Martela, 2017), since traditional managerial hierarchy models are not able to keep up with the dynamic business environment of today (Hamel, 2011; Kostamo and Martela, 2017; Lee and Edmondson, 2017). The top-down approach to management is too slow in initiating decisions (Hamel, 2011) and hinders rapid development (Kostamo and Martela, 2017). Due to the constraints of bureaucracy, less-hierarchical means of organizing are being adopted. One answer is the self-managed organization, which is defined as organizations with radically decentralized authority (Lee and Edmondson, 2017). These organizations have abolished the traditional manager-subordinate authority relationship to such a degree that middle managers do not exist (Martela, 2019).

This type of organizational form has piqued interest amongst scholars, business reviews, and widespread interest alike (Martela, 2019), given that self-managed organizations can answer the need for flexibility, adaptivity, innovative behavior, and meaning-making

(Lee and Edmondson, 2017; Kostamo and Martela, 2017). Although there is increased interest in fully self-managed organizations amongst practitioners, scholarly research and understanding on this radically decentralized organizing is currently limited. Therefore, scholars have demanded more research and theory on fully self-managed organizations to increase understanding of these organizational models and offer new practical possibilities for companies. (Puranam and Håkonsson, 2015; Bernstein, Bunch, Canner and Lee, 2016; Lee and Edmondson, 2017.)

Moreover, most research on self-managed organizations has focused on the general design features of how they are structured and organized. However, they have not touched on the organizational culture of self-managed organizations (Martela, 2019). Culture has a powerful influence on people's behavior, beliefs, values, and attitudes (Iivari and Iivari, 2011) and affects organizational performance (Barney, 1986; Sadri and Lees, 2001; Schein, 2010). Therefore, it is vital to understand the underlying culture of self-managed organizations to gain additional insight into the factors that guide self-management.

1.2. Research question

In accordance with the research gap mentioned above, the study's objective is to increase the understanding of self-managed organizations, especially the cultural aspects that define self-managed organizations. Therefore, the study's goal is to answer the following research question:

What is the organizational culture like within a self-managed organization?

By answering the above research question, the study will contribute to the limited scholarly understanding of fully self-managed organizations and provide additional insight into the cultural characteristics that define self-managed organizations.

1.3. Thesis structure

The thesis will continue with a comprehensive literature review on the concept of self-management, organizational culture, and cultural characteristics of self-managed

organizations, after which I present the research design and method of the study in the third chapter. After, I present the findings of the study and compare it to prior literature. Finally, I summarize the study based on a theoretical cultural framework, present practical implications, evaluate the validity and limitations of the study, and offer suggestions for future research.

2. Literature review

The following chapter will explore existing literature on self-managed organizations and organizational culture. First, I will introduce the concept of self-management, followed by the introduction of organizational culture. In the third section of the literature review, I will present the possible cultural characteristics of self-managed organizations. The last section will present a theoretical cultural framework of self-managed organizations.

2.1. Self-managed organizations

The following chapter will explore the current literature on self-managed organizations. First, I will explore the evolution of self-management. Secondly, I will present the typical characteristics of self-managed organizations. Thirdly and lastly, I will present the idea behind self-management, which leans on the psychological and motivational theory of Self-Determination.

2.1.1. The emergence of self-management

Since the beginnings of organizational studies, organizational design has continuously evolved. From Max Weber's managerial hierarchy mode, known for its command-control management style, clear procedures, and high hierarchy, organizational design has evolved to lower hierarchical styles. One example is Adhocracy, which operates as a matrix organization or with self-managing teams (Martela, 2019). Despite the evolution towards less-hierarchical organizational models, formal managerial hierarchies are still the most popular and widespread model. Although highly popular, these bureaucratic hierarchies are argued to have difficulties keeping up with the dynamic business environment of today, which requires flexibility and adaptability from organizations (Barker; 1993; Hamel, 2011; Kostamo and Martela, 2017; Lee and Edmonson, 2017). Due to predefined tasks and strict structures, traditional organizational forms cannot solve novel, highly complex, or surprising problems, according to Lee and Edmondson (2017). Hamel (2011) also argues that the top-down approach to management is too slow in initiating decisions, and the management layer is unnecessarily costly due to higher

salaries. Moreover, several researchers argue that bureaucratic management structures hinder innovation, creativity, and rapid development, which negatively affects competitiveness (i.e. Wellins, Byham and Wilson, 1990; Kostamo and Martela, 2017).

Due to the constraints of bureaucracy, less-hierarchical means of organizing have been adopted by organizations and scholars. These may consist of attempts to keep the management layer and structuring it in a less-hierarchical manner, such as with supervisor-free self-managed teams (Wellins et al., 1991). Alternatively, organizations have been eliminating the entire level of middle management (Lee and Edmondson, 2017). These types of organizational forms are also known as self-managed organizations.

There are three reasons for the increased interest in self-managed organizations, according to Martela and Jarenko (2017). Firstly, due to digitalization and globalization, the world is continuously evolving at an increasing pace, forcing companies to be more flexible and adaptive to market disruptions. This requires effective information flows within organizations as well as quick decision-making. Secondly, work tasks are changing and with increasing speed, where repetitive tasks will be automated, and tasks requiring problem-solving skills and human interaction will continue. The shift to more knowledge-intensive work impacts organizations since managers do not have the full competence to solve organizational challenges. Instead, every organization member needs to contribute. Thirdly, digitalization and the development of information technology enable large groups to coordinate without middle-managers.

Furthermore, Savaspuro (2019, p. 40) argues that employees have become more demanding by expecting more freedom, trust, autonomy, and decision-making possibilities within the company they work for. Especially the younger generation of millennials value the culture and people of an organization more than financial compensation and expect companies to offer meaningful work, equal treatment, flexibility, and fairness (De Hauw and De Vos, 2010; Savaspuro, 2019, p. 40). Laloux (2014, p. 139) argues that millenials see people's influence dictated by contribution and reputation, causing them to value self-management more than the position at work. As an

effect, organizations are loosening or eliminating their structures to support self-management and motivation (Lee and Edmondson, 2017; Kostamo and Martela, 2017). Nevertheless, scholarly research and understanding on this type of radically decentralized organizing is currently limited, which calls for more research and understanding on the new organizational model (Puranam and Håkonsson, 2015; Bernstein et al., 2016; Lee and Edmondson, 2017.)

Numerous organizations have adopted self-management, such as the world's largest tomato processor company Morning Star and an online shoe and clothing retailer, Zappos. For example, Morning Star has eliminated the manager-level, giving employees the freedom and responsibility in their work. In turn, Morning Star employees are committed to the company. They also receive higher wages given that manager-level salaries have been abolished. Furthermore, the company is reported to be more innovative and flexible. (Hamel, 2011.) Similarly, self-management has allowed Zappos to get more out of their employees' work by giving them autonomy, and the employees enjoy the fact that they have an influence on organization-level decisions in turn (Bernstein et al., 2016).

2.1.2. Characteristics of self-managed organizations

Numerous terms are used to define self-management. For example, self-managing at the individual level can be referred to as self-leadership, which refers to taking responsibility for one's actions and managing oneself without guidance (Manz, 1986; Martela and Jarenko 2017). While self-managed organizations are sometimes referred to as Holacratic organizations (Robertson, 2015; Kumar and Mukherjee, 2018), Freedom-form organizations (Getz, 2009; Corbett-Etchevers, Perea, Richard, Colle and Defélix, 2019), flat organizations, or autonomous organizations (Bernstein et al., 2016).

Given that this particular study research self-management on the organizational level, I will be using the term self-managed organization to keep this study consistent. A self-managed organization can be referred to as an organization that has removed the traditional manager-subordinate reporting relationships almost entirely to distribute

power throughout the entire organization (Lee and Edmondson, 2017). Its building blocks are determined as minimum hierarchy, high individual freedom and responsibility, and clear communication and information flow (Kostamo and Martela, 2017). To date, the most comprehensive descriptions of self-managed organizations have been offered by Lee and Edmondson (2017) and Kostamo and Martela (2017). Hence, I will present the specific qualities of self-managed organizations based on both authors' views.

Firstly, self-managed organizations have radically decentralized authority (Lee and Edmonson, 2017). It can also be referred to as the minimization of hierarchy (Kostamo and Martela, 2017). The traditional reporting relationships between the manager and employee are typically removed almost entirely. Nevertheless, self-managed organizations are not entirely free from managerial work (Lee and Edmondson, 2017). On the contrary, self-managed organizations typically invest more effort in leadership than traditional hierarchies (Kostamo and Martela, 2017). Although managerial tasks can be temporarily held by members of the organization (Lee and Edmondson, 2017), every member manages oneself (Kostamo and Martela, 2017).

Secondly, since the traditional commanding relationship between the supervisor and subordinate is abolished in self-managed organizations, employees have full responsibility and autonomy (Kostamo and Martela, 2017). Autonomy refers to employees' independence, discretion, and freedom to execute their everyday work tasks (Putnam, Myers and Gailliard, 2014). In self-managed organizations, employees have the autonomy to make decisions regarding their actions and tasks (Lee and Edmondson, 2017) and their roles, purchases, and investments within the organizations (Kostamo and Martela, 2017). Therefore, organization members do not have to gain approval for decisions from higher levels of the organization, such as in bureaucratic and adhocratic companies (Martela, 2019).

Thirdly, decentralized authority is practiced throughout the entire organization, which is spread evenly amongst all teams and units. However, top management, such as C-level representatives, still may have the final say over a few critical elements of the

organization. (Lee and Edmondson, 2017.) For example, Laloux (2014, p. 104-105) elaborates on an example where a self-managed organization declared that a top-down decision-making process would be temporarily applied for a critical and complex problem. However, to ensure that self-management was not undermined, the timeframe and scope of the top-down approach were transparently communicated. A person who proved not to exert power afterward was also appointed to handle the decision-making process. Furthermore, top management may create the overarching structure of the company and how tasks are divided (Martela, 2019). Nevertheless, individual employees and teams are mainly responsible for identifying, implementing, and accomplishing work tasks based on the organization's common goal (Lee and Edmondson, 2017; Martela, 2019). For example, at Zappos, the governance of authority applies equally to both a new and senior member of the organization. At Morning Star, every organization member signs a bilateral agreement with peers and the CEO (Lee and Edmondson, 2017).

The fourth element is the voice employees have in organizational-level decisions, meaning that strategic decisions are made together with all members of the organizations from the very start (Kostamo and Martela, 2017). As mentioned prior, although top management has authority over some elements of strategic decision-making (Lee and Edmondson, 2017), management ensures that everyone has a say in shaping the company, which encourages employees to take initiative (Kostamo and Martela, 2017) and also signals trust towards employees (Laloux, 2014, p. 110).

The fifth quality is the systematic and formal decentralization of authority so that it is clear to all. Rather than decentralizing power amongst managers, relying on a culture that empowers employees, or simply expecting the decentralization of authority to be an informal arrangement, self-managed organizations have clear rules on how authority is decentralized. For example, the formal system can be materialized into a handbook, which explains how authority is practiced within the organization. (Lee and Edmondson, 2017.)

The sixth characteristic is transparent communication and information flow, which refers to the availability of all relevant company information ranging from plans and decisions

to financial reports. Instead of constraining important company information at the top level of the organization, self-managed organizations ensure a broad and transparent distribution of information so that members can make informed decisions based on the organization's goals. (Kostamo and Martela, 2017; Martela, 2019.)

The seventh quality is a clear and shared vision of the organization. Self-managed organizations ensure all members have a clear understanding of where the organization is heading for autonomous employees to act and make decisions that are aligned with the common goal. This eliminates the need for rules and traditional roles that would coordinate all operations. (Kostamo and Martela, 2017.)

Lastly, self-managing employees have continuously evolving roles instead of static ones (Kostamo and Martela, 2017; Corbett-Etchevers et al., 2019). Rather than having static departments or tasks defined by upper-level managers, roles and responsibilities are negotiated with co-workers based on demand. Employees can thus freely decide to change roles or choose different tasks based on their judgment and whether it is something the organization needs. (Kostamo and Martela, 2017.) For example, Morning Star does not have readily defined roles (Hamel, 2011).

Table 1. Characteristics of Self-Managed Organizations

Characteristic of a self-managed organization	**Authors**
Radically decentralized authority and minimized hierarchy	Kostamo and Martela (2017) Lee and Edmondson (2017)
Full responsibility and autonomy	Kostamo and Martela (2017)
Authority is decentralized in the entire organization	Lee and Edmondson (2017)
People are participated in strategic decisions	Kostamo and Martela (2017)
Systematic and formal decentralization of authority	Lee and Edmondson (2017)
Transparent communication and information flow	Kostamo and Martela (2017)
Clear and shared vision	Kostamo and Martela (2017)
Continuously evolving roles	Kostamo and Martela (2017)

It is important to note that the above-defined characteristics of self-managed organizations may differ based on the company at hand. The scope and amount of authority and control dictated may differ based on the nature, strategy, and industry of the particular organization. (Lee and Edmondson, 2017.)

2.1.3. Self-Determination Theory

Self-management leans on the theory that humans are proactive individuals and have the intrinsic motivation to succeed. Therefore, they can have freedom and responsibility at work (McGregor, 1960). Self-management is born from psychology and motivation theory, explicitly known as Self-Determination Theory (SDT) (Deci, Olafsen and Ryan, 2017). According to Self-Determination Theory, motivation is the critical influence on the performance and well-being of employees. Motivation can be separated to autonomous motivation and controlled motivation. (Deci et. al., 2017; Kostamo and Martela, 2017). While controlled motivation develops from external forces, such as compensation, autonomous motivation arises from within the individual and from feelings of ownership and one's own will (Deci et al., 2017). Therefore, autonomous motivation is needed in self-management, since by giving a person the impression that an activity is self-chosen and the person has the power over one's activities, the individual will be more autonomously motivated towards the particular activity at hand (Kostamo and Martela, 2017).

Furthermore, according to Deci and others (2017), autonomous motivation can be separated into integrated and intrinsic motivation. The former refers to the rewarding and satisfying activity, while the latter means that the act is connected to one's values, creating a strong need to perform well. Intrinsic and autonomous motivation combined are linked to higher performance, well-being, work commitment, and work satisfaction. Therefore, Self-Determination Theory and intrinsic motivation offer reasons why self-managed organizations are argued to be effective. Self-managed organizations need their personnel to be intrinsically motivated to work autonomously, be proactive, and work towards the organization's common goals (Kostamo and Martela, 2017).

In order to ensure that employees experience autonomous motivation and in an intrinsic way, organizations must ensure that employees' basic psychological needs are satisfied with a properly nourishing environment (Deci et al., 2017; Kostamo and Martela, 2017). Due to the world's higher well-being and living standards, the psychological needs in question are the higher needs in Maslow's hierarchy (McGregor, 1960). Gagné and Deci (2005) and Corbett-Etchevers and others (2019) specify three needs. The first is the need for autonomy, meaning that employees should feel that an activity is self-chosen and motivation is formed from within. The second need is competence, which refers to the ability to complete activities and tasks successfully and continuously develop one's capabilities. The last need is relatedness, which is the feeling that one is cared for and appreciated and has a sense of connection with others and feels the same way about others. Once these three basic needs are fulfilled, motivation arises naturally, and the person will have the purpose to act enthusiastically by taking responsibility. Therefore, the role of management within self-managed organizations is to facilitate these needs of employees (Martela and Jarenko, 2017).

McGregor (1960) argues that bureaucratic management practices of control are insufficient in motivating employees as it does not fulfill these higher needs of humans. A controlling environment strips away the possibility of fulfilling one's basic needs, making people operate based on external motivations and resulting in short-term benefits and decreased individual well-being (Getz, 2009). Therefore, organizations should ensure they support the three needs mentioned above since they affect self-motivation, lead to higher-quality work performance, and increase well-being (Deci et. al., 2017; Kostamo and Martela, 2017).

2.2. Organizational culture

Given that culture has a powerful influence on people's behavior, beliefs, values, and attitudes (Iivari and Iivari, 2011) and affects organizational performance (Barney 1986; Sadri and Lees, 2001; Schein, 2010), it is vital to understand the concept of culture. In the

context of this study, understanding the culture of self-managed organizations will offer additional insight into the factors that guide self-management.

Therefore, in this chapter, organizational culture will be introduced, and a few different streams on organizational culture will be discussed based on previous academic studies. In addition to presenting the definition of culture, the cultural levels of organizational culture will be explored.

2.2.1. Definition of organizational culture

There is no universal definition of what is meant by organizational culture due to its complexity and ambiguity. Denison (1996) argues that it is difficult for researchers to separate the content of culture from their interests, which has created an abundant amount of different definitions. In simple terms, organizational culture is developed by multiple different forces, which differentiates organizations from one another and results in a unique, distinctive organizational culture in every company (Hofstede, 2001, p. 393; Schein, 2010). Odabasi and others (2013, p. 415-419) argue that organizations' cultural styles vary depending on the work environment, type of company, organizational philosophies, and whether the style is beneficial.

Hofstede (2001, p. 393) describes organizational culture as a soft and holistic construct established socially amongst a group of people who share the same values. Iivari and Iivari (2011) define organizational culture as a pattern of meanings learned and shared by a group and guide how members act. Similarly, Schein (2010) explains that culture is a pattern of shared assumptions formed based on the successful learnings of a group, which are then taught as the correct ways to think, feel, and perceive the problems to new members of the organization. Therefore, culture facilitates the cooperation of organizational members and guides the way they interact with other individuals, groups, departments, and even organizations (Iivari and Iivari, 2011). In addition, culture affects the way members relate to one another and how issues are confronted and resolved (Schultz, 2014).

Even though a precise definition for organizational culture is not available, it is possible to notice similarities across the definitions mentioned above, such as the focus on values and assumptions. In fact, organizational culture is often examined through values, beliefs, and norms (Cameron and Freeman, 1985; Schein, 2010; Iivari and Iivari, 2011). Values and beliefs are the basic principles of an organization, which guide how people act and make decisions (Schein, 2010). According to Schein (1984), leaders and founders bring their own values and beliefs to the organization, which originate from the leader's previous cultural experiences and personal traits. These values and beliefs are then taught as the correct way to act and think to newcomers of the organization.

On the other hand, organizational norms refer to the taken-for-granted way things are done within an organization. These can be seen as the organization's work methods, employee behavior, daily routines, used language and terminology, and hidden rules on how to react and act in social situations. In addition, norms are taught to others through socialization within an organization and guide members' behavior so that it is aligned with the organization's mission. (Schein, 2010.) All in all, organizational culture resides deep within an organization to create stability. Nevertheless, it is fluid and weak at the same time due to the way it is established through interactions and socialization (Denison, 1996).

The reason why organizational culture is highly studied is due to the influence it has on organizational performance. Organizational culture can hinder an organization's performance or be a source of competitive advantage (Barney 1986; Sadri and Lees, 2001). Schein (2010) emphasizes the importance of understanding the cultural forces created socially within the organization since members of an organization can become victims to them without understanding them. In addition, organizations also may have different cultures between different departments (Schneider, Gunnarson and Niles-Jolly, 1994), and even the different departments may entail different subcultures, which is why it is essential to understand whether the subcultures are in conflict or balance and align them in a way that ensures the organization's sustainability (Schein 2010). In cases where one of the subcultures becomes too dominant, Schein (2010) suggests the organization

cannot function properly. Therefore, since organizational culture influences the performance of organizations, it is essential to match culture with the organizations' goals. However, there are no ready-available solutions to shape organizational culture to match the organization's business goals due to culture's unique and ambiguous nature. Instead, a deep dive is needed to understand the underlying levels of organizational culture (Barney, 1986).

2.2.2. Cultural levels

Schein (2010) emphasizes the values, norms, beliefs, and basic assumptions that influence organizational culture and guide members' behavior. However, it is difficult to identify these underlying factors of culture due to their subconscious nature (Cameron and Freeman, 1985) and because they lie in deeper levels of culture (Schein, 1984). Hence, in order to understand the underlying levels of organizational culture, Schein (2010) distinguishes three different levels of organizational culture; surface levels (artifacts), deep levels (basic assumptions), and in between these two can be found the espoused beliefs. The visible levels are influenced by the invisible levels of culture (Schein, 2010).

The first level, the surface level, consists of the different visible artifacts of culture (Schein, 2010). The tangible artifacts can be verbal and physical (Denison, 1996). For example, it includes the physical layout of the premises, the dress code, symbols, manners, ceremonies, rituals, used language, publicly listed values, organizational stories, and the level of formality in how people address each other. Although they are easy to see, they are more difficult to decode by outsiders of the organization as they are guided by the underlying beliefs and values of the group. (Schein, 2010.)

The intermediate level encompasses the values and beliefs formed between members of a group that guides the activities of organizational members, especially when problem-solving is needed. In order to realize the organizational values, organizations use directives and processes that support the values to guide employees to embrace the underlying beliefs. These include the organization's norms, ideologies, and mission and vision statements. The values and beliefs are thus gradually formed into shared values by

mutual reinforcement of organizational members once they are validated as successful, after which they are eventually formed into shared assumptions (Schein, 2010), which I come to next.

The deepest level consists of the underlying assumptions of organizational members, which are typically unconscious and determine members' perceptions, thought processes, feelings, and behavior. Assumptions are held onto firmly and are typically undebatable, making them extremely difficult to change. The assumptions create the artifacts of the surface level and values of the intermediate level, which is why understanding the underlying assumptions aids in understanding the two upper levels of culture. (Schein, 2010.)

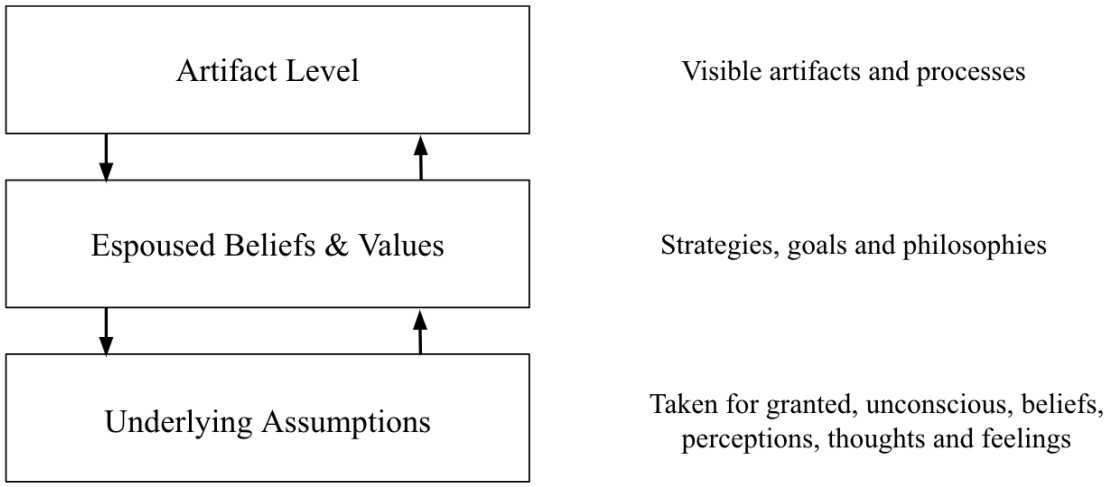

Figure 1. Levels of organizational culture (Schein, 2010, p. 26)

Since there are many different definitions of culture, I will be investigating organizational culture based on Schein's (2010) three cultural levels to keep this study consistent. I understand organizational culture as a pattern of shared deeply seated values and assumptions that influence the behavior of organizational members and, in turn, reflect the physical environment and visible practices of an organization. This is Schein's (2010) general definition of culture and encompasses the three cultural levels. However, since many organizational scholars agree that the underlying values and assumptions influence

organizational behavior more than the visible layer (i.e. Riter, 1994; Martins and Terblanche, 2003), I aim to gain insight into the beliefs and values (intermediate level) and the underlying assumptions (deepest level) of culture in this study.

2.3. Possible cultural dimensions of self-managed organizations

In the following chapter, the cultural characteristics of self-managed organizations will be distinguished and discussed. Since organizational culture has a powerful influence on people's behavior, beliefs, values, and attitudes within an organization (Iivari and Iivari, 2011) and an effect on organizational performance (Barney 1986; Sadri and Lees, 2001; Schein, 2010), it is vital to understand the underlying culture of self-managed organizations to gain more insight into the factors that guide self-management. However, research into the organizational culture of less-hierarchical organizations is almost entirely missing, namely for fully self-managed organizations. Although the limited number of studies on radically self-managed organizations do touch on some cultural characteristics, they are not considered cultural studies as they mainly focus on organizational design. Furthermore, the literature on organizational culture related to self-management is primarily theoretical and contains a sample size too insignificant for generalization.

Nevertheless, the available literature and research are adequate to offer a basis for further research. The observations of the cultural characteristics of self-managed organizations are complemented with the organizational culture literature on agile organizations, Teal organizations, self-managing teams, work-related autonomy, and employee empowerment. These models share similar ideologies as self-managed organizations. They more or less strive for autonomy and decentralized authority and hence share similar cultural characteristics to self-managed organizations. Therefore, cultural studies related to the models above are applicable to be used to explore the cultural dimensions of self-managed organizations.

As mentioned prior, self-managed organizations promote minimum hierarchy and autonomy (Kostamo and Martela, 2017; Lee and Edmondson, 2017; Kumar and Mukherjee, 2018), and are built upon Self-Determination theory (Deci et al. 2017). Self-Determination Theory considers how the surrounding environment, e.g. social and cultural factors, facilitates employees' motivation, autonomy, well-being, and work performance. In order to strengthen self-motivation and self-management, self-managed organizations aim to create an environment that satisfies an individual's psychological needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness (Gagné and Deci, 2005; Corbett-Etchevers et al., 2019). To fulfill these basic needs, Savaspuro (2019, p. 51-53) argues that the organizational culture of self-managed organizations should be built on three core elements; trust, autonomy, and clear and open communication. In addition, to fulfill the universal need for competence and relatedness (Gagné and Deci, 2005; Corbett-Etchevers et al., 2019), organizations should support learning and professional development and emphasize the values of caring and appreciation (Martela and Jarenko, 2015, p. 95-137).

2.3.1. Autonomy

Firstly, there should be a culture of autonomy within self-managed organizations since it motivates, inspires, commits, and increases well-being (Savaspuro, 2019, p. 51-53). A culture of autonomy satisfies an individual's psychological needs for autonomy based on Self-Determination Theory (Gagné and Deci, 2005; Corbett-Etchevers et al., 2019). Providing employees' autonomy, freedom, and responsibility to take actions they consider worthwhile is an essential criterion in F-form organizations, which can be defined as a self-managed organization (Getz, 2009). Furthermore, high individual freedom and responsibility are among the building blocks of self-managed organizations, according to Kostamo and Martela (2017).

From a team-based view, autonomy allows members of a self-managing team to enjoy authority and responsibility in decision-making, coordinate within the team without a supervisor, and take collective responsibility (Barker, 1993). Autonomy can also refer to empowering members of the organization to have the power to work on meaningful and

important work tasks (Kurki and Wilenius, 2016). This statement leans on self-leadership theory, which suggests that individuals of an organization should be able to choose the aspects of tasks that are enjoyable. Self-leadership also leans on Self-Determination Theory by sharing the belief that work feels more intrinsically rewarding when tasks bring pleasure, meaning, and a feeling that one has the competence to complete the tasks. (Manz and Sims, 2001.) Therefore, self-leadership supports the culture of autonomy, especially given that self-managed organizations give employees the freedom to choose their work tasks and roles (Kostamo and Martela, 2017).

The concept of autonomy is recognized especially in employee empowerment literature. According to Yang and Ok Choi's (2009) empirical study, giving a team autonomy intrinsically motivates individuals and leads to higher levels of empowerment and team performance. Also, allocating responsibility to lower levels of the organization improves team performance. Autonomy also makes team members more empowered and proactive (Kirkman and Rosen, 1999). Empowered teams also tend to have increased information and knowledge sharing (Srivastava, Bartol and Locke, 2006; Navimipour and Charband, 2016), which is essential in self-managed organizations. In fact, the well-known key for effective self-managed teams is to offer a wide degree of authority to the group, allowing them to enjoy considerable flexibility in decision-making, according to Druskat and Wheeler (2004). However, it is important to note that the starting point of employee empowerment differs in self-managed organizations compared to others. In some organizations, employee empowerment can be seen as top-level people being gracious enough to give lower-level employees some of their power. While in self-managed organizations, employees simply have power instead of fighting for it since empowerment is intertwined into the organization's structures, processes, and activities. (Laloux, 2014, p. 137.)

Empowering employees at all levels with the autonomy to evaluate methods and operations and propose solutions to the problems they identify also facilitates organizational agility (Schultz, 2014). This is why agile organizations value freedom, individual initiative, and flexibility instead of strict rules to answer to uncertainty, change,

and ambiguity (Iivari and Iivari, 2011). Agile organizations give both individuals and teams the freedom to work and use their competence to adapt quickly (Denning, 2013). This type of organizational flexibility is also the goal of self-managed organizations (Martela and Jarenko, 2017).

2.3.2. Trust

Secondly, a trusting culture develops the feeling of safety, which is central when encouraging people to take responsibility for one's work (Savaspuro, 2019, p. 51-53). Self-management requires trust amongst colleagues and the feeling that management trusts the members of the organization (Savaspuro, 2019, p. 49). This builds on McGregor's (1960) theory that by viewing employees with trust, they will return it with responsibility-taking behavior. Trust comes in different forms, one being social trust and the other instrumental trust. Social trust refers to trusting the goodwill of others, while instrumental trust is the trust in the competence and predictability of others. Trust in competence means that people believe that the other can deliver desired outcomes and solve problems with their competence. Trust in predictability refers to the belief that people will behave based on one's expectations. (Tyler, 2003.)

Trust has a critical role in flat network-based organizations, which rely on interpersonal and intra-organizational cooperation (Tyler, 2003). In fact, for self-managing processes to work, such as with autonomous decision-making, employees must trust one another to do the right things, which in turn eliminates the need for control mechanisms and procreates responsibility (Laloux, 2014, p. 80-81). Moreover, since management does not monitor or control their employees in self-managed organizations, they must trust their employees (Kostamo and Martela, 2017). Which is why Laloux (2014, p. 230) presents trust to be a common cultural trait amongst organizations that strive for self-management, meaning that co-workers trust one another. The value placed on trust was also a finding that Kurki and Wilenius (2016) found from their study on two self-managed organizations.

Trust is critical for cooperation within organizations (Tyler, 2003; Meier, Stephenson and Perkowski, 2019) and is proven to positively affect innovation (Ellonen, Blomqvist and Puumalainen, 2008). Trust has also been found to positively impact collaboration amongst team members (Breuer, Hüffmeier, and Hertel, 2016; Choi and Cho, 2019). In a study on external leaders of self-managed teams, building team trust and trusting the individuals of a team was seen as essential to team success (Druskat and Wheeler, 2004).

Schultz (2014) also highlights the importance of creating an environment of trust to empower employees to work in environments that require change and flexibility. This type of culture allows the feeling that they are trusted to make the best decisions without having to ask approval from higher up and that they can ask for help, receive assistance, and make mistakes without being punished.

2.3.3. Openness and transparency

Thirdly, the culture should encourage clear and open dialogue amongst all employees of the organization to ensure information moves around (Savaspuro, 2019, p. 51-53). Also, the dialogue amongst employees should be authentic, meaning that people can voice their differing opinions freely (Savaspuro, 2019, p. 51-53). Clear communication and information flow is a central organizing structure of self-managed organizations and can be seen as essential to success (Kurki and Wilenius, 2016; Kostamo and Martela, 2017). Instead of constraining important company information at the top level or the organization, self-managed organizations must ensure a broad and transparent distribution of information for all self-organizing members to make informed decisions (Laloux, 2014, p.111; Kostamo and Martela, 2017; Martela 2019). Which is why self-managed organizations also communicate a clear vision so that autonomous employees can act and make decisions that are aligned with the common goal (Getz, 2009; Kostamo and Martela, 2017). A guiding vision is also a crucial component within self-managed companies that consist of self-managing teams since it allows the teams to guide their work and coordinate with other members of the organization (Barker, 1993). It also gives

employees an understanding of which of their autonomous actions are best for the company (Getz, 2009).

2.3.4. Learning and development

To fulfill the universal need for competence based on Self-Determination Theory (Gagné and Deci, 2005; Corbett-Etchevers et al., 2019), organizations should support learning and professional development so that individuals get to embark on challenging work tasks and can continuously learn and keep their professional competence up to date (Martela and Jarenko, 2015, p. 95-116). According to the study on F-form organizations by Getz (2009), the companies ensured an environment that provides professional growth by allowing employees to switch work tasks and supporting them to gain the skills to succeed in them. Furthermore, the self-managed organization Zappos emphasizes learning potential by allowing employees to modify their careers so that they can move around the organization to learn new functions (Kumar and Mukherjee, 2018). In addition, Martela and Jarenko (2015, p. 111-112) emphasize continuous feedback to ensure a culture of continuous development within an organization.

Similarly, continuous improvement is a value of agile organizations in which individuals work in cross-functional teams that allow role switching to enable continuous learning (Denning, 2013). Spiegler and others (2019) propose that companies aiming for agility with autonomous teams should foster learning so that every member of the organization continuously shares knowledge openly with one another and hence learn from each other. This can be fostered with the right tools and communities. The possibility to share knowledge amongst team and organization members intrinsically motivates individuals, facilitating creativity and learning in turn (Takeuchi and Nonaka, 1986). Therefore, agile organizations emphasize the right tools and procedures that foster knowledge sharing and management, such as incentives for actively sharing knowledge, offering communities of practice, and providing meetings in which anyone can join (Spiegler et al., 2019).

2.3.5. Caring and appreciation

Moreover, to support the experience of relatedness, which can be referred to as the sense of connection and the feeling that one is cared for and appreciated (Gagné and Deci, 2005; Corbett-Etchevers et al., 2019), the company culture of self-managed organizations should emphasize the values of caring and appreciation. Meaning that all employees are taken into consideration, listened to, and thanked (Martela and Jarenko 2015, p. 117-137). Management should genuinely listen to the employees instead of dictating what they must do, which creates the feeling that all members of the organization are equal (Getz, 2009). By creating the impression that the employee is important and valued, a sense of community within the organization is strengthened and increases the motivation to achieve the common goals of the organization together (Robertson, 2015). Schultz (2014) also emphasizes the importance of agile organizations making employees feel recognized and cared to create a sense of community. This type of human-centricity is essential within self-managed organizations as they rely on the community of coworkers (Kurki and Wilenius 2016). This can be seen, for example, by allowing all employees to participate in higher-level decisions (Kostamo and Martela, 2017).

In addition to members satisfying their own universal needs, members are also expected to satisfy others' universal needs in self-managed organizations by treating them equally and helping them out (Getz, 2009). Helping and respecting others should also be evident values within self-managed teams (Polley and Ribbens, 1998). Based on a study on self-managed teams, Zarraga and Bonache (2005) argue that a team atmosphere supporting caring is key as it favors knowledge creation and sharing of knowledge. According to Von Krogh (1998), high care builds up when a team experiences mutual trust in competence, grace when judging others' actions and ideas, willingness to share opinions, and empathy towards another's situation, interests, failure, and competence. Also, the willingness to offer help and share one's knowledge, instead of hoarding it with the fear of losing a position of power, supports a caring atmosphere. Similarly, leaders should exhibit care for the team members of self-managed teams (Druskat and Wheeler, 2004).

2.4. Theoretical cultural framework

Based on the literature review findings, a theoretical cultural framework of self-managed organizations is provided (Figure 2) to guide the study in diagnosing the cultural aspects of self-managed organizations.

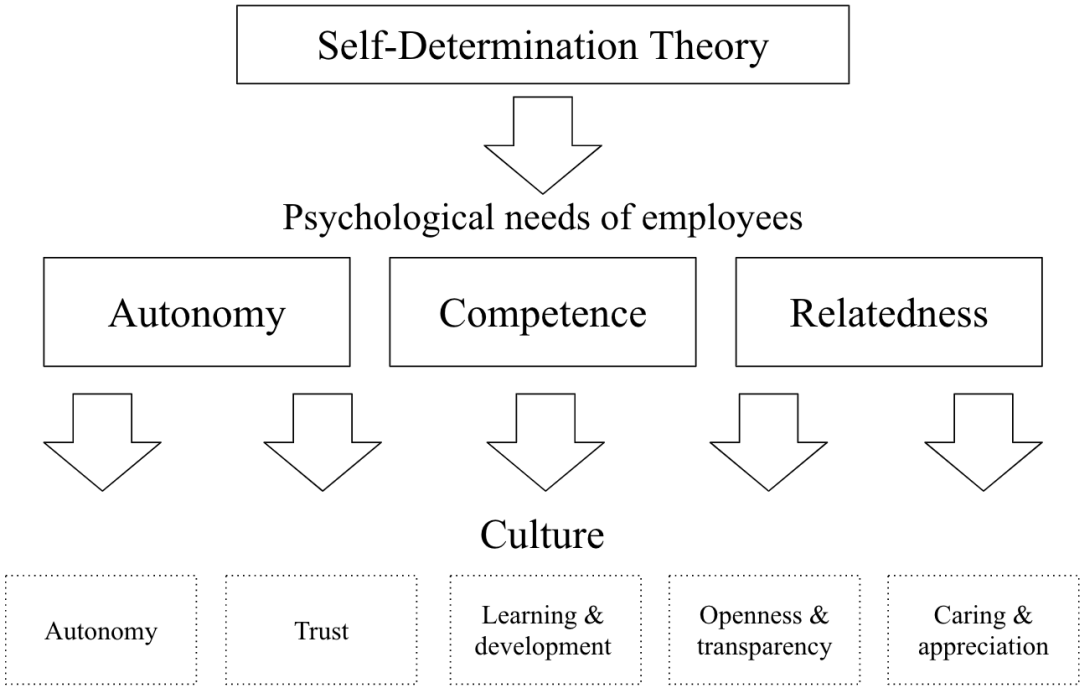

Figure 2. Theoretical cultural framework of self-managed organizations

To summarize the theoretical cultural framework, the idea behind self-management is based on Self-Determination Theory, which argues that there motivation can be distinguished between autonomous motivation and controlled motivation (Deci et. al., 2017). Intrinsic autonomous motivation sets the basis for self-management so that employees can work autonomously, self-manage, be proactive, and work towards the organization's common goals (Kostamo and Martela, 2017). To ensure that employees experience autonomous motivation intrinsically, organizations must ensure that employees' basic psychological needs are satisfied (Deci et. al., 2017), which are autonomy, competence, and relatedness (Gagné and Deci, 2005; Corbett-Etchevers et al.,

2019). Once these three basic needs are fulfilled, motivation arises naturally, and the person will have the purpose to act enthusiastically by taking responsibility.

To fulfill these basic needs, Savaspuro (2019, p. 51-53) argues that the organizational culture for self-managed organizations should be built on three core elements; trust, autonomy, and clear and open dialogue. Furthermore, Martela and Jarenko (2015, p. 95-116) propose that self-managed organizations should facilitate a culture of learning and development, which in part fulfills the universal need for competence based on Self-Determination Theory (Gagné and Deci, 2005; Corbett-Etchevers et al., 2019). Moreover, to support the experience of relatedness, the company culture of self-managed organizations should emphasize the values of caring and appreciation (Martela and Jarenko, 2015, p. 117-137). Therefore, the theoretical cultural framework focuses on these five dimensions of culture to guide the exploration of organizational culture within self-managed organizations.

3. Research design and methods

The following chapter presents my chosen research approach and the methods used to collect and analyze the data.

3.1. Research approach

The study's goal is to create more understanding of self-managed organizations and especially the cultural aspects that define self-managed organizations. Therefore, the study's objective is to answer the following research question:

What is the organizational culture like within a self-managed organization?

Given that self-managed organizations are a relatively new and under-researched phenomenon (Lee and Edmonson, 2017), the study is exploratory by nature. Hence, the goal is to gain a holistic understanding of the phenomenon, which calls for a qualitative research approach (Eriksson and Kovalainen, 2008).

Organizational culture can be studied both qualitatively and quantitatively. However, quantitative methods have been criticized for not being able to study the deeper cultural values of an organization (Cameron and Quinn, 2011). Furthermore, Schein (2010) argues that using quantitative methods for researching culture causes difficulties in validating an instrument for studying such a complex phenomenon, the cultural dimensions chosen for a survey or questionnaire may not be of relevance to the studied organization, the respondent is not able to answer the questions reliably given that assumptions are tacit by nature, and a questionnaire is not able to pattern the cultural assumptions into a paradigm. Although qualitative research faces similar limitations, I believe that it is still a better approach as it will not limit the cultural dimensions that I can explore. Therefore, this study is qualitative.

Each researcher has background assumptions that guide their research, so it is good to identify these assumptions, such as based on the question of what is reality (ontology) and knowledge (epistemology). From the ontological viewpoint, my assumption of reality

is subjective, meaning that perceptions and experiences differ between people and develop based on time and a specific context. In other words, I believe that there is not just one reality but multiple ones. The epistemological starting point of this study leans on constructionism, which is the belief that organizations continuously produce culture through social interaction, which focuses on meaning-making. (Eriksson and Kovalainen, 2008.) In practice, I acknowledge that organizational culture is a social construction of reality and conditioned by people's experiences (Schein, 2010).

This study aims to understand the organizational phenomena of culture within self-managed organizations. Since culture is subjective and context-dependent, it is justifiable to carry out the study for only one company in an intensive manner. Therefore, this study researches the organizational culture of a particular mid-sized organization working in the IT industry that operates in a self-managing fashion. Although the company operates internationally, my study focuses on the organizational culture of the Finnish office, which consists of the back-office and client teams in Finland. Given that I am studying one organization's organizational culture, the boundaries of this study are limited to this specific organization. The studied company will be presented next.

3.2. Studied company

The studied company is a Finnish IT consultancy company, Reaktor. This specific company was chosen for the study due to its reputation of working in a decentralized and self-managing manner and because I am familiar with the organization and the people working there. This familiarity aspect is also known as backyard research (Glesne, 1999, p. 26-28), which is argued to improve the chances of creating detailed contextual understanding when the organization is already familiar to the researcher (Eriksson and Kovalainen, 2008).

Reaktor was founded in 2000 and has grown into an international company, operating in seven different countries with around 550 employees. Their focus is on creating digital products, services, and strategies for their clients. Their work philosophy is based on autonomous and cross-functional teams (Reaktor, 2022). Since its origins, Reaktor has

operated with self-organization, social control, and trust with networked practices (Kurki and Wilenius, 2016), which are based on an open and responsibility-giving culture (Sormunen, 2017). According to one of the founding members, teams are formed around clients' projects, and they are given significant autonomy. Teams are also supported with support functions, such as HR, training suppliers, specialists, and in-house coaches. (Ihalainen, 2019.) All in all, Reaktor has won awards in best working places studies both in Finland and Europe (Sormunen, 2017).

Since Reaktor has been operating with a systematically and radically self-managing organization design from the very start, the company is suited for studying the phenomenon of self-managed organizations.

3.3. Data collection

Due to the unique nature of organizational culture, a deep analysis is required to understand the behavior-driving hidden levels of organizational culture. Meaning that in-depth interviews are needed (Schein, 1984). Interviews are considered a suitable choice in cases where a phenomenon is complex and relatively new as they can collect extensive and multifaceted information (Eisenhardt and Graebner, 2007). Given that organizational culture is a complex concept, it is relevant to collect primary empirical data by interviewing the studied company's employees. Therefore, semi-structured interviews were used as the interview method. This type of interview approach studies both open-ended 'what' and 'how' questions (Eriksson and Kovalainen, 2008), which is argued to be one of the best research approaches according to Holstein and Gubrium (2004). The questions were formulated into open-ended questions to get a deep dive into the interviewees' personal experiences (Hirsjärvi and Hurme, 1982).

Cameron and Quinn (2011) argue that researching organizational culture as a whole is merely impossible. Instead, specific cultural dimensions should be focused on. Therefore, instead of having detailed questions, the interview guide was divided into themes (Hirsjärvi and Hurme, 1982) which were decided based on academic literature on self-managed organizations and their culture; 1) values, mission, and vision, 2) organization

and leadership, 3) responsibility and decision-making, 4) feedback, evaluation, and recognition, 5) information and communication, 6) learning and development, 7) interpersonal relationships, and 8) self-management. Since culture is such an abstract term and affects the way people behave (Schein, 2010; Iivari and Iivari, 2011; Schultz, 2014), I decided to study culture through the processes and practices of the organization to investigate the two cultural levels defined by Schein (2010); beliefs and values (intermediate level of organizational culture) and the underlying assumptions (deepest level of organizational culture).

Two separate interview guides were developed; one for normal workers and one for the experts in self-management. Even though I used two separate interview guides, both revolved around the above-mentioned themes, and the questions were similar in nature. Interviewees were asked similar questions, which is a typical way to conduct semi-structured interviews (Eskola and Suoranta, 2008). Since probing more in-depth answers is allowed in the semi-structured method (Eriksson and Kovalainen, 2008), the interview situation guides the themes that are focused on (Eskola and Suoranta, 2008). The interview guide for normal workers can be found in Appendix A, and the one for experts in self-management can be found in Appendix B.

I gained access to the studied organization in January 2021 through a personal relation who works for the company. Around February, the person proposed two co-workers to participate in the study, as they had significant experience in self-management. I was able to choose the rest of the participants, given that I had connections within the company. When selecting the interviewees, the organization and I ensured that the participants had a mix of different positions and work roles (working in support teams versus client teams) to gain a comprehensive view of the possible culture. We also ensured that they were capable of sharing their knowledge and experiences by mainly choosing people who had worked in the company for at least a year to ensure high-quality data.

There was no specific goal of how many participants were to be interviewed. It highly depended on the number of people wanting to volunteer. However, the aim was to conduct

as many interviews as possible until patterns emerged (Hirsjärvi and Hurme, 1982). I contacted seven possible candidates personally via e-mail at the start of March 2021 to explain the study and asked whether they would like to participate in the study. All seven of them voluntarily accepted to participate. All were sent the data protection notice, consent to participate, and interview questions before the actual interviews. Based on the initial analysis of the seven interviews, patterns had already started to emerge. Thus, the amount of data collected was sufficient for the study.

Out of the interviewees, one worked as a consultant for a client full-time, three mainly worked within support functions, while the rest of the five interviewees worked as consultants in client teams and within support functions. Three of the interviewees worked within the same support team in addition to other tasks, while the rest of the interviewees that worked within support tasks mainly worked in separate support teams. Since the interviewees cannot disclose their clients, it is unclear whether any of the interviewees worked in the same client teams. Two of the interviewees had worked for Reaktor for over 10 years, another two had worked for the company over 5 years, and three under 5 years. Six of the interviewees were male and one was female.

The interview questions were first tested with the contact person who works in the studied company. This allowed me to test the interview questions in action, after which I made a few minor alterations to the interview guide to ensure the questions were clear to the interviewees and to ensure all the needed findings around culture would be collected. The interviews were conducted in Finnish, given that all participants were Finnish. Therefore, the interview questions were translated from English to Finnish. The interviews were conducted from the 17th of March to the 6th of April 2021. Two interviews were conducted face-to-face, four virtually, and one over the phone. The interviews varied from 26 minutes to 1 hour and 23 minutes. All interviews were recorded with a voice recorder, and the recordings were transcribed verbatim after each interview. The collected data was stored and managed with utmost care to ensure the security of the data.

After every interview, the interviewee had the possibility to choose whether they wanted to be anonymous in the study or have their name and/or job role mentioned next to a direct quote. I promised that they could change this freely any time before the submission of the study. Each participant had the possibility to check the direct quotes before submission. The studied organization also read through the findings before publishing the study to ensure no misconceptions were made on my part.

3.4. Data analysis

The data was analyzed using thematic analysis. I decided to use this approach, given that thematic analysis is an excellent way to view interviewees' perspectives and possibly generate unexpected insights (Nowell, Norris, White and Moules, 2017). Thematic analysis entails ”identifying, analyzing and reporting patterns within data” (Braun and Clarke, 2006, p. 79). It entails classifying and labeling, i.e. coding, gathered data into relevant themes (Eriksson and Kovalainen, 2008). As a result, the themes should capture the most important insights of the patterned data that are relevant to the study’s research questions (Braun and Clarke, 2006). Although some cultural characteristics of self-managed organizations were determined from the literature review, the themes generated in the thematic analysis were not determined based on these pre-identified propositions. Instead, the data analysis took an inductive approach, meaning that the themes were determined from the empirical data (Eriksson and Kovalainen, 2008).

Green and others (2007) identify four different steps in thematic analysis; data immersion, coding, creating categories and developing themes. I used these specific steps in my analysis;

1. In the first step of data immersion, I familiarized myself with the data. In this phase, the researcher gets familiarized with the content of the data (Nowell et. al., 2017) and starts to identify important insights for the analysis (Green et al., 2007). This already started when transcribing the interviews as I read through them several times, during which I started to gain an overall image of the data. By

reading the transcriptions time and time again I started to highlight the important sections of the interview that may be of relevance to my research question.

2. Secondly, I formulated the initial codes based on the data. As mentioned prior, I used inductive data-driven coding (Eriksson and Kovalainen, 2008), meaning that I created the codes based on the data's content. I coded the transcripts one-by-one into separate mind maps and ensured that each code had a vast portion of information for me to understand the context of the code. After coding each transcript into separate mind maps, I crafted one list of all the codes, after which the codes were analyzed again to merge overlapping codes into one. All codes were given a content description and all the relevant data from the transcripts were listed next to each code. I constantly revisited the transcriptions and codes during this step to avoid misconceptions of the codes.
3. Thirdly, I composed the codes into higher, more abstract categories, which best described the codes. For example, 16 different codes were separated into four categories; high-care, equality, recognition and participation, and trust. High-care consisted of codes, such as warm relationships, taking care of employees, helping etc. All in all, I had 14 categories in total at this point.
4. Lastly, I identified themes based on the categories. After a few iterations, I was able to create four main themes from the 14 categories; 1) autonomy, 2) openness and transparency, 3) learning and development, and 4) human-centricity. The themes were presented in a way that they offered a holistic understanding of the data. For example, the four categories of high-care, equality, recognition and participation, and trust were incorporated under the larger, holistic theme of human-centricity.

I then connected the themes to the literature I was conversing with in my study. The four themes - autonomy, openness and transparency, learning and development, and human-centricity - were highly similar to the themes of the literature on self-managed organizations, which revolved around autonomy for individuals and teams, openness and transparency in communication, supporting learning and development, trust, and caring

and appreciation towards employees. The themes of autonomy, learning and development, openness and transparency, and trust were almost identical to the themes created from the data analysis. In the literature, the theme of caring and appreciation consists of findings, such as listening and participating employees, treating employees as equals, helping and respecting one another, and taking care of employees. These different findings were similar to the categories I found from the data analysis, and these categories were included under the larger theme of human-centricity.

4. Empirical findings

This chapter presents the findings of my analysis, which are divided into five main themes; self-management, autonomy, learning and development, openness and transparency, and human-centricity. Firstly, I will open up how the interviewees perceive self-management. Secondly, I will present how a culture of autonomy is fostered on individual and team levels. Thirdly, I will present the findings on how learning and development are part of the company culture and how it can be identified in numerous different ways. I will then elaborate on how a culture of openness and transparency can be revealed from the interviews in which I will be concentrating on the open and authentic dialogue between peers and the aim to openly and transparently communicate firm-related matters throughout the entire organization. Lastly, I will dive into the human-centricity of the company.

As mentioned prior, Reaktor's organization is formed around client teams that consist of consultants working for different client projects. In addition to these client teams, the organization also has support teams, such as HR, training suppliers, business development teams, in-house coaches, recruitment teams, etc. Therefore, when reading the empirical findings, it is essential to keep in mind that the interviewees consisted of a mix of consultants and supporting functions' team members.

4.1. Self-management

Many interviewees dropped the word "self-management" when explaining their company and work. When asking them what self-management actually means to them, the interviewees mainly had similar answers. The answers revolved around individual autonomy and freedom and how there is no dictating force telling what you should do. For example, most of the answers revolved around how self-managing individuals have the *freedom* to choose their ways of working, resolve issues, and prioritize work within a specific context and boundaries. Additionally, the interviewees described a self-managing individual to be *responsible* for the future direction they are heading towards. Thus, a

self-managing individual naturally must have the *ability* to guide oneself towards a specific direction and make decisions themselves.

In my opinion, self-management means that the entity is allowed and can make decisions independently without a guiding force, a type of dictating force. [...] So you steer yourself towards a specific direction, you have some idea of why we are going there, and it is not like a command comes from somewhere that 'go that way'. (Interviewee #3)

Although most of the answers regarding the definition of self-management revolved around the ability to make decisions autonomously and direct oneself in a specific direction, two interviewees had additional meanings for the term. One interviewee added that a self-managing individual must also know how to reflect on what has been done, objectively review the current situation, and look at the bigger picture and future to have the ability to make decisions and choose directions. Another interviewee expressed that although self-management means that an individual gets the freedom to do things, the individual is also responsible for making responsible decisions for the community, company, or client. These two additional findings indicate that self-management means individual freedom and requires making responsible decisions for others.

Furthermore, two interviewees who were more knowledgeable in the concept of self-management underlined the importance of having clear goals when self-managing oneself. They suggest that goal(s) ensure boundaries within self-management, and they help guide the work so that all self-managing individuals strive for the same goal, which prevents the risk of individuals striving for different things and moving in different directions.

Naturally, the interviewees explained that to self-manage oneself, the company must support this, and the interviewees agreed that their company is self-managing based on their above definitions of self-management. The following sub-chapters will elaborate more on how self-management is present within the company culture of Reaktor and what type of cultural attributes entail within the studied self-managed organization.

4.2. Autonomy

The findings suggest that Reaktor fosters a culture of autonomy. Autonomy is given to employees in various forms on both an individual and team level.

4.2.1. Autonomy to individuals

Reaktor does not have the traditional middle-management layer. Due to this, the interviewees reveal that there are no superiors from whom you would have to ask for permission or who would dictate what a person has to do. As a result, the findings suggest that employees have freedom and autonomy in their everyday tasks. The interviewees explain that they can make decisions and resolve matters independently, decide on the client projects they would like to embark on and what topics they want to learn and develop in, and decide on their ways of working. Additionally, they point out that there are no strict role descriptions that place a person into a specific mold, meaning employees can embark on projects outside of their current roles, such as by helping out with sales and recruitment or any other type of other internal development projects. The interviewees also suggest that employees have the freedom to advance their own ideas in which the company could develop.

And from my point of view [the uniqueness of Reaktor] is that I can do almost anything I want. [...] Well, at the moment, I can pretty much freely choose the projects I want to do. For example, if I would like to study some subject, I would probably be able to do so. Then if I would want to do some internal stuff - for instance, if I would like to do recruitment - that should be OK. If I would like to sell projects for a while, perhaps they would be interested in the help over there as well. It is very autonomous what you can do or choose. (Interviewee #7)

In fact, one interviewee expresses that people within the company like to do things their own way, which has become a self-reinforcing culture at the company.

I believe that rebel-spirited people who like doing things in their own way have found their way to our company. So kind of like… mavericks or what would you call them, little rebels. Every one of us has a small rebel inside of us. That has maybe become a type of self-reinforcing culture as well. (Interviewee #2)

Nevertheless, with autonomy and power also comes responsibility. The interviewees point out that they are responsible for their decisions and manage their own time and tasks since they do not have superiors supervising this aspect. Furthermore, although the findings suggest employees are given the autonomy and freedom to decide for themselves related to their work, asking for advice was a finding mentioned countless times throughout the interviews. This implies that seeking others' input is heavily ingrained in the company culture. The interviewees explain that they can make decisions by themselves and are also responsible for their choices, however, they tend to ask for advice before making a decision. The interviewees describe this as the advice process. It is not a way to ask permission but a way to receive feedback and validation on an idea or task you are thinking of carrying out. They may request advice from people with the best knowledge about a specific topic and/or from stakeholders who will feel the effects of their decision. Additionally, they have a specific advice forum channel within which you can ask for advice for your own thoughts. Once others have validated an idea or thought, no force from above would restrict the person from carrying out the idea or thought.

The advice process works so that when you are thinking of a decision that should I do this or that, you can ask for advice from others either openly from the advice forum or from certain people. It doesn't mean that I wouldn't be responsible for the decision, but you can ask others for advice. For example, if I am thinking that 'hey there is that training session in France that costs 15 000' - this was before corona - that there would be that type of training opportunity, I don't have to ask anyone for permission that can I go. But I do ask for advice from people who may be familiar with the training or from people I can sparr about my career development plans, or like that 'hey is this sensible'. And then if it happens that I have attended tens of 15000€ courses a year, then someone might come and talk to me like 'hey, how much time have you been spending on these trainings and if

this is sensible' and like that. But not like you should ask for permission. But you can ask, you should ask, and we are encouraged to ask for advice. (Interviewee #2)

The culture of autonomy can also be identified through goal setting. When asking the interviewees about their personal goals, the interviewees stated that they do not have any personal goals. Although teams have goals that they aim for together, the company does not set written or quantitative personal goals for individual employees. Instead, the interviewees elaborate that setting goals for oneself are their own responsibility.

They [own goals] have to be created yourself. And with the good and the bad sides of self-management, that can be the bad side for some. It doesn't work for everyone. Like some need that what should I study next, what should I do next, and it is easy then when you have a superior that says like do that, do this. If you don't have that, you have to make it up yourself. (Interviewee #6)

4.2.2. Autonomy to teams

In addition to giving freedom and autonomy to individuals, the findings suggest that the client teams of the company are given full autonomy, responsibility, and power to operate as they see best. The interviewees state that the client teams decide on their working methods and what processes and tools they use. They also have the autonomy to recognize, manage, and resolve issues within their projects and tend to search for their own team members internally. According to the interviewees, giving client teams considerable autonomy and freedom to work in their contexts is the best for the client and the company, since the team is closest to the problem and have the best knowledge about the context.

Teams can choose their own software development processes, own tools, own programming languages, own design processes. [...] All teams decide themselves what is the best way to work. Maybe the big difference here compared to traditional operators is that the decisions are pushed to where they have influence. So, if a consultant team wants to work in some way, they don't have to ask for permission from anyone to do so, that can

they use this new method, tool, or technology. They are responsible for the client, not for the company's leadership team. (Interviewee #1)

The idea that teams have the autonomy to make decisions without asking for permission from some entity is also present within the company's support functions' teams to some extent. These support teams have the autonomy and responsibility to make decisions that affect only their own team. However, they have to coordinate over team boundaries when their own choices affect others. Therefore, they do not have similar full autonomy as client teams who work entirely independently from other teams.

Maybe the type of background idea is that the people who have the best ability to make decisions, they make the decisions. So decisions related to talent growth come from the talent growth team, business decisions in the business team - there is competence for that. And then there is like… what would they be... these types of mediator characters that work between different stakeholders, since few decisions are made independently and would only affect one team. (Interviewee #3)

Furthermore, the interviewees explain that people do not have strong positions, set roles, or strict hierarchies within support and client teams. Instead, the type of role a person takes within a team or project usually happens organically based on the individual's strengths and wishes and based on the team's goal. For example, some may want to take more responsibility in driving the project forward as a lead, one may wish to take a role where they can talk to others, while others may be more comfortable working on their laptops. Therefore, the teams organically organize themselves based on the goal of the team and the problem at hand.

So we don't have positions. For example, seniors don't have this kind of specific position that "hey, okay, we now have here this kind of lead architect who decides on the thing X and Y and Z, and these juniors, for example, do these boring things". Instead, the team kind of organizes around the client's problem. And people themselves within their own capabilities choose the roles in which they want to develop and in which they are good. For example, one project where I was in, we had the youngest person design the

architecture entirely - okay, I was there helping - but he/she designed it because he/she was good at it. And that is quite normal at Reaktor, that it isn't kind of, we don't have all the functions named. Instead, people organically find their strengths from there. (Interviewee #1)

As mentioned previously in the sub-chapter 4.2.1., the company does not set goals for individuals. Similarly, the company does not set goals for teams either. Instead, goals are defined by the teams, which changes based on what type of team is in question. For example, support teams define goals together within the team by discussing what they want to get done and why, as well as where they are heading and how they can get there. While, within client teams, the goals are determined often by the client, which is then the team's common goal.

A clear goal of the client projects/consultant teams is that the work steering aspect comes from the client. The client is like, "I want to do a mobile application that does this", so the team is like "yes, that is a very clear thing". [...] For example, the client has a need that he/she wants to build a system with which he/she can achieve X. So that is like one common goal [of the client team]. (Interviewee #1)

4.3. Learning and professional development

The findings imply that a high level of competence and professionalism is exceptionally valued. When asked what makes the company unique, many interviewees answered it to be the level of brilliant, professional, and highly competent people. For example, Interviewee #3 explained: "*We have very smart people at work, like, across the board. That makes [Reaktor] unique."* In addition to valuing competence, the interviewees emphasized that the company aims to continuously learn and develop to be the best in their business and provides an environment where the most competent people in the industry can learn and develop professionally continuously. Therefore, learning and development are supported in numerous ways based on the findings.

First of all, the company provides training for employees to develop their skills in a specific domain. Employees can request different types of training, which are then formed based on supply and demand. The company also proactively explores various types of training that support the company's bigger picture. Secondly, learning and professional growth are central when choosing projects. The interviewees expressed that one factor influencing the choice of a project is the ability to learn and develop from the project. For example, Interviewee #7 explained: "*Well, the most important, in my opinion, is that strength in choosing projects, so that what type of environment I put myself into every day. That is the most significant prediction to my learning."*

The opportunity to learn and develop is also central when the company's staffing function evaluates what projects would suit an employee. For example, when a new employee joins the company, the company's staffing function considers what the employee wants to do and work on, and aims to provide a project in which they can learn. In addition, one interviewee emphasized that the average time in a project is usually shorter at Reaktor, and employees can work in multidisciplinary teams at best. These also support professional development and learning.

Thirdly, the flexible roles of employees support professional development. Since people are not boxed into one area within the company, they can develop in different directions, such as by participating in sales, recruitment, and other internal projects. Based on the interviews, individuals also have a high agency of advancing their own ideas within the company.

Very good [opportunities for professional development and learning]. Very good. I don't know how to open it more… We can do things on a vast spectrum. And if you have an idea or some thought, you have a pretty high agency to go and implement it. (Interviewee #3)

Well, I experience that like they [the opportunities for professional development] are endless. So, Reaktor does pretty much all kinds of stuff, and like principally, you have the chance to participate in everything - of course, within the limits of your own capabilities.

But I see that there are all kinds of possibilities, and I have got myself mixed up in all sorts of things and even surprising things for me. I still remember previously I thought that recruitment was the most annoying thing. Doing interviews is very off-putting and writing them rejections and rejecting people. And now I have been in Reaktor's recruitment! And I came as a developer. […] So, and I have just like… I have pushed myself into some and I have been asked into some. I feel that there are a lot of opportunities. (Interviewee #6)

Although the interviewees have a coherent view that they have many opportunities to work in different contexts within the company, one interviewee mentioned that not all people agree on this based on a poll. This appears to conflict with the coherent view of the interviewees that they would have many opportunities to develop within the company. Therefore, whether one can embark on different tasks within the company seems to vary in the end.

I have maybe been a bit of an exception. I have looked at internal gallups that everyone doesn't experience it the same way in our company. I don't know what the reason is… But I have a kind of, I know exactly where I can or how I could develop or do different stuff at Reaktor - that is kind of somehow clear to me. (Interviewee #6)

Professional development is also supported with development discussions, which is a formal channel for identifying areas one could grow and develop and collecting feedback from peers. Although they have this formal channel to collect feedback, many interviewees highlighted the importance of actively asking for instant feedback from peers to develop professionally. However, it seems that the minority of people ask for instant feedback. Additionally, although the interviewees note that they receive a lot of encouraging, positive feedback and praise from colleagues, giving constructive feedback spontaneously to peers does not happen often. Therefore, actively giving and receiving instant constructive feedback does not seem to be a differentiating cultural factor of the organization.

Lastly, many interviewees felt that they learn a lot from their colleagues since they are knowledgeable and share their knowledge, help others, and teach others. The interviewees underline that people do not hoard information and knowledge since an employee's value is not based on knowing something others do not and then keeping it to yourself.

It is also very strongly the openness - I mean with that like professional openness. So in practice like learning, that people want to share their own knowledge, that it isn't somehow being hoarded that "I am exceptional because only I know this". (Interviewee #7)

All in all, although the findings are slightly inconclusive of whether employees have flexible roles, the findings present overwhelming evidence on how the studied company places much effort on employees' learning and professional development, which is also highly valued by employees. Which is why we can conclude that the findings suggest the studied company fosters a culture of learning and professional development.

4.4. Openness and transparency

According to my analysis, Reaktor fosters a culture of openness and transparency, which is based on open and authentic dialogue amongst peers, and open and transparent communication company wide.

4.4.1. Open and authentic dialogue amongst peers

The findings indicate that Reaktor fosters a culture of authentic dialogue. Meaning that people can freely share their own opinions and views, question practices, and openly disagree with others. For example, Interviewee #5 stated: "*In my opinion, the company culture seems open, such that you can bring your own views and opinions to light, things are not hidden."* Open dialogue can also be seen through the long and intense discussion threads within the company's internal communication channel, Slack, where sharing one's opinion on a specific topic is common.

It feels that there are quite many people [in the company], so all sorts of opinions come out from some people. If we discuss somewhere on Slack, then the discussion is intense enough. So if you join half an hour too late and you start reading it, you read it, and then more messages start coming. And then maybe half an hour later you have read it all, like the whole thing, and then you're like "well, okay, I don't have much to add here". Maybe after the third message, I could have said something, but then on the 7th message, someone already says about [the similar thing] that you had in mind. (Interviewee #4)

One interviewee points out that the discussion in Slack can even seem chaotic and confusing for a new employee since people within the company are pretty self-aware and self-examining. As a result, difficult and complex matters are discussed and asked within the Slack. Therefore, it may seem as if there is a type of existential crisis for an outsider due to the discussion being so active. This finding also suggests that dialogue within the company is open and authentic.

Then it is also kind of self-examining at times, like we are not immune to any type of phenomenon that happens within us internally or in the field or outside of us. So like we ask ourselves a lot of kind of self-conscious questions. That is interesting to see. So, for example, equality is - diversity and inclusion - is like a discussion that is active, like maybe in many other companies as well. So, people seem to actively find that "okay what is our stance on this and how does this realize at us?". And in the long run, that is kind of like something that will hopefully strengthen the sense of belonging, that we ask ourselves difficult questions. But at the same time, it can sometimes feel also like, if you look at it for one discussion, that sometimes there is kind of an existential like… awareness or distress. Especially, for example, if you have just come into the firm and you see "okay, here there is this type of like turmoil", then that can look chaotic or challenging, that why are we talking about these things so much, is this a type of problem. (Interviewee #5)

4.4.2. Open and transparent communication company-wide

Regarding open and transparent communication, the interviewees state that information related to the company and its operations is available for everyone. For example, the

organization's top-management decisions, financial information, and strategy work are shared through various means, such as through information-sharing channels and public meeting sessions. Therefore, if a person is interested to understand the reasoning behind firm-related decisions or results, they can freely join the public meetings/events and ask questions.

The interviewees also agree that the leadership team openly and transparently communicate topics on their table to ensure employees understand what is happening within the firm, which direction they are heading, and why. However, one interviewee pointed out that openness has especially *lately* been emphasized and that it is constantly going towards the direction that topics are made visible for everyone. Additionally, another interviewee reveals that they have had their failures with openness in the past, which suggests that there may have been some hiccups with sharing information openly and transparently before. However, the interviewee believes that they still share much more information than other companies, which seems to support the other interviewees' feelings that information *is* shared openly and transparently.

Well, there have been failures in the past [with openness], but there have also been successes. But probably [an example of openness is] how the Finnish leadership team was chosen in the fall. It was done openly, interviews were carried out, we told who are making the decisions, who are participating in the decisions, the sessions were open, financials were shared with all firm employees. We continuously share the type of information about the firm that other firms don't share at all with their employees. Everything - many things - are available if someone just wants to know about it. (Interviewee #1)

Furthermore, although the interviewees mainly have a coherent view that information is shared openly and transparently, the findings indicate that the process of sharing information is challenging. The interviewees explain that information gets spread across channels since the company is scattered into a complex network in which people work in different contexts. Due to the channels being quite diverse, the information easily gets

lost. The same interviewee who mentioned that they have had past failures within openness also elaborated that ensuring everyone has the right information at the right time is very difficult. However, they put much effort into internal communication since the interviewee believes it to be highly vital that employees know what is happening within the company strategically. This finding also implies that the company tries to ensure a culture of openness and transparency.

Well, it [ensuring everyone has the right information at the right time] is difficult. It is very difficult. And we don't always succeed in it. We have very different mechanisms. We have this type of monthly meeting once a month where we share the firm's current status openly, financials and everything else, different things, projects. Like transparency on what is happening in the firm at that point in time. And the importance of that has been a big thing… very active slack messaging. We are currently recruiting a person to that internal communications role because it is really important to us that it happens. […] We have a few types of systematic things, but we notice that when we always put effort into it, it still isn't enough. We could constantly put more and more effort into internal communication. (Interviewee #1)

Nevertheless, although the above quote implies that they have different mechanisms of sharing information in the company, other interviewees express that the company does not have a systematic system in place to ensure people have the right information at the right time. One interviewee suggests that the basic assumption is that people find information and follow conversations since the information is available, which again supports the finding that communication is shared openly and transparently. However, most interviewees feel that the best way to receive and find information is through their own contacts and informal networks, such as through different reference groups (e.g. reference groups based on competence and/or hobbies), which indicates the difficulty in sharing information. Since the company is a network organization, interviewees feel that information is more easily transmitted through people that are listened to, such as through people that hold informal power and other influencers. This is why the company also tries to ensure information moves around through these individuals.

I think for that [everyone would have the needed information at the right moment], there isn't any type of system. Instead it is based on people's contacts. (Interviewee #4)

However, according to one interviewee, since the company is organized of client teams that work independently from other teams in their own contexts, they do not need much information from the company to do their work well. One interviewee experiences that if he/she continuously tried to keep up-to-date on what is happening within the company, this would disrupt his/her client work.

I experience that [that there is enough information about what is happening within the company], I don't have to know everything. Or at least I don't even want to know everything. [...] So much happens within the firm that I wouldn't be able to do the client work if I tried to keep up with everything. (Interviewee #4)

In fact, the interviewees working in client teams seemed to highly emphasize the goal of the client projects, indicating that the client work is first-priority compared to what is happening within the company, which also implies that employees have highly customer-centric values. Additionally, the interviewees state that the company does not even have a formal and explicit mission and vision - or even values - which they would follow. Due to this, people had their own views of their mission and vision, which revolved around similar themes, such as creating high-quality software and competitive, significant services and consulting, creating a better world through services, being a global player, and being a good place to work. Two interviewees explain that since the company has become more versatile in the previous years, they have identified a need for a formal mission and vision.

All in all, despite the challenges of distributing information, communicating firm-related matters openly and transparently and distributing information on a broad spectrum throughout the organization can be considered a cultural trait of the organization. This is because the findings suggest that the company considers it extremely important and puts a significant amount of effort into it. In fact, the current issue does not seem to be that information would not be shared openly and transparently. Instead, the issue lies in the

challenging process of sharing this information throughout a scattered network organization.

4.5. Human-centricity

In the following, I will present the different factors that make Reaktor a human-centric firm based on the findings of my analysis, which is based on a culture of high-care and helping, equality and fairness, recognition and participation, and trust.

4.5.1. High-care and helping

The interviewees emphasized that the company entails a high-care and human-centric environment where people and their wishes are put first, for example, by giving employees the freedom to choose their own projects. This seems to indicate that the employees feel appreciated. In addition, the interviewees feel that the company takes care of employees. For example, the company encourages people to spend time together through training sessions, different hobbies, team days, and dinners. Other perks are also given to the employees by sending gifts to their homes and offering extensive health care.

And maybe another which surprised me and seems exceptionally good is how well people are taken care of. That basically a lot of effort is put into it in the firm, like time and money and everything, that people have a good framework. And it is seen in different things, but it is like a very big effort. [...] Then, as a characteristic of the employer, of course, everything that is provided to employees. Like now, it is pretty little during remote times, of course. I have this type of growth box that came home - beans, or what are they, peas grow in it. So basically that type of stuff, that we are remembered with small packages and stuff. I think it is nice. But then, of course, outside of the pandemic, then everything on how much effort is put into that we spend time together and get people together - is it then training around some topic, or around hobbies, or then generally that there are different types of common dinners and team days. (Interviewee #6)

Some interviewees also described the atmosphere in the company to be warm. For example, the interviewees said they highly appreciate and respect their colleagues. They feel that people treat each other with warmth, are kind, want to do good, listen to each other, treat each other as equals, and give a lot of encouraging feedback and praise. One interviewee described how people also joke around, while others pointed out that they discuss other matters than just work and feel like they can be themselves at work. Additionally, the interviewees explain that they have created deep trusting relationships with their co-workers and, thus, their colleagues have also become friends outside of work. These findings and the fact that people spend time with each other through training sessions, different hobbies, team days, and dinners suggest that there is a strong sense of community within the company.

I have quite a lot of good friends there. […] Like that happens, in my opinion, exceptionally more at our place or somehow in our type of crews. It's like a normal workplace. Here people are the same people even in their free time, which is a good thing. (Interviewee #7)

Furthermore, the theme of helping and how people are willing to help each other was mentioned countless times, implying a culture of helping within the company. One interviewee explained that the company has been structured so that people aim to succeed together. For example, individuals do not have personal KPI-based bonuses that incentivize people to focus on their own performance. In addition, helping others by arranging trainings, mentoring, and bringing people together is also highly valued in salary determination criteria. Nevertheless, although specific structures make people want to help each other, the interviewees express that people genuinely help one another, want the best for each other, and do not compete against one another. This finding seems to be linked with the finding that people tend to ask for advice from others. Since asking for advice seems to be heavily ingrained in the company's culture, people are also naturally willing to help each other.

If you ask, "could you help me with this" then someone always helps. Like on the tech side, if you are on that side, you can then ask something - whatever - related to your project or technology or whatever challenge you have. For example, you can throw a question to our Slack, and there is good discussion straight away. Straight away the best people are like "this is the way you should do it". Basically, it has been made into the culture with small things, that people are like... It is in their best interest to help. Or that there isn't - or maybe the other way; it isn't against your best interest that you help others, which has then been created with the organization structure and like with compensation systems. With those, people work together towards the same goal. (Interviewee #6)

4.5.2. Equality and fairness

Reaktor has structures in place that support equality and fairness. For example, employees do not have personal bonuses. Instead, each employee receives the same amount of yearly bonuses based on the company's profit. In addition, employees have the right to buy the company's shares and own the company.

Moreover, the elimination of formal hierarchies amongst teams also seems to support equality and fairness amongst peers. Although there may be a person responsible for the bigger picture of a client project in some cases, decisions are made together as a team and sometimes with a democratic process where people vote. When it comes to support teams, the two different interviewed teams had some kind of team leader(s) that is/are responsible for the bigger picture of their work. However, the interviewees highlighted that they are not their managers or superiors.

Nonetheless, although some members of a team may take more responsibility in driving the team forward, the support team's members decide together what should be focused on and what should be advanced. In addition, although client and support teams may have a person or persons that have more responsibility for the bigger picture, interviewees explain that every team member is treated as equal. They also have a chance to have a say in matters and to have their voice heard. In fact, even the more junior employees can decide how work should be done. In addition, the findings suggest that people are treated

as equals in the rare case a conflict happens, since there is not one person who has the final say in a conflict, and age or seniority does not give anyone more power in a conflict situation.

Furthermore, interviewees experience that leadership within a team is relatively equal and happens emergently. Leadership is not prescribed to one person but varies and changes depending on the context. For example, someone may take more leadership when they have the best knowledge in a matter and can make the most informed decision. Also, when someone takes leadership, it is not a type of authoritarian leadership in which others are dictated.

In practice, what I mean [with emergent leadership] is a kind of like situational leadership. And leadership isn't necessarily determined - like given to some person - and it isn't a static state that someone is a leader. Instead, more so that leadership occurs in contexts, occurs in situations, occurs through your substance knowledge. […] The same way in another context, it can be that then your leadership isn't that smart. Instead, someone else should take more action in that role. Of course, it helps that you compare to another where the leadership is given to some specific person. Leadership is focused on something. Then the leader's responsibilities - which could be, for example, decision making or delegating work or defining priorities - doesn't come from one person constantly. Instead, it is determined by who at that point has the best understanding of it, who is the deepest in the thing, who can give the most reasoned decision for it. (Interviewee #3)

However, although Reaktor does not have formal hierarchies, which can be seen as a way to foster equality, many interviewees recognized informal natural hierarchies in the organization. For example, someone may have more power if they have worked for the company for a long time as they may have more knowledge and experience on a specific topic.

So although Reaktor doesn't have formal hierarchies, Reaktor has quite a strong informal hierarchy, which is then based on various things. [...] They can be very different - really

of all kinds. It can be based on seniority. It can be based on the fact that someone has been at Reaktor for a really long time. It can be based around a specific community of practice, which is much appreciated at Reaktor. So you can be, for example, really good at functional programming, so you get some specific power. (Interviewee #3)

However, this does not mean that a more senior individual would dominate a team or always hold that power. Instead, informal power naturally comes up in contexts where someone may have more knowledge about a topic and make a solid reasoned argument better than others. These informal hierarchies are then respected, just as in the ways it is appreciated that some may take on more leadership when they have the best knowledge around a topic. Nonetheless, interviewees note that people are still treated mainly as equals although they have informal hierarchies.

But most of the time it [relationship with colleagues] is equal. Some may have some information and thereby some kind of knowledge, know-how, understanding, power in a certain setting and a certain topic. So then maybe someone can be in a certain way in that thing - ah, but that also appears more in the arguments of a discussion, and not so much as dominance that because I say so we will do this like this. But it's like that, yeah, you're an equal but there is like expertise, and it is respected. So usually our people are like… At least I try to be quiet if I don't know anything. (Interviewee #7)

However, a few interviewees also mentioned how natural hierarchies can also be based on social capital. Meaning you have a higher chance of getting your ideas advanced if you have a lot of social relationships and connections, you know the right people, and people also listen to you. This type of natural hierarchy appears to conflict the interviewees' answers that equality is fostered within the company.

This is very much of a network organization and it also works on the basis of who you know. When you know the right people and you have this type of social capital so that people also listen to you, then you get things advanced. (Interviewee #2)

The above finding seems to be closely linked to the fact that one of the interviewees feels he/she is in an exceptional position since he/she has been able to embark on many different tasks within the company. This might be due to the individual's social power within the company. Nevertheless, although equality was highlighted in the interviewees' answers and can be distinguished through the practices and actions of the company and employees, the informal natural hierarchy based on social capital can partly eliminate equality.

4.5.3. Recognition and participation

In terms of company-wide processes, equality can be exhibited in how the company recognizes and participates employees in different matters. Interviewees present many examples of how employees can participate in discussions related to larger strategic changes and give their own feedback. For example, a top-down process was not used to form the executive teams of Finland and Holland. Instead, employees were allowed to recommend people through a firm-wide advice process. Also, employees were participated in deciding whether the company should open a new office in Tampere and another location.

Now we have a strategy process going on, so then, for example, we have a public Slack channel to which we continuously produce material. There are various events you can attend, you are invited to participate, and you can openly participate. So we ask people. So basically, we involve people to a great extent. We have a partner who helps us in the strategy process, and they were even kind of surprised by the level of involvement we have, and how much people are listened to. Their opinions, needs, and desires are listened to, so it is really advanced. (Interviewee #1)

Furthermore, some interviewees feel that participation possibilities in decisions - whether related to strategy, sales, finance, or recruitment - are equal for everyone since you can always approach the people driving a project forward, ask about their plans, and recommend your ideas. Some also elaborate that the leadership team is easily approachable, so you can always go and discuss your thoughts and ideas with them.

Well, the [participation] opportunities [in strategic decisions] are the same for everyone. So everyone knows the people, so you can go and talk to the people and ask and recommend [your ideas], and like, in that sense, have the opportunity to make an impact. [...] And I don't see that there is no such thing as... there is no wall in between that you can't talk to them. So, just like any other function, you can approach it - be it strategy work, sales, finance or recruitment, or whatever. So you can ask them and suggest that have you thought about this. (Interviewee #6)

However, a few of the interviewees express that although you can see how decisions are made and you can participate in discussions, the level of influence you actually have in decision-making is a different story.

Most of the time, everyone has access to information, and everyone can participate in the discussions, such as strategy. It is usually mentioned somewhere, and there is always a channel open. So you have at least the knowledge about it, but how much you get to influence it is, of course, a different matter. (Interviewee #7)

Although employees can participate in discussions related to company-wide decisions and have the opportunity to see the reasoning behind decisions, one interviewee points out that the people that have the best knowledge and understanding of the topic are the ones that make the final call for the decision. Therefore, perhaps the reason why a few employees feel that they may not have much influence in strategic decisions is because the people with the best knowledge in the area have the final say in the end. However, this does not eliminate the fact that employees are heavily involved in company-wide decisions. In the following, one interviewee explains how people were participated in forming the new leadership team.

It's not a vote of who's in roikka [the leadership team]. Instead, it's a kind of thing that you can recommend people and then you think... Then like the stakeholders who understand the scene the most, they think what would be a good set [of people]. So usually perhaps the previous group, the owners and such, that have thought about the company's leadership the most, then they think that this group could be good. (Interviewee #6)

4.5.4. Trust

Trust is a theme that the interviewees mentioned numerous times, implying that the company fosters a culture of trust. For example, one interviewee explained how trust is essential in a self-managed organization since there are no managers monitoring employees. Therefore, to ensure the self-managed company functions, these traditional processes are replaced with trust.

Trust is the most important thing if you work with people. It is important within an organization. In a way, it is perhaps even more important in a self-managed organization, because in a way, you don't have those processes and the kind of defined practices so much. You don't have the managers who monitor, so you are really trust-based. So in a way, people over process, which means that you can trust those people. If you can't trust them, then you have processes, and you try to force them and force managers to manage them so that they definitely follow the processes. But then, when you have this type of people-oriented organization, the process is replaced with trust, which is like the glue that ensures that things work. (Interviewee #1)

Trust can be seen by the high level of autonomy the company gives to teams and how people are trusted to have the best knowledge and make the best decisions within their job. Additionally, many interviewees expressed how they trust their colleagues' competence and do not question it. For example, Interviewee #7 explains: "*People are mainly really smart who know their subject, so you can trust them."* One interviewee brought up how they also trust new people joining the company since they trust the recruitment process. Also, a few interviewees explain that trust is exhibited through helping and the advice process, meaning that when someone asks another for help, they do not verify whether the advice or help given is a good solution. Instead, they simply trust the others' competence and advice.

Furthermore, one interviewee highlights how the fact that people are treated as equals is a form of trust. Similarly, another interviewee explains how participating employees in

firm-wide decisions exhibit trust. This yet again confirms that the interviewees believe that the company fosters equality and suggests that equality and trust come hand in hand.

In addition to trusting people's abilities, the interviewees seem to trust the goodwill of others and that others want to do things well and sensibly. One interviewee explains that when something goes wrong, the incident is treated as an individual case instead of creating complex company-wide procedures to ensure the incident won't happen again. Hence, people are not punished for an incident that does not go according to plan.

Another where the [trust] is exhibited, in my opinion, is that when things go wrong, and things always go wrong - people misuse things - so they're not resolved with generic rules. So that, okay, because someone invoiced too much of something, we won't set up acceptance practices for it. Instead, we treat it as an individual case. So we start by trusting people, people's ability and desire to do things well and right and act sensibly. And then when it doesn't always happen - it is a type of realism that doesn't always come true - they are treated as individual cases. And not like I have seen somewhere else that okay when someone has misused something, a complicated mechanism is set up, which seeks to ensure that this kind of abuse never happens. Which is, in my opinion, as sensible as the fact that we put everyone into jail because someone has stolen something. (Interviewee #2)

5. Discussion and analysis

In the following, I will discuss, analyze, and interpret the findings in relation to the theoretical cultural framework of self-managed organizations (Figure 2) found in the sub-chapter 2.4. The theoretical cultural framework identifies five relevant cultural dimensions of self-managed organizations - autonomy, trust, openness and transparency, caring and appreciation, and learning and development - which are built on the basic psychological needs of autonomy, competence, and relatedness based on Self-Determination Theory.

The findings of the research mainly support the theoretical cultural framework and the identified five cultural dimensions. The findings suggest that the studied company's culture is primarily focused on autonomy, highlights learning and professional development and open and transparent communication, and shares the core values of trust, caring, and appreciation. In addition, the findings also offer additional and fairly novel findings of the culture of self-managed organizations.

5.1. Culture of autonomy

The findings indicate that the studied self-managed organization fosters a culture of autonomy, which is in line with the theoretical cultural framework of self-managed organizations (Figure 2). The framework identifies autonomy to be a cultural dimension of self-managed organizations (Savaspuro, 2019, p. 51-53), given that autonomy is a basic psychological need of employees based on Self-Determination Theory (Gagné and Deci, 2005; Corbett-Etchevers et al., 2019).

The findings supplement prior literature that argues self-managed organizations give autonomy to employees (Getz, 2009; Laloux, 2014, p. 92-93; Kostamo and Martela, 2017; Lee and Edmondson, 2017; Kumar and Mukherjee, 2018; Savaspuro, 2019, p. 51-53), since the employees of the studied self-managed organization do not have middle-managers and therefore have considerable autonomy and freedom in their work. On a team level, the findings suggest that client teams have full autonomy as they work

independently from other teams. At the same time, support teams also enjoy autonomy to some extent. However, they are responsible for coordinating over team boundaries when their own choices also affect others. These findings complement prior literature on self-managing teams, which suggest that effective self-managing teams should have the autonomy, flexibility, and responsibility to make decisions and coordinate as they see best (Barker, 1993; Druskat and Wheeler, 2004).

Prior literature also suggests that employees of self-managed organizations have the autonomy to choose their roles (Kostamo and Martela, 2017). This study partly supports the previous statement since a person's role within a team mainly happens organically based on the individual's strengths and wishes. Additionally, the interviewees felt that they can embark on different tasks, projects, and roles within the company, such as participating in sales, recruitment, and other internal projects, which suggests that employees would also have flexible roles outside of their teams. Nonetheless, one interviewee mentioned that not all people agree on having possibilities to embark on different organizational tasks for reasons he does not know, which conflicts with the interviewees' answers. This suggests that some employees have more possibilities to work in different tasks and roles outside of their teams compared to others. Whatever the reason behind this finding, it can still be considered to eliminate autonomy from the individuals who experience restrictions in working in different contexts since their self-choice is restricted.

Although the above finding on having freedom and autonomy with one's own role is not entirely coherent, the overwhelming evidence on how the company gives significant autonomy and freedom to employees implies that the company seems to ensure that members of the organization can embark on tasks they feel are meaningful and important. This supports prior literature that argues autonomy empowers employees (Kurki and Wilenius, 2016) and leads to increased feelings of competence and meaning making when aspects of tasks can be chosen based on what is enjoyable for an individual (Manz and Sims, 2001). Therefore, it can be argued that the studied company aims to fulfill the psychological need for autonomy by ensuring that employees feel activities are self-

chosen and motivation is formed from within with autonomy-supporting ideologies and practices. These ideologies and practices guide employees to embrace the company's underlying beliefs and values. Thus, autonomy can be considered a strong value and belief of the company from the point of view of Schein's (2010) intermediate level of culture. From the point of view of Schein's (2010) defined deepest level of culture, the findings indicate that autonomy is a given amongst employees and is, therefore, an underlying assumption of the organizational members, which reinforces the autonomy-fostering culture in turn.

Interestingly, although the findings suggest that individuals have considerable freedom and autonomy in their work, they also indicate that it does not mean that people would be entirely alone in their personal decision-making. Instead, seeking others' advice for an idea or task an employee wants to carry out seems heavily ingrained in the company culture. This is a process Laloux (2014) presented in his book 'Reinventing Organizations', but it has not otherwise been addressed in prior literature and is thus a reasonably novel finding. The fact that people tend to ask advice from relevant stakeholders that might feel the effects of one's decision seems to indicate that the members of the organization do not just think about themselves and their own needs, although they have a high level of individual autonomy. Instead, they also consider others. Therefore, it can also be argued as a process that fulfills the psychological need for relatedness as it creates a sense of connection with others and the feeling that one is recognized by others. In addition, the fact that people proactively ask for advice from people with the best knowledge over a specific topic signals that people trust one another and their competence. This advice process seems to be set up to ensure that autonomous employees consider others and that the different autonomous entities within the organization move somewhat in the same direction.

Interestingly, since employees are not dictated by anyone and do not have to follow this advice process if they do not want to do so, the findings indicate that asking for advice has formed into an underlying assumption of the employees, which they proactively do without dictation. This is the deepest level of culture, according to Schein (2010). As a

result, this has formed into a solid underlying belief of organizational members, which is the intermediate hidden level of culture, according to Schein (2010). Moreover, this type of asking-for-advice culture does not seem to eliminate individual autonomy since people proactively seek it. Therefore, it can be considered self-chosen activity.

5.2. Culture of learning and professional development

In addition to autonomy, competence is a basic psychological need of employees based on Self-Determination Theory. It is a factor that enables employees to experience intrinsic autonomous motivation so that they can self-manage themselves (Gagné and Deci, 2005; Corbett-Etchevers et al., 2019), which is why prior literature proposes learning and professional development to be a characteristic of self-managed organizations (Getz, 2009, Martela and Jarenko, 2015, p. 95-116; Kumar and Mukherjee, 2018). Thus, it is identified as a cultural dimension of the theoretical cultural framework of self-managed organizations (Figure 2). This study's findings are in line with the theoretical cultural framework since learning and professional development seem to be highly supported within the studied organization to secure the company's high competence level and fulfill employees' needs for continuous development and learning.

Offering the possibility for employees to continuously learn and develop and ensuring people share their knowledge with others is highly ingrained into the structures and practices of the organization. Therefore, it can be argued that learning and professional development is an underlying value of the company, signaling the intermediate level of culture (Schein, 2010). In addition, the fact that people share one's knowledge openly, and want to help and teach others, indicates that supporting others' professional development are underlying assumptions people share within the company. Meaning that people perceive learning and professional development as valuable and beneficial to oneself and others, reflecting the deepest level of culture determined by Schein (2010). However, although employees seem to openly share their knowledge as a means of helping others, actively giving and receiving instant constructive feedback is not common, and cannot be considered a differentiating cultural factor of the organization.

This does not support Martela and Jarenko's (2015, p. 111-112) statement, which emphasizes the characteristic of continuous feedback in organizations that want to ensure continuous development.

Furthermore, prior literature suggests that switching roles instead of having static ones is common in self-managed organizations and supports professional development (i.e, Getz, 2009; Kostamo and Martela, 2017; Kumar and Mukherjee, 2018; Corbett-Etchevers et al., 2019). The findings suggest that employees at least have flexible roles within teams. However, although the interviewees feel that they have numerous possibilities to embark on different roles within the company, everyone does not seem to agree on this within the company and is therefore in conflict with prior literature.

Nevertheless, the findings present overwhelming evidence on how employees have many possibilities to learn and develop within the company. The high value the company places on competence seems to naturally drive the company to ensure employees can fulfill their psychological need for competence. And since the findings suggest that employees also want to fulfill the need for competence by continuously learning and developing professionally, this type of combination of supply and demand seems to have created a culture that fosters learning and professional development.

5.3. Culture of openness and transparency

The theoretical cultural framework presents openness and transparency as a cultural dimension of self-managed organizations. It supports employees' three psychological needs of competence, autonomy, and relatedness to be fulfilled and supports intrinsic motivation in turn. (Savaspuro, 2019, p. 51-53). The findings mainly support the notion that a self-managed organization entails a culture of openness and transparency.

The studied company seems to foster a culture of open peer-to-peer dialogue, which complements Savaspuro's (2019, p. 51-53) suggestion that the organizational culture for self-managed organizations should be built on clear and open dialogue to ensure information moves around. Savaspuro (2019, p. 51-53) also suggests that dialogue

amongst peers should be authentic, which is supported by the findings, as people freely share their own opinions and views, question practices, and openly disagree with others. Therefore, this behavior indicates that open and authentic dialogue are shared underlying assumptions of the organizational members and are therefore highly valued.

In addition, literature suggests that self-managed organizations ensure a wide, transparent, and clear distribution of information and communication company-wide in order for all self-organizing members to make better and informed decisions based on the organization's goal (i.e. Laloux, 2014, p.111; Kostamo and Martela, 2017; Martela, 2019). The findings complement this, since although the studied company seems to have had their failures with open communication in the past, the findings suggest that the company is constantly putting a lot of effort in communicating firm-related manners throughout the organization openly and transparently.

However, the findings suggest that ensuring everyone has the information they need when they need it is a difficult process due to the complex network structure of the company. Although information seems to be available for all, the information gets spread across diverse channels, causing the information to get lost easily. As a result, employees mainly rely on their own informal networks and connections to receive information. Thus, the company also tries to ensure information moves around through people that are listened to, such as people that hold informal power and other influencers. The fact that people rely on their connections to receive information supports prior literature that a self-managed organization should be built on open dialogue to ensure information moves around (Savaspuro, 2019, p. 51-53), since the finding suggests that people *do* share information to peers. However, this finding also offers light into the challenges of sharing information in self-managed organizations. It can also be argued that transparency is hindered when information is transmitted through informal networks and connections since people have to have the right connections to be exposed to this information. Therefore, some may miss out on information if they do not have connections to influencers or people that hold informal power. This comes down to whether the communication is truly fully transparent, although an effort is put into it due to the value

the company places in transparency. This also raises the issue of equality, since it can be argued that everyone is not in an equal position if they do not know the right people and are thus not exposed to all information. Of course, these individuals can search for the information. However, suppose they do not even become aware that this type of information is available. In that case, it can be considered that they are not in an entirely equal position to others.

Nevertheless, the findings indicate that the challenge of sharing information across a scattered network organization is not because the company would not value openness and transparency. On the contrary, openness and transparency seem to be underlying assumptions and values of the company since effort is continuously being put into it and they have been taking actions to improve it. Therefore, the challenge of sharing information is a structural problem instead of a cultural issue. However, the findings are slightly inconclusive of whether the employees truly need or even want much information from the company. A few interviewees suggest that employees working within client projects do not need much information from the company to do their work well since client teams work independently in their own contexts. Therefore, the client team members mainly need the type of information that supports their own team's goal - not the company's. The findings also indicate that the actual client work would be disrupted if the consultants had to keep up-to-date on what is happening within the company continuously. Therefore, it can be argued whether full transparency is even perceived as necessary as an individual can only handle a specific amount of information. This finding contradicts previous literature (Kostamo and Martela, 2017; Getz, 2009) that emphasizes the importance of sharing information effectively within self-managed organizations to ensure members understand what the company is aiming at for autonomous employees to act and make decisions that are aligned with the common goal of the company.

Furthermore, on the contrary to literature that states the importance of a guiding and shared vision within self-managed organizations (Getz, 2009; Kostamo and Martela, 2017) or companies that consist of self-managing teams (Barker, 1993), the studied self-managed organization does not have a formal mission or vision. According to literature,

a vision helps employees decide which of their actions are best for the company (Getz, 2009) and allows the self-managing teams to guide their own work and coordinate with other organization members (Barker, 1993). However, the findings contradict these statements and instead imply that the employees working in client teams - which is the majority of the company - mainly guide their own work based on the client's goals, and is thus a novel finding. However, as Lee and Edmonson (2017) suggest, the defined characteristics of self-managed organizations may differ based on the particular organization's nature, strategy, and industry. Therefore, the findings seem to contradict the literature since the studied company is an organization formed of teams working for differing clients.

Nonetheless, although a formal mission and vision are missing within the studied self-managed company, similar themes arose from the interviewees when they shared their own views of what it could be. This indicates that the employees have some kind of shared understanding of what the company aims for, where they are heading, and how they should operate, which also implies that the employees are unconsciously guided by some hidden force, although it is not specifically verbalized into writing. According to Schein (2010), the hidden intermediate level of culture encompasses of values and beliefs that guide the activities of members of an organization. To realize these values, organizations use directives and processes - such as norms, ideologies, and mission and vision statements - to guide employees to embrace the underlying beliefs and values. Interestingly, the studied company has not used these types of formal directives and processes to guide employees to embrace the underlying beliefs and values of the organization. This raises the question of how the employees have come to embrace similar types of common underlying beliefs of the company's mission and vision - especially given that one interviewee had not worked in the company as long as others, however still shared similar understandings of what the mission and vision may be. Values and beliefs are formed between members of a group and guide their activities (Schein, 2010). Therefore, it seems that the members of the studied company share strong common beliefs and values of the organization, although values have not been written down anywhere

either in addition to the mission and vision statement. Then the newcomers of the organization pick these up through interactions with others and perhaps through storytelling. Therefore, the beliefs of what the mission and vision could be seem to be guided by these hidden values and beliefs people share. What's more, since the interviewees shared similar views of the non-existent mission, vision, and value statements of the company, and the answers of the interviewees to the interview questions were heavily coherent, there seems to be a strong and congruent hidden value base within the company. This, in turn, indicates that there are strong underlying shared assumptions amongst organizational members since the assumptions create the values of the intermediate level of culture (Schein, 2010).

Furthermore, given that there is a mutual understanding of what the mission and vision could be, the organization's members are not only devoted to the clients but also feel connected and devoted to the company as a whole. What may seem to unite each member in the company is the strong assumptions, value base, and beliefs that each member shares.

5.4. Culture of caring and appreciation

In addition to autonomy and competence, relatedness is a basic psychological need of employees, referred to as the sense of connection and the feeling that one is cared for and appreciated (Gagné and Deci, 2005; Corbett-Etchevers et al., 2019). It is a factor that enables employees to experience intrinsic autonomous motivation (Deci et al., 2017). Thus, the theoretical cultural framework identifies caring and appreciation as a cultural dimension based on prior literature (Martela and Jarenko 2015, p. 117-137). The findings complement this since employees are recognized and cared for by the company in numerous ways; all from how employees are given freedom and autonomy to the extent the studied company puts time and money into recognizing and taking care of employees. The culture of caring and appreciation can also be identified by how the studied company involves employees in company-wide decisions, which supports prior literature (Getz, 2009; Martela and Jarenko, 2015, p. 119-120; Kostamo and Martela, 2017). However, the

findings suggest that the level of influence an individual employee has on larger strategic changes may be minimal since the people that have the best knowledge and understanding of a specific topic are the ones that make the final call. Prior literature also supports this finding by elaborating that although management within a self-managed company aims to ensure that everyone has a say in shaping the company (Laloux, 2014, p. 110; Kostamo and Martela, 2017), top management still may have the final say over some key elements of the organization (Lee and Edmondson, 2017). Nonetheless, the fact that employees are even given the possibility to have their voice heard indicates that recognition is an underlying value of the company.

In addition to top leadership showing caring and appreciation for employees, the findings suggest that peers also highly appreciate and respect one another in day-to-day activities by treating each other with warmth and kindness, listening to each other, and giving each other praise and encouraging feedback. This supplements Zarraga and Bonache's (2005) study on self-managing teams, which indicates that an atmosphere supporting caring is key as it favors knowledge creation and sharing. Similarly, Druskat and Wheeler (2004) argue that the willingness to offer help and share one's own knowledge supports a caring atmosphere, which is in line with the finding that employees within the studied company openly share their knowledge and teach and help others. In fact, the findings suggest a strong culture of helping, which supports prior literature that emphasizes the importance of helping within self-managed organizations (Getz, 2009) and self-managing teams (Polley and Ribbens, 1998).

Moreover, Getz (2009) states that self-managed organizations are expected to satisfy others' universal needs in addition to their own by treating others equally. This study partly supports the previous statements since equality can be distinguished through the findings. Firstly, the elimination of formal hierarchies and other processes, such as offering every employee the right to buy shares of the company and thus own the company, and offering the same amount of yearly bonuses based on the company's profit, support equality. Secondly, the findings suggest that the participation possibilities in decisions - whether being strategy, sales, finance, or recruitment - would be equal for

everyone since any employee can always approach the people driving a project forward, ask about their plans, and recommend ideas. This also includes approaching the leadership team. Thirdly, equality can be distinguished from the way teams do not have strict hierarchies and positions. For example, even a more junior employee with less work experience can take a lot of responsibility in a project and decide how to undertake work tasks. In addition, although there may be a person responsible for the bigger picture of a client project or an support team in some cases, decisions are made together as a team with mutual discussion, and everyone can have their voice heard. The findings suggest that even leadership is fairly equal since leadership is not prescribed to one person as a static position. Instead, leadership emerges and changes based on who has the best knowledge in a specific context and thus can make the most informed decision. Lastly, age and seniority do not give a person the advantage in disagreement or conflict situations, which supports equality.

Nevertheless, despite the above processes and actions that support equality and the fact that many of the interviewees suggest relationships to be mainly equal amongst peers, informal natural hierarchies are present within the studied company, which can partly eliminate equality. For example, one hidden informal hierarchy is based on knowledge, meaning that if someone has more knowledge and experience in a topic, they may have more power since they can make more reasoned arguments and decisions better than others. In addition, these informal and natural hierarchies can also be based on social capital. Meaning that a person with many connections and is listened to has a higher chance of having their ideas advanced. Whether these natural hierarchies can be considered as supporting or eliminating equality is based on how the employees react to these natural hierarchies.

On the one hand, the prior finding related to informal hierarchies based on competence and knowledge does not seem to eliminate equality amongst peers since the employees respect these types of hierarchies and see them as fair. Everyone has the possibility to have their voice heard - whether that is in team-level or organizational-level decision-making situations or conflict situations. However, those who can make better-reasoned

arguments may hold more power in the situation, which is then respected. It can be easily assumed that informal power based on knowledge would mean that more senior employees would always hold this power. However, even more junior employees can hold this power since power is not given based on the length of one's career. Instead, power is mainly based on who has the best arguments and can make the most informed decision based on one's knowledge. Therefore, if an employee with less work experience can make more reasoned arguments and decisions better than others, these employees can hold power and even hold a leadership position for a specific task or amount of time. The fact that power and leadership are not static but emerge and change in different contexts also indicates that everyone can hold this power at some point. Therefore, it can be argued that everyone is then treated as equals.

On the other hand, the latter natural hierarchy based on social capital suggests that not all are in perhaps equal positions and therefore is in conflict with Getz's (2009) research and the answers of the interviewees who suggest that equality is fostered within the company. In fact, the findings on how some employees have the possibility to work in different tasks and roles more than others may be due to the social power one holds within the organization. Meaning that the individuals who know the right people and have built credibility within the company can get their own ideas advanced, while individuals with less social capital and credibility have fewer opportunities to advance their ideas within the company. Although the interviewees suggest that the participation possibilities in decisions would be equal for everyone as anyone can approach the people - even the leadership team - driving a project forward and recommend their ideas, the fact whether people actually listen to these ideas, believe in them, and take action depends on the credibility one has within the company. Furthermore, since information is best transmitted through people who hold informal power, if people do not know the right people, they may not access this information, which eliminates equality. This can create even more significant gaps between equality since informal power then piles more and more on to the people who have more connections to the right people. These findings on informal hierarchies are not addressed in prior literature and are therefore novel.

All in all, based on the findings, it can be concluded that people are treated as equals within teams, given that the team members have connections to each other. However, when moving outside the teams and looking at individuals company-wide, the fact that individuals with more connections and with the right people hold more power can hinder equality. Nevertheless, the findings provide overwhelming evidence on how employees care for, appreciate and help each other that it can be considered to rise from the deepest level of culture (Schein, 2010). Meaning that caring, appreciation, and helping are underlying assumptions of the company members and thus guide people's behavior. In fact, it seems that these values have created the outcome that people even create deeper relationships with their co-workers so that they even become friends outside of work. This suggests that the company has created a strong sense of community, which indicates that the company fulfills the psychological need of relatedness and a sense of connection of the employees (Gagné and Deci, 2005; Corbett-Etchevers et al., 2019). This supports prior literature that states the importance of a sense of community since self-managed organizations rely heavily on the community of colleagues (Kurki & Wilenius, 2016).

5.5. Culture of trust

Lastly, the theoretical cultural framework identifies trust as a cultural dimension of self-managed organizations since it supports employees to fulfill their three psychological needs of competence, autonomy, and relatedness and supports intrinsic motivation in turn. (Savaspuro, 2019, p. 51-53). The findings suggest that the company culture is built on trust, which is in line with prior literature that suggests trust has a critical role in flat network-based organizations (Tyler, 2003) and self-managed organizations that do not have middle-management (Laloux, 2014, p. 230; Kurki and Wilenius, 2016; Kostamo and Martela, 2017; Savaspuro, 2019, p. 51-53). Employees must trust one another within self-managed organizations as it develops a feeling of safety (Savaspuro, 2019, p. 51-53), which in turn procreates responsibility-taking behavior (McGregor's, 1960; Laloux, 2014, p. 80-81) and advances effective collaboration on an organizational level (Meier et al., 2019; Tyler, 2003) and team-level (Druskat and Wheeler, 2004; Breuer et al. 2016; Choi and Cho, 2019). The findings suggest trust is an underlying thought process of the

studied company and its members since the findings present overwhelming evidence of how people trust others. Therefore, it seems to rise from Schein's (2010) proposed deepest level of culture.

Based on the findings, trust is given on both an organizational-level and peer-to-peer level, which supports Savaspuro's (2019, p. 49) statement that self-management requires trust amongst colleagues and the feeling that management trusts the members of the organization. On an organizational level, trust is exhibited by how the company gives teams autonomy and freedom. This supports Schultz's (2014) argument that people should feel that they are trusted to make the best decisions without asking approval from higher up when wanting to empower employees to work in environments that require change and flexibility. Furthermore, the fact that employees are involved in organizational-level decisions signals trust. This is supported by Laloux (2014, p. 110), who suggests that management in self-managed organizations should ensure that everyone has a say in shaping the company as it signals trust towards employees.

On a peer-to-peer level, the findings imply that employees highly trust each other's abilities, which supplements Von Krogh's (1998) argument that a team should experience mutual trust in competence as it builds a high care atmosphere. Furthermore, people trust that others want to do things well and sensibly. Therefore people are not punished for an incident that does not go according to plan. This supports Schultz's (2014) finding that an environment of trust that allows people to make mistakes without being punished empowers employees to work in environments that require change and flexibility.

6. Conclusion

The final chapter will summarize the study, offer practical implications based on the study's findings, present limitations of the study, and offer suggestions for future research.

6.1. Research summary

Due to the changing trends in the world (Kostamo and Martela, 2017; De Hauw and De Vos, 2010; Savaspuro, 2019, p. 40), less-hierarchical organizational structures have been adopted (Lee and Edmondson, 2017; Kostamo and Martela, 2017), with one answer being self-managed organizations. This type of organizational form has piqued interest (Martela, 2019) since it is considered to answer the need for flexibility and adaptivity, innovative behavior, and meaning-making within work (Lee and Edmondson, 2017; Kostamo and Martela, 2017). However, scholars have demanded for more research and theory on fully self-managed organizations to increase understanding of these types of organizational models (Puranam and Håkonsson, 2015; Bernstein et al., 2016; Lee and Edmondson, 2017). Moreover, most research on self-managed organizations has focused on the general design features, however, they have not touched on the organizational culture of self-managed organizations (Martela, 2019). Since culture has a powerful influence on people's behavior, beliefs, values, and attitudes (Iivari and Iivari, 2011) and an effect on organizational performance (Barney 1986; Sadri and Lees, 2001; Schein, 2010), it is vital to understand the underlying culture of self-managed organizations to gain more insight into the organizational factors that guide self-management. Therefore, the study's objective is to increase the understanding of self-managed organizations and especially the cultural aspects by answering the following research question:

What is the organizational culture like within a self-managed organization?

The study was conducted by interviewing employees from a Finnish IT consultancy company, Reaktor, which works in a decentralized and self-managing manner. The findings were constructed using thematic analysis. To answer the research question, five

common cultural themes were identified based on the interviewees' experiences; 1) a culture of autonomy, 2) a culture of learning and development, 3) a culture of openness and transparency, 4) a culture of caring and appreciation, and 5) a culture of trust. The study's findings can be identified through the updated theoretical cultural framework (Figure 3) below, which aims to present that the company's values and the employees' psychological needs form the five cultural dimensions together by mutual reinforcement of all organizational members.

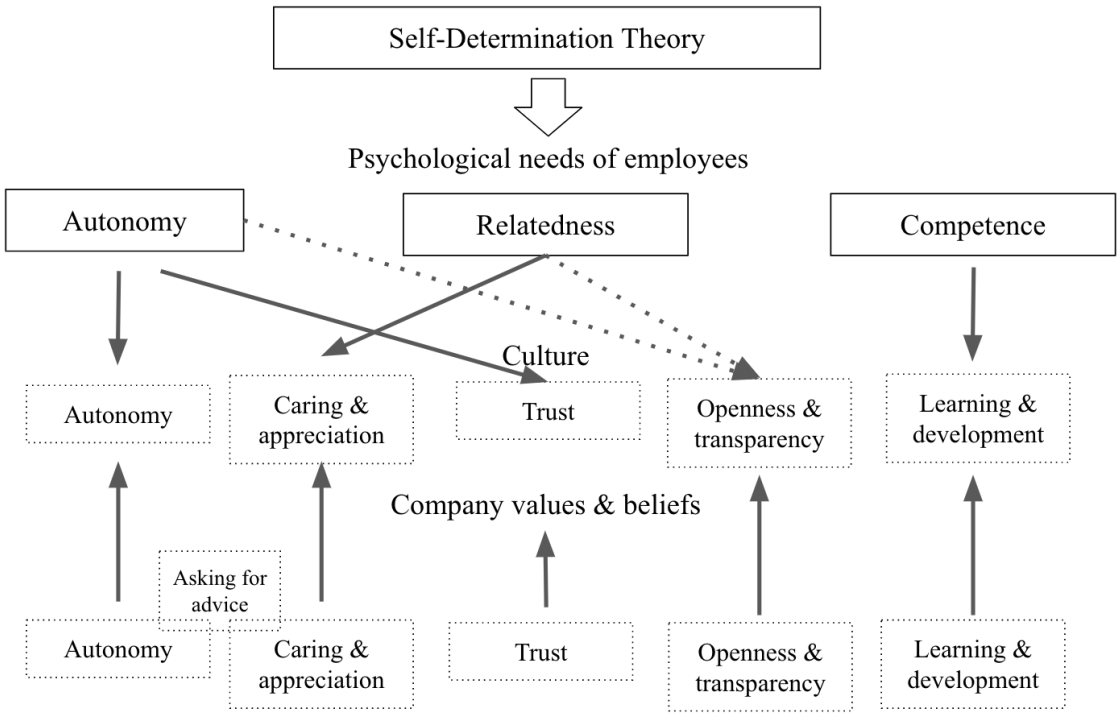

Figure 3. Findings of culture within a self-managed organization based on the theoretical cultural framework

When it comes to **autonomy**, the company has implemented autonomy-supporting ideologies and practices to guide employees to embrace autonomy, which can be identified as a value and belief of the company. At the same time, the psychological need for autonomy forces the company to foster a culture of autonomy. Since this has seemed to be validated as a successful way of operating within the company, autonomy has formed into an underlying shared assumption that reinforces the value and culture of

autonomy. Furthermore, the more novel finding of asking for advice can be seen as a value that facilitates autonomy and fulfills the need for relatedness, as it creates a sense of connection with others and the feeling that one is recognized by others. Therefore, it has been added as an additional value to the theoretical cultural framework.

Related to **learning and development**, competence is an underlying value the company seems to foster highly. This can be seen through the numerous structures and practices that support employee learning and professional development. The findings also suggest that the employees strive to fulfill the need for competence as they see it as valuable and beneficial to oneself and others, given that knowledge is shared openly and employees help and teach others. Given that the company and employees value learning and professional development, this has formed into underlying shared assumptions that reinforce the values and culture of learning and development.

When evaluating **openness and transparency**, the findings indicate that openness and transparency are a by-product of autonomy to ensure employees know what is happening within the company. It can also be perceived as a way to recognize employees so that nothing is hidden from them. Which is why the findings suggest openness and transparency to be an underlying value of the company and can even be considered as a supporting factor for fulfilling the need for autonomy and relatedness of employees. Although openness and transparency seem to be valued by leadership in the company, the issue related to sharing information in which information is transmitted best through informal networks and connections may actually hinder transparency. However, the findings are slightly inconclusive of whether the employees truly need or even want much information from the company since a few interviewees suggest that employees working within client projects do not need much information from the company to do their work well. Therefore, it can be argued whether full transparency is even perceived as important for the company's employees as an individual can only handle a specific amount of information. This is why the arrows in the framework that point from the psychological needs to the culture of openness and transparency are dotted to present the uncertainty of whether a culture of openness and transparency is a need for self-managing employees.

Nonetheless, it seems that the value placed on openness and transparency pays off so that the members of the organization are unconsciously guided in a similar direction, given that no formal mission or vision statements are guiding the employees. Therefore, with the help of openness and transparency, people are unconsciously picking up the organization's values and mutually reinforcing them together through social interactions in a way that there is an unconscious shared understanding of what the company is striving for and where they should be heading.

Concerning **caring and appreciation**, the findings provide overwhelming evidence on how employees are recognized and cared for by the company. Furthermore, the employees also care and appreciate each other, which fulfills the psychological need for relatedness. Therefore, the company values and employees' needs seem to have created a self-reinforcing cycle that has formed caring and appreciation into underlying assumptions amongst members. This has created a sense of community within the company in turn. Given that the findings of equality were inconclusive due to the hidden informal hierarchies of the organization, this was not added to the theoretical cultural framework. However, this is a novel insight that should not be bypassed. It indicates that although self-managed organizations have formally stripped hierarchies, hidden hierarchies may hinder equality.

Lastly, **trust** was kept in the theoretical cultural framework since the employees within the self-managed organization trust one another's goodwill and competence. Trust also seems to be a by-product of autonomy as it develops a feeling of safety (Savaspuro, 2019, p. 51-53), which in turn procreates responsibility-taking behavior (McGregor’s, 1960; Laloux, 2014, p. 80-81) and advances effective collaboration on an organizational level (Meier et al., 2019; Tyler, 2003) and team-level (Druskat and Wheeler, 2004; Breuer et al. 2016; Choi and Cho, 2019). Therefore, the findings indicate that the company highly values trust and signals it through its structures and processes. Also, given that trust is a construct that cannot be forced upon people, the findings provide evidence that the organization's employees simply trust each other. Therefore, trust can be perceived as an underlying assumption of the organizational members. Therefore, the values of the

company and the fact that employees believe trust to be important seem to have created a self-reinforcing culture of trust within the organization.

All in all, what was specifically interesting from the study, was the overwhelming evidence on how the interviewees shared similar beliefs, assumptions, perceptions, feelings, and behavior, indicating many share the same beliefs, values, and norms although the company has not explicitly written them down. This indicates that the organization members share strong values and assumptions, creating a robust underlying culture within the company in turn.

6.2. Practical implications

This section will elaborate on what can be learned from the study and present practical implications for companies running in a self-managing manner within the consulting industry. However, the implications can be suitable for other types of organizations as well.

Self-managed organizations need their personnel to be intrinsically motivated to work autonomously, self-manage, be proactive, and work towards the organization's common goals (Kostamo and Martela, 2017), which requires members of the organization to have three basic psychological needs fulfilled; autonomy, competence, and relatedness. (Gagné and Deci, 2005; Corbett-Etchevers et al., 2019). Therefore, a culture of autonomy in which autonomy and freedom are given to both individuals and teams should be evident cultural traits within companies striving towards self-managing practices. This naturally requires employees to perceive, believe and feel autonomy to be beneficial for them to value autonomy. Therefore, recruitment should focus on whether a potential employee values autonomy, freedom, and responsibility since self-management and autonomy do not suit everyone.

Secondly, a culture of autonomy does not mean that people work entirely autonomously from one another. Instead, a culture of autonomy requires a shared goal amongst peers -

whether that being the goal of the organization or team - to ensure autonomous employees work together towards the same goal. Furthermore, a culture of helping and asking for advice seems to balance out the culture of autonomy so that people still work together towards their shared goal. Therefore, encouraging employees to help and support each other is likely to benefit a self-managed company. This can be supported with structures, such as avoiding personal KPI-based bonuses that incentivize people to focus on their own performance and having company-wide bonuses to ensure people strive towards a common goal together instead. Also, valuing more soft factors in salary determination criteria, such as the extent to which someone helps other members by arranging trainings and mentoring, can incentivize people to help and support each other.

Thirdly, the culture should fulfill the need for relatedness by fostering a culture in which the company and colleagues treat each other well. This entails ensuring employees are cared for and appreciated with different perks and praise, treating employees as adults that can make decisions for themselves, giving a lot of trust to the employees, striving for a sense of community with social gatherings, and ensuring people are treated equally with different organizational structures.

A fourth practical implication is to build support structures for information sharing and communication. The findings imply that self-managed organizations may have difficulties sharing information due to the lack of superiors. Especially an organization that relies on sharing and transmitting information through informal networks will hit difficulties once the personnel grows since employees will not know every person within the company. This can eliminate transparency and, at worst, hinder the sharing of crucial information autonomous employees need to make decisions. Therefore, when a self-managed organization grows, it is favorable to invest in a dedicated internal communications team to create a more systematic information-sharing structure. Testing out different channels and ways to communicate information company-wide can help find the right ways and practices to share information.

Lastly, since organizational culture can either hinder an organization's performance or be a source of competitive advantage (Barney 1986; Sadri and Lees, 2001), organizations need to understand their culture and ensure that it matches the organization's goals. Therefore, it is worthwhile for a company to conduct a cultural study of their organization to understand the values, mindsets, and norms of the organization and realize whether they are in line with the company's goal. Without understanding the underlying cultural forces of an organization, the organization's members can become victims to them (Schein, 2010). Once you are aware of the underlying forces of your company's culture, ensuring that all the employees of the organization share these values and norms is essential.

6.4. Limitations of study

First of all, since my study concerns a single company and its culture, and since organizational culture is more or less unique within each company (Hofstede, 2001, p. 393; Schein, 2010), it is important to note that the findings are not concrete and detailed generalizations. Furthermore, the organizational cultural styles vary depending on the work environment, type of company, and organizational philosophies (Odabasi et al., 2013, p. 415-419). Therefore, although self-managed organizations can be defined with specific characteristics, the type of self-management supporting structures and the scope and amount of autonomy given may differ based on the particular organization's nature, strategy, and industry (Lee and Edmondson, 2017). This study was conducted in an organization working in the IT consultancy field, which is also known as a highly decentralized company. Therefore, an organization's strategy and general industry and the self-managing nature and degree of autonomy given to employees may affect another company's culture. Hence, the findings of this study cannot be directly generalized and transferred to other contexts. I aim to support existing literature on self-managed organizations so that the findings can be considered as broader, abstract generalizations and insights.

Secondly, another limitation of the study is the number of research participants, which is relatively narrow. Also, while I tried to ensure that the interviewees would consist of a diverse sample from different teams, three out of seven worked to some degree within the same team. Thus, the sample does not represent the entire organization. Therefore, it is essential to keep these limitations in mind when reading the study's conclusions since the narrowness of the research approach could have caused the study to miss out on important and differing insights into the company culture and any potential sub-cultures. Nevertheless, the interviewees seemed to have highly diverse roles as many have worked or currently do work in both support and client projects/teams, so although three employees were from the same team, the diversity of their roles should ensure that the culture they experience is not only the culture of their own team. Additionally, while the amount of participants is limited, significant patterns already emerged from the seven interviews, making the data valuable.

The third potential limitation is the possibility of researcher bias. As the company was familiar to me prior to the study, my pre-understandings, presumptions, prior views, and beliefs on the company could have impacted the findings and conclusions I have drawn. To reduce the extent of these biases, I have rigorously followed the principles of academic research, and the study has been monitored and supervised by an academic instructor. Furthermore, I have paid extra attention to these issues to limit the possibility of bias and misinterpretations.

Lastly, there is always the possibility that the interviewees may have felt apprehensive in sharing their experiences and thoughts truthfully to me, given that I knew some of their co-workers personally. Keeping this in mind, I ensured to communicate to the interviewees that I would not disclose any information to my relations and that only I would listen to the recordings and write and read the transcripts. Furthermore, I also ensured to build trust and comfort with each participant by emphasizing that the participant has the authority to choose how they want to be reported in the study, have the full right to leave the study whenever they want before its submission and can correct

the citations to avoid possible misunderstandings. Nevertheless, since I knew most of the interviewees beforehand, I assumed that the relationship between the interviewee and me would be based on trust. Thus, I expect that the interviewee felt comfortable and relaxed in sharing their thoughts and experiences. Moreover, it is important to note that the reliability of the interviewees' answers has not been questioned. Therefore, I presume that all participants have answered the interview questions truthfully to their best knowledge.

6.5. Validation of the study

As a qualitative researcher, it is important to assure the trustworthiness and quality of one's study (Eriksson and Kovalainen, 2008). As I conducted qualitative research with a constructionist stance, my research must be evaluated and validated based on qualitative research evaluation criteria. Lincoln and Guba (1985) have established the evaluation of trustworthiness which is relevant for qualitative research with four aspects: credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability.

First of all, credibility refers to whether the researcher can prove one's familiarity with the study's concept (Lincoln and Guba, 1985), and I have ensured this by conducting an extensive literature review. In addition, the study's data should be sufficient enough to demonstrate the accuracy of the findings (Lincoln and Guba, 1985). To demonstrate the truth of the findings, I have gathered data from a company suitable for answering the research question. Furthermore, the end result should be credible in the eyes of the participants of the research (Lincoln and Guba, 1985), which is why all interviewees checked the quotes used in the study, and a representative of the studied company checked the final paper before publishing to avoid any misconceptions or possible errors.

Transferability implies that the research is able to form a connection to previous research results and has some similarities to prior literature. Nevertheless, generalization is merely impossible when it comes down to qualitative studies, given that the findings are highly connected to the context of the study. Instead, the research context should be clearly and sufficiently explicated (Lincoln and Guba, 1985). This research demonstrates

transferability by introducing similar studies and literature in the literature review and rigorously introducing the research context.

Dependability refers to the ability to offer relevant information and that the research process is understandable to follow and interpretable in the eyes of the reader (Lincoln and Guba, 1985). I have ensured dependability by reporting the different steps of the research in the research design and methodology chapter; how I approached the studied company, how and when the participants were contacted and interviewed, the different steps of analysis etc.

Lastly, the criterion of confirmability refers to the ability to link findings and interpretations to the data in an understanding and logical manner, and that the links are nonprejudiced (Lincoln and Guba, 1985). I ensured confirmability by demonstrating clear links between the data and the interpretation of the study and by explaining the decisions made carefully. I have also presented my research process step-by-step to ensure confirmability.

6.6. Suggestions for future research

In terms of suggestions for future research I would firstly recommend verifying this study's findings with a more extensive study by interviewing more people from the organization. A more comprehensive study would enable to study different teams to validate whether the organization consists of sub-cultures within teams.

Secondly, given organizational culture is such an abstract and wide concept, analyzing broader sets of data with different methods, for example with quantitative research and ethnography research, would provide a broader and deeper understanding on the culture within self-managed organizations. In fact, Rousseau (1990) suggests that quantitative methods can also be used for researching culture and offers a possibility to realize the systematic impact culture has on people's behavior.

Thirdly, as the culture of self-managed organizations is not widely studied, investigating other self-managed organizations' cultures would be interesting. Although organizational cultures are typically unique (Hofstede, 2001, p. 393; Schein, 2010), it would be interesting to compare the cultures of two different self-managed companies working in the consultancy business to determine whether there are similarities within the cultural traits. Furthermore, comparing the organizational cultures of a self-managed organization versus a hierarchical organization would give further understanding of whether cultures could differ based on the organizational structures and practices.

A fourth possible direction for future research would be to examine whether the national culture impacts self-management. Especially studying self-management within organizations that are located within more traditional, hierarchical national cultures could provide fascinating insight into how self-management is practiced outside of the Nordics.

Lastly, since this study does not take a stance of what cultural traits are beneficial for self-managed companies, I suggest studying further on what kind of cultural traits are beneficial for a self-managed organization.

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Appendices

Appendix 1. Interview guide for normal workers

Although the below interview guide is in English, all interviews were conducted in Finnish. In addition to the questions found below, follow-up questions were also asked based on the interviewees' answers.

Work tasks and relationship to company

1. Job title and duties, and duration at firm
2. In what projects or teams do you work in currently?
    a. How did you end up in the project/team?
    b. What does your team do?
    c. Do you have a team leader? Is he/she your superior?
3. What is it in your own words that makes your organization unique?

Values, mission and vision

4. What are the most important values of the company? How do you see these values in your everyday work?
5. How would you describe the mission/vision of your organization? How does the mission/vision guide you in your day to day work?

Responsibility and decision-making

6. What type of responsibilities do you have in your everyday work and how are they decided?
7. How are decisions made within the organization? (Give example)
8. How do you resolve conflicts/disagreements? (Give example)

Feedback, evaluation and recognition

9. How are your own work goals determined?
10. How do you get feedback from your work?
11. How is your work acknowledged?

Organization and leadership

12. How would you describe your company's leadership style? (Give example)
13. What type of participation possibilities do you have within your company's strategic decision making?

Information and communication

14. How does your company make sure that everyone has the right information at the right time?

Learning and development

15. What type of opportunities do you have for professional development and learning at work?

Interpersonal relationships

16. How would you describe the company's atmosphere? (Give examples)
17. How would you describe your relationship with fellow colleagues?

Self-management

18. What do you think self-management means? Do you feel your organization is a self-managing organization?
19. How is self-management visible in your daily practice? (Give example)

Appendix 2. Interview guide for experts in self-management

Although the below interview guide is in English, all interviews were conducted in Finnish. In addition to the questions found below, follow-up questions were also asked based on the interviewees' answers.

Work tasks and relationship to company

1. Job title and duties, and duration at firm
2. What is it in your own words that makes your organization unique?

Values, mission and vision

3. What are the most important values of the company? How do you see these values in your everyday work?
4. How would you describe the mission/vision of your organization? How does the mission/vision guide you in your day to day work?

Organization and leadership (autonomy)

5. How are teams/projects chosen within your company?
6. How would you describe your company's leadership style? (Give example)

Responsibility and decision-making (autonomy)

7. Kuinka vastuuta jaetaan yrityksessä/tiimeissä ja miten siitä päätetään? What type of responsibilities do you have in your everyday work and how are they decided?
8. How are decisions made within the organization? (Give example)

Information and communication (openness and transparency)

9. How does your company make sure that everyone has the right information at the right time?

Learning and development

10. What type of opportunities do you have for professional development and learning at work?

Feedback, evaluation and recognition

11. How are your own work goals determined?
12. How do you get feedback from your work?
13. How is your work acknowledged?

Interpersonal relationships (trust, care, appreciation)

14. How would you describe the company's atmosphere? (Give examples)
15. How would you describe your relationship with fellow colleagues?

Self-management

16. What do you think self-management means? Do you feel your organization is a self-managing organization?
17. How is self-management visible in your daily practice? (Give example)
18. What conditions support self-management in your company?
19. What are the pain points you have noticed to be difficult in supporting self-management within your organization?