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EMPLOYEE WELL-BEING IN SELF-MANAGING ORGANIZATIONS

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ABSTRACT

Eliisa Nissi: Employee Well-Being in Self-Managing Organizations
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Today's organizations have to a large extent, shifted from industrial manufacturing to mastering and creating high-level knowledge. However, the traditional way of organizing work and leading employees, which has reigned in organizations for a long has caused challenges on organizations' performance. The change in the nature of work has also highlighted the importance of employee well-being as knowledge work may create high strains, leading to adverse impacts on employee well-being. Various organizations have responded to these challenges by degrading their hierarchical organizational structures and distributing the leadership in them. However, this phenomenon of self-organizing and its influence on employee well-being have been studied vaguely.

This thesis aims to examine how the characteristics of self-managing organizations influence the experienced employee well-being by adopting a comprehensive perspective on how employee well-being is formed in organizations. The formed research question is answered through literature review and analysis of empirical data. Interpretivism and, more precisely, phenomenology acted as the guiding research philosophies, and an abductive approach was adopted conducting the thesis. The research design consisted of a qualitative case study. Altogether, thirteen semi-structured interviews were analyzed using thematic analysis. This thesis is part of a TEOT -research project conducted at Tampere University, aiming to study employee well-being in self-managing organizations with no managers and minimal hierarchy. Two case organizations participating in the research project were examined, of which both the organizations operated in the software industry.

The findings are categorized under five themes, derived from the theory of comprehensive employee well-being perspective, which consists of factors influencing employee well-being in organizations. The themes are the organization, leadership, work community, work, and individual factors. To briefly summarize the results, several characteristics of self-managing organizations are identified to positively influence the experienced employee well-being regarding each of the themes. However, some characteristics also cause challenges and adverse impacts on the experienced employee well-being.

Both theoretical contributions and practical implications on employee well-being in self-managing organizations are offered in this thesis. This thesis composes the existing but scattered body of literature and research on self-organizing's influence on employee well-being and confirms many existing views on self-organizing's advantages as well as challenges to employee well-being in self-managing organizations. Furthermore, this study supports the perception of comprehensive employee well-being forming from various factors. However, the results also challenge some of the current views in literature and provide new aspects that have not been addressed previously. Practical implications on fostering employee well-being in self-managing organizations operating in the software industry are finally offered based on this thesis's results, and future research possibilities are indicated.

Keywords: self-organizing, self-managing organization, self-leadership, employee well-being

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TIIVISTELMÄ

Eliisa Nissi: Employee Well-Being in Self-Managing Organizations
Pro gradu -tutkielma
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Nykypäivän organisaatiot ovat suurelta osin siirtyneet teollisesta tuotannosta korkean tason tiedonhallintaan ja tiedon luomiseen. Organisaatioissa pitkään vallinnut tapa organisoida työtä ja johtaa työntekijöitä aiheuttaa kuitenkin haasteita niiden suoriutumiskyvylle. Työn luonteen muutos on lisäksi tuonut esiin työntekijöiden hyvinvoinnin työssä, sillä tietotyö aiheuttaa työntekijöille huomattavaa rasitusta johtuen kielteisiin vaikutuksiin heidän hyvinvoinnissaan. Monet organisaatiot ovat vastanneet näihin haasteisiin purkamalla hierarkisia organisaatorakenteita sekä jakamalla johtajuutta niissä. Tätä itseorganisoitumista ja sen vaikutusta työntekijöiden hyvinvointiin on kuitenkin tutkittu vajavaisesti.

Tämän pro gradu -tutkielman tarkoituksena on tarkastella, kuinka itseohjautuvien organisaatioiden piirteet vaikuttavat työntekijöiden koettuun hyvinvointiin omaksumalla laajempi näkökulma työntekijöiden hyvinvoinnin muodostumisesta organisaatioissa. Muodostettuun tutkimuskysymykseen vastataan sekä teoreettisen kirjallisuuskatsauksen että empiirisen aineiston analysoinnin kautta. Interpretivismi ja tarkemmin fenomenologia toimivat ohjaavina tieteenfilosofisina suuntauksina ja tutkimuksessa sovelletaan abduktiivista päättelyä. Tutkimus toteutettiin laadullisena tapaus tutkimuksena. Yhteensä kolmetoista puolistrukturoitua haastattelua analysoitiin temaattista analyysia käyttäen. Tutkielma on osa Tampereen yliopistossa toteutettua TEOT-tutkimushanketta, joka keskittyy tarkastelemaan työntekijöiden hyvinvointia itseohjautuvissa organisaatioissa, joissa ei ole esimiehiä ja joilla on minimaalinen hierarkia. Tutkielmassa tarkastellaan kahta tutkimushankkeeseen osallistunutta tapausorganisaatiota, joista molemmat toimivat ohjelmistoalalla.

Tulokset on luokiteltu viiteen teemaan, jotka ovat johdettu kokonaisvaltaisen työhyvinvoinnin teoriasta, ja jotka koostuvat työhyvinvointiin vaikuttavista tekijöistä organisaatioissa. Nämä teemat ovat organisaatio, johtajuus, työyhteisö, työ sekä yksilö. Lyhyenä yhteenvedona tuloksista voidaan todeta, että itseohjautuvien organisaatioiden useiden piirteiden tunnistetaan positiivisesti vaikuttavan työntekijöiden hyvinvointiin kunkin teeman osalta. Kuitenkin jotkut piirteistä aiheuttavat työntekijöille myös haasteita sekä kielteisiä vaikutuksia heidän koettuun hyvinvointiinsa.

Tämä tutkielma tarjoaa sekä teoreettista kontribuutiota että käytännön neuvoja työntekijöiden hyvinvoinnin kehittämiseen itseohjautuvissa organisaatioissa. Tutkielma kokoaa yhteen aiemmin hajanaisesti käsiteltyä kirjallisuutta itseohjautuvuuden vaikutuksista työhyvinvointiin ja vahvistaa monia olemassa olevia käsityksiä itseohjautuvuuden hyödyistä sekä haasteista työntekijän hyvinvoinnille itseohjautuvissa organisaatioissa. Lisäksi tutkielma tukee käsitystä kokonaisvaltaisesta työhyvinvoinnista, joka muodostuu erilaisista tekijöistä ammatillisessa ympäristössä. Tulokset kuitenkin myös haastavat joitakin nykyisiä kirjallisuuden näkemyksiä, sekä tuovat esille uusia näkökulmia, joita ei ole aiemmin käsitelty. Tutkielman tulosten perusteella pystytään tarjoamaan monia käytännön neuvoja työntekijöiden hyvinvoinnin edistämiseksi ohjelmistoalalla toimivissa itseohjautuvissa organisaatioissa, sekä osoittamaan aihepiirin tulevaisuuden tutkimusmahdollisuuksia.

Avainsanat: itseohjautuvuus, itseohjautuva organisaatio, itsensä johtaminen, työhyvinvointi

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1. INTRODUCTION

1.1. Background of Research Phenomenon

From the late 20th century onward, work tasks in all industries have focused on mastering high-level know-how and new technology instead of physical labor in manufacturing, and it seems that the importance of knowledge work will only increase (Pyöriä, 2002, pp. 58—60). For organizations that produce services, which require the management and creating of high knowledge, knowledge is a critical factor for its operations and competitiveness. However, when expertise and knowledge are the essential resources, they must be updated and utilized constantly. Thus, these types of knowledge organizations face tremendous pressure to change continuously. On the one hand, these organizations need to adapt to their changing environment constantly, and on the other hand, they must maintain their existing operations as efficiently as possible. (Markova, 2005, p. 17.)

Organizations consciously aim to form an efficient structure by organizing the social structures and hierarchy, dividing labor, and creating channels for coordination and communication, which has usually been the management's responsibility (Peltonen, 2010, p. 9). Traditionally the management of organizations has been based on high hierarchy, where the top management sits at the top of a pyramid and many organizational levels below are the line employees, who are to follow the orders from above (Martela & Jarenko, 2017, p. 16). However, in today's organizations, it is rather tricky for any individual leader to possess all the required knowledge, skills, and competence to manage the knowledge work in the organization by themselves. It requires both individual employees and teams, where employees share their knowledge into the use of the whole team. (Pearce & Manz, 2005, p. 132.) Thus, the traditional way of organizing work and leading employees causes challenges regarding organizational performance in today's knowledge organizations (Adler, 2001, p. 216).

For employees, who perform knowledge work in dynamic organizational environments, both cognitive and behavioral abilities are required to reach the organization's expected working efficiency (Pearce & Manz, 2005, p. 132). According to the Finnish working life barometer, working life's mental strains are significantly more common than physical strains (Keyriläinen, 2020, p. 113). Increasing intensification regarding work and constant learning has led employees to perceive the acceleration of demands on their work and career in general (Ulferts, Korunka, & Kubicek, 2013). Work intensification may lead to lower employee satisfaction levels and a higher-level risk of experiencing exhaustion (Korunka, Kubicek, Paškvan &

Ulferts, 2015). In addition, high strains in knowledge work have been associated with poorer health and less job satisfaction (McClenahan, Giles & Mallett, 2007).

Besides having impacts on individual employees, well-being has outcomes on work communities, organizations, and even society. For instance, employees experiencing feelings of burnout may also negatively affect their work community through conflicts and underperforming job tasks (Maslach, Schaufeli & Leiter, 2001, p. 406). Many studies have also shown the connection between employee well-being and organizational productivity; In Ahonen's study (2002), employee satisfaction was significantly related to customer satisfaction. According to Cooper and Cartwright (1994), the costs of occupational stress can be measured both in financial and humanistic terms. Furthermore, for instance, job stress has been associated with an increased risk of disability pension (Juvani et al., 2014), which among other outcomes of negative well-being, generates costs and challenges to the society. Thus, taking care of employee well-being is significant in terms of organizations' social sustainability as well.

Many organizations have become aware of the performance issues due to the changes in the nature of work and the organizational environment as well as their requirements for their employees' well-being. In addition to facing this type of top-down pressure, today's organizations also face bottom-up pressure, meaning that the members of organizations seek ways to facilitate their knowledge into use better and create meaning for their work (Pearce & Manz, 2005, p. 132). Some organizations have responded to these changes and requirements by degrading their hierarchical organizational structures and distributing the leadership in them. By decentralizing the authority and decision-making possibilities, these organizations have sought better flexibility and reactivity. (Houghton, Neck & Manz, 2003, p. 123; Pearce & Manz, 2005, p. 132; Yammarino, 2013, p. 151.) Furthermore, several quantitative studies have shown that organizations, where employees have more authority and responsibility on their work and organizational matters, are associated with diverse positive effects on employee well-being (e.g., Eurofound, 2017, p. 141; Lyly-Yrjänäinen, 2019, pp. 42—43).

These changes in the organizational and leadership practices have led to the emerging of concepts, such as self- and shared leadership (Pearce & Manz, 2005, pp. 132—133) and self-managing organizations (Lee & Edmondson, 2017) in the organizational research and literature. Many advantages have been recognized regarding this phenomenon of self-organizing (as referred to in this thesis) in the literature as well as challenges to it (e.g., Hamel, 2011). However, this phenomenon has been lacking in empirical study, and the few conducted case studies are referred to in multiple publications. Furthermore, the relationship between self-

organizing and employee well-being has been studied even less, and the conducted studies have focused only on specific aspects of employee well-being. Thus, empirical research is required to understand better the outcomes of self-organizing on employee well-being in a more comprehensive perspective. This need acts as an inspiration to this research.

1.2. Aim of the Research and Research Question

Self-organizing is currently very topical in organizational literature. Nonetheless, there is still a lack of empirical studies on self-managing organizations, where self-organizing is practiced throughout the organization, as well as on how individuals experience working in these self-managing organizations (Lee & Edmondson, 2017). Furthermore, although self-organizing's and on the individual level self-leadership's relations to well-being have been studied from specific aspects, there are no studies on how self-organizing is related to employee well-being from a more comprehensive perspective. This thesis aims to examine how the characteristics of self-managing organizations, such as structures, processes, practices, and culture, influence the experienced employee well-being in them by adopting a comprehensive perspective on how employee well-being is formed in organizations.

The research question of this thesis is following:

How do the characteristics of a self-managing organization influence the experienced employee well-being?

The research question is answered through a theoretical literature review and an analysis of empirical data. This thesis is part of a TEOT -research project conducted at Tampere University. The aim of the research project is to study on what level is the general employee well-being in self-managing organizations with no managers and with minimal hierarchy, and how the characteristics of self-managing organizations influence employee well-being in them. In this thesis, two case organizations participating in the research project are examined. Both organizations operate in the software industry. The work in the case organizations concentrates on the management and creation of high-level knowledge, and as knowledge work and high strains in it have been associated with poorer health and less job satisfaction (McClenahan et al., 2007), examining the employee well-being in these self-managing organizations is seen as especially meaningful.

1.3. Thesis Process and Structure

This chapter briefly describes the research process and the structure of the thesis. The thesis was conducted between May 2020 and May 2021. The process started by acquiring an understanding of the theory and literature relevant to the research phenomenon, which stemmed from the TEOT -research project that had begun in early 2020. A preliminary research question and research topic were then defined, and suitable research methods were chosen. The research was a qualitative case study, which was approached abductively, and thus the research process consisted of a dialogue between the empirical data and theory.

As the TEOT -research group had collected the data, the analysis process began by familiarizing with the data and writing short memos on ideas and issues that seemed significant regarding the research question. The initial round of coding followed this, generating a preliminary overview of the data. As the preliminary understanding of the data was formed, the research question was then redefined, and the more precise literature and theoretical framework were formed during Autumn 2020.

In January 2021, the initial codes were redefined, and the final coding of the data was performed. Based on the final coding and the theoretical framework, the coded data was then organized and categorized into themes, and findings were formed. Finally, the conclusions were produced, and the thesis was finalized by May 2021.

The thesis is divided into five chapters, and the structure is illustrated in figure 1.

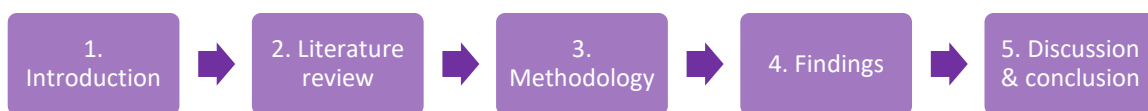


Figure 1. Structure of the thesis

The structure is following:

1. The introduction provides background for the study, presents the aim of the research and the research question, and describes the structure of the thesis.
2. The literature review on the theoretical background to employee well-being in self-managing organizations is presented. The chapter is divided into four sections. The first section provides an overview of the phenomenon of self-organizing. The second section examines employee well-being from the comprehensive employee well-being perspective and presents the expressions of employee well-being. The third section then

composes the existing but scattered body of literature and research on self-organizing's influence on employee well-being. Finally, a synthesis of the theoretical framework for this thesis is presented.

3. The methodological choices are explained, and the conducting of the thesis is described. In addition, the case organizations are introduced.
4. The findings of the empirical research are presented. The findings are divided into five themes, which consist of factors influencing employee well-being in self-managing organizations. Finally, a summary of the findings is presented.
5. The thesis is briefly summarized, and theoretical contributions as well as practical implications are suggested. The chapter ends by evaluating the conducting of the thesis and addressing the limitations and future research possibilities.

2. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND TO EMPLOYEE WELL-BEING IN SELF-MANAGING ORGANIZATIONS

2.1. Self-Organizing

The phenomenon of employee autonomy and decentralization of authority has been referred to with multiple terms in the organization literature, and there is no single definition for it. Instead, the definition used depends on the context in question. In this thesis, the described phenomenon of organizing the operations and work in an organization with no central authority is referred to as self-organizing. Instead of having a central authority giving orders, interdependent agents operate based on the shared knowledge and other agents’ actions (Chiles, Meyer & Hench, 2004, p. 502).

However, it is essential to recognize that self-organizing in this thesis consists of different level approaches to it, and the difference between them should be clarified. When self-organizing occurs on the individual level, the term self-leadership in this thesis refers to the individual’s possibility and capability to lead themselves in a work context. Whereas self-organizing occurs on the team level, meaning that a team has authority over their decision-making and behavior, the term referred to is a self-managing team (SMT). When the decentralizing of authority, and self-organizing practices, occur throughout the organization, the term in question is a self-managing organization (SMO). The definitions used regarding self-organizing in this thesis are described in table 1.

Table 1. Terms and definitions of self-organizing used in the thesis.

Term	Definition
Self-organizing	Organizing complex systems with no central authority. In self-organizing systems, orders do not come from central authority but from interdependent agents, who operate based on the shared knowledge and other agents’ actions. (Chiles et al., 2004, p. 502.)
Self-leadership (self-management)	Individual’s ability to function without external guidance, self-imposed (Kostamo, 2017, p. 80).
Self-managing team (SMT)	Team with a high decision-making authority and behavioral control (Manz & Sims, 1987, p. 107).
Self-managing organization (SMO)	“those that radically decentralize authority in a formal and systematic way throughout the organization” (Lee & Edmondson, 2017, p. 39)

However, in this thesis, the definition of a self-managing team will not be addressed more closely as it is assumed that self-managing organizations consist of self-managing teams and thus are included in the organization-level approach. As described in chapter 1.2, the thesis aims to examine employee well-being in self-managing organizations. To better understand this research phenomenon, the concepts of self-leadership and more profoundly self-managing organizations are now further elaborated, and relevant literature and theory of overall self-organizing are presented:

1. Self-leadership and its history are reviewed.
2. The concept of self-managing organizations and their typical characteristics are described.
3. Self-organizing is considered in practice.
4. The advantages and pitfalls of self-organizing are covered.

2.1.1. Self-Leadership

When considering the self-organizing phenomenon from the individual employee's perspective in this thesis, the referred term is self-leadership. Manz (1986) describes self-leadership as “a comprehensive self-influence perspective that concerns leading oneself toward performance of naturally motivating tasks as well as managing oneself to do work that must be done but is not naturally motivating” (p. 589). Self-leadership refers to the individual's ability to function without external guidance, self-imposed. It means that the individual is aware of his goals and aims to reach them independently. Thus, it is about possessing the capability and skills to lead one's self. (Kostamo, 2017, p. 80; Martela & Jarenko, 2017, p. 12.) Self-leadership does not only include the technical knowledge to execute tasks but also the ability to lead one's self in terms of time management, task setting, and resource management, for example, that traditionally have been the manager's responsibilities. (Martela & Jarenko, 2017, p. 12.) Besides referring to managing one's behavior, self-leadership also means that the individual evaluates, sets, and reshapes the targets and standards, thus creating a reason and direction for one's actions (Pearce & Manz, 2005, p. 133).

In addition to these self-leadership skills, also the role of intrinsic motivation is highlighted in self-leadership (Pearce & Manz, 2005, p. 133). Self-leadership requires the individual to be self-motivated (Martela & Jarenko, 2017, p. 12), and an integral theory associated with self-leadership and the role of motivation in it is self-determination theory (SDT). According to the theory, motivation can vary between so-called autonomous motivations and controlled

motivations; autonomy meaning of being willing to act, and control meaning being externally or internally pressured to act. Autonomous forms of motivation are necessary for high-level performance and engagement in work that includes thinking and creativity. Autonomous motivation can be reached through the satisfaction of basic psychological needs, that according to the SDT theory, are the feelings of competence, autonomy, and relatedness. The satisfaction of the needs is not necessary only in terms of reaching the optimal level of motivation and performance but also for ensuring psychological growth, integrity, and well-being of the employee. (Ryan & Deci, 2017, pp. 3—25, 532—558.)

The concept of self-leadership has become popular in organization and leadership literature within the last few decades. In the 1980s and 1990s, it was considered especially valuable concerning SMTs and empowering leadership. From the 1990s onward, the self-leadership theory has been applied to multiple contexts, such as organizational change, team performance, and job satisfaction. (Neck & Houghton, 2006.) Self-leadership is related to many other phenomena in organizations and leadership, such as employee empowerment and participation. Self-leadership is considered as the follower of the more recognizable concept of self-management. Self-management refers to managing one's behavior by using self-discipline strategies to fulfill targets and standards set by the organization or a leader. (Pearce & Manz, 2005, p. 133.) Thus, the individuals can decide how to perform specific tasks, but they cannot determine what the tasks are and why they should be executed (Stewart, Courtright & Manz 2010, p. 190).

Self-leadership has gained a considerable amount of popularity within the last few decades. However, it still has received its fair share of criticism as well. Its most common criticism seems to be the overlapping with other related concepts and theories of motivation. Nonetheless, it can be argued that self-leadership is a normative model instead of being a deductive or descriptive model. Thus, rather than aiming to describe this phenomenon's fundamental processes, self-leadership tends to enlighten how it should be implicated in different contexts. Another reason for criticism seems to be the lack of empirical research done in organizational settings. (Neck & Houghton, 2006, pp. 274—275.)

2.1.2. Self-Managing Organizations

Besides occurring only on the individual level, self-organizing can also be practiced on the organization level. The terms used to describe self-organizing on the organization level have

varied in literature, but in this thesis, the term self-managing organization is used to describe an organization, where self-organizing is practiced throughout the organization.

Self-managing organizations (SMOs) can be defined as “those that radically decentralize authority in a formal and systematic way throughout the organization” (Lee & Edmondson, 2017, p. 39). SMOs differ from hierarchical organizations by eliminating or decreasing the hierarchical reporting relationships that act as the cornerstones of organizing work and control in hierarchical organizations (ibid). Self-managing is especially necessary for organizations, which perform complex tasks and where no individuals can possess all the knowledge needed in these tasks. By sharing the knowledge and leadership between employees, organizations can enhance their decision-making and processes, leading to a more dynamic organization. (Paju, 2017, p. 46.)

A common misperception regarding self-managing organizations is that people are free to function and behave as they like. For SMOs to function, common processes and guidelines are required to guide the employees and operations. SMOs are often prescribed as flat organizations with little hierarchy and no management or leadership when on the contrary, there are multiple structures and arguably even more leadership that is just widely distributed throughout the organization. (Laloux, 2016, pp. 134—136.) Next, common structures, processes, practices, and cultural characteristics in self-managing organizations are viewed. The source used as the base of this section is Frederic Laloux’s *Reinventing Organizations*, which has been considered to have a significant influence on the field of SMOs or Teal -organizations, as referred in his work. However, it should be noted that the characteristics presented in this section represent only some common or idealistic characteristics of an SMO, but they do not define whether an organization is self-managing or not.

Structures

In SMOs, the organizational structures prescribed by the management are as decreased as possible, and organizations are searching for the minimal viable structure. However, every middle-sized or larger company has some operating model or structure within them. (Martela & Jarenko, 2017, pp. 13—14.) The structure is often formed by several SMTs. These teams can be referred for example, as circles, pods, or just teams, that can be considered as the building blocks of the structure (Bernstein, Bunch, Canner & Lee, 2016, p. 43), and they are created and discontinued according to the organization’s needs (Bernstein et al., 2016, p. 43 & Kostamo,

2017, p. 80; Martela & Jarenko, 2017, p. 12). The SMTs are not divided by different departments or units in the organizational matrix, which allows them to be a lot more adaptive than in traditional organizations (Bernstein et al., 2016, p. 43).

The SMTs manage and shape themselves, taking into account the larger organizational structure and fundamentals on how to form, modify and discontinue teams in the organization. Besides, they contribute to forming those fundamentals and guidelines in the organization. However, these fundamentals and guidelines do not order how teams and employees within them should execute their tasks but explains on a more general level how the teams should form the roles in them and cooperate with each other. (Bernstein et al., 2016, p. 43.) Inside the teams, individual employees' roles are formed in consensus, considering how to accomplish the team's purpose (Bernstein et al., 2016, pp. 43—44; Martela, 2019). Individuals often no longer have a single job title and role but instead have many roles depending on their interests (Bernstein et al., 2016, p. 44; Laloux, 2016, p. 180).

SMTs governing themselves does not mean that the role of leadership is to decrease. A relevant concept related to self-managing organizations is shared leadership. Perry, Pearce, and Sims (1999) describe shared leadership as “a collaborative process of sharing leadership within the team as a whole” (p. 38). Shared leadership consists of constant multiple, simultaneous influence processes by official and unofficial leaders (Pearce & Manz, 2005, p. 134). In SMOs, the leadership roles and responsibilities change as the tasks and teams change (Bernstein et al., 2016, p. 44). Ropo et al. (2005) divide shared leadership into two perspectives. Firstly, shared leadership means dividing and delegating the leadership tasks and responsibilities. Secondly, shared leadership can be considered as the process of making leadership mutual by sharing experiences and interpretations in teams or organizations. This view considers that every person's values, desire for power, and trust, among others, affect the process of sharing the leadership. (Ropo et al., 2005, pp. 19—20.)

According to several studies (e.g., Houghton et al., 2003; Bligh, Pearce & Kohles, 2006), self-leadership is essential for facilitating shared leadership processes. It is assumed that before being able to share the leadership responsibilities commonly in a team, the individuals must be able to lead themselves as well (Houghton et al., 2003). For employees who are in SMOs for the first time, self-leadership might be challenging, at least in the beginning. Responsibility follows freedom, and thus challenging situations might create the urge to have the higher authorities make the decisions and be responsible for those. Also, employees who previously have worked as managers in their old organizations might feel relieved of not having to handle

these situations, but on the other hand, they might long for their power over these decisions. (Laloux, 2016, p. 137.)

Processes & practices

Decision-making is an essential process, which needs to be redefined in SMOs. In SMOs, power to make decisions is distributed throughout the organization, and all the employees have the right to be part of the decision-making that cannot be outweighed by managers' authorities (Lee & Edmondson, 2017, p. 39). In many SMOs, advice processes are used, where the employee asks advice for a decision from colleagues affected by this decision. The larger the effects would be, the more people should be included in the advice process. It does not mean that there must be a consensus on the decision, but everyone's opinion should be heard in the process. (Laloux, 2016, pp. 99—103.) Commonly employees in SMOs also have the authority to use the company money to make necessary purchases (Hamel, 2011, p. 53; Laloux, 2016, p. 106) presumed that this is done through the advice process (Laloux, 2016, p. 106). For all the employees to participate in the decision-making, a shared vision of the organization's direction and its strategic goals is needed (Kostamo & Martela, 2017, pp. 58—59). Furthermore, with no managers guiding the decision-making in meetings, there need to be specific meeting practices to guide the interaction (Laloux, 2016, pp. 146—168), as well as training for it (Pearce & Manz, 2005, p. 139).

Another essential process in self-managing organizations is the communication within the organization. Unlike in many traditional organizations, almost all the data is shared with all the employees in SMOs. In some SMOs, even the employees' salaries are transparent to the whole organization. (Laloux, 2016, p. 110.) For the employees to be part of the decision-making, the transparency of information is necessary (Kostamo & Martela, 2017, p. 58; Laloux, 2016, p. 111; Martela, 2019), and it can be argued that self-organizing would be impossible without the organization-wide sharing of almost all the information (Laihonen, 2005). Technology and IT systems play an essential role in information sharing (Bernstein et al., 2016, p. 44; Martela, 2019). SMOs have also defined processes of handling any types of tensions or conflict in a communicative manner that might emerge within the organization. These are important to reinforce an organizational culture, where employees can encounter each other honestly and thus overcome any conflicts or issues. (Hamel, 2011, p. 55; Laloux, 2016, pp. 111—114;

Martela, 2019.) In addition, training on communication and conflict management is necessary to develop self-leadership in self-managing organizations (Pearce & Manz, 2005, p. 139).

A third process that needs to be reconsidered in self-managed organizations is the whole of performance management and compensation. When in traditional organizations, the managers aim to motivate the employees to perform well, in SMOs, the motivation is generated intrinsically through the ability to make decisions regarding one's work and ways of working, thus creating a sense of purpose. Also, the performance of the fellow colleagues and the demands of the organizational environment guide the employees' motivation and performance. (Laloux, 2016, pp. 123—125; Martela, 2019.) The role of peer feedback is highlighted in self-managing organizations (Laloux, 2016, pp. 123—125), and studies indicate that peer evaluations for various purposes foster self-organizing in teams (Stewart et al., 2010, p. 208). Without managers, also the process of setting salaries and incentives differs significantly. Salaries in SMO's can be set based on a peer review by a compensation committee (Hamel, 2011, p. 56), and in some of the organizations, salaries are even self-set (Laloux, 2016, pp. 129—131). However, finding a suitable compensation model can be challenging in SMOs, where employees have multiple roles in many operations (Bernstein et al., 2016, p. 46). Group-based incentive systems are seen as preferable over individual-based ones in SMOs (Pearce & Manz, 2005, p. 138; Stewart et al., 2010, p. 208).

The role of human resources management (HRM), its actors and activities also differ in self-managing organizations. Instead of sharing the responsibility of HRM development and performance between the HR department and managers, teams and individual employees in SMOs take more responsibility for HRM, whereas the HR department acts as a mere facilitator. (Renkema, Bos-Nehles & Meijerink, 2020.) The organization's general competence development is more on employees' responsibility, and employees have more authority over it. However, the organization often provides coaching to support personal development in SMOs. Most roles in SMOs have autonomy regarding the working hours, but with the freedom also comes the responsibility for organizing the work. (Laloux, 2016, pp. 158—183.) It is necessary to give new employees an introduction to self-organizing, ground rules, and the organizational culture, since working in SMO can differ a lot from the employees' previous working experiences (Laloux, 2016, pp. 174—175; Pearce & Manz, 2005, pp. 138—139).

Culture

Self-managing organizations also share some common cultural traits and guidelines that guide them in their actions. Firstly, in SMOs, the intertwined concepts of trust, decision-making, information sharing, and responsibility play a central role in their culture and code of conduct (Bernstein et al., 2016, p. 43; Laloux, 2016, pp. 230—231) since culture, with high employee involvement, information sharing, and autonomy, enhances self-organizing and effectiveness in the organization (Stewart et al., 2010, p. 209). Secondly, there are elements such as equality, unity, safety, learning, and constructive relationships that are often embedded into the norms of SMOs. Everyone in the organization should be equally treated as human beings, thus creating a safe and caring working environment. The physical offices also reflect this kind of environment as they are designed to be comfortable places with no signs of hierarchy and allow employees to show their humane side. Challenges and failures should be experienced as learning opportunities instead of fearing them. Thirdly, the sense of purpose guides the organization and its individuals in decision-making and actions. The organizational purpose as well as the individuals' purposes that should reflect the organizational purpose are essential to guide SMOs, where the leadership is shared. (Laloux, 2016, pp. 158, 231—232.)

2.1.3. Self-Organizing in Practice

In reality, the division between traditional, hierarchical organizing and self-organizing is not very clear. The level of control in organizations can vary considerably, even between organizations that are considered self-managing. Commonly, employees in SMOs have a high level of autonomy in areas such as work execution and monitoring, as well as work design and resource allocation to some extent. Then again, organization strategy and personnel management are often still under management's control. (Lee & Edmondson, 2017.) There are also organizations in which teams are strongly self-managed, but they have strict boundaries and goals, which they need to achieve. Thus, organizations vary significantly regarding the freedom they give to their employees, and the level of freedom can also vary between the individual and team levels within the organization. (Martela & Jarenko, 2017, pp. 13—14.) According to Bernstein et al. (2016), in most organizations, it is not even reasonable to adopt self-organizing practices throughout the organization, but only in areas where a high level of adaptability is required.

A few SMOs have been empirically studied, which have been referred to in a variety of publications. One of the examples used in various publications (e.g., Hamel, 2011; Kostamo & Martela, 2017; Laloux, 2014; Lee & Edmondson, 2017) is Morning Star, a company that has successfully operated with minimal hierarchy and no managers for more than two decades. Morning Star's mission acts as the company leader, and in this empowering environment, everyone manages their own work. Everyone negotiates their responsibilities with their colleagues and is responsible for the quality of their work. They can also spend Morning Star's budget in order to have everything needed to perform their work. Morning Star's case indicates that it is possible to perform profitably even with no hierarchies and managers by sharing the leadership with everyone. However, it requires shared goals, enduring relationships, and understanding of the industry. (Hamel, 2011.)

When examining the occurring of self-organizing in practice, it can be noted that in Finland, the employee's possibilities to participate in the development in the workplace have increased within the last decade. According to the Finnish working life barometer, in 2018, only 14% percent of employees indicated to have weak possibilities to participate in the organization, whereas 55% of employees experienced being able to participate. (Lyly-Yrjänäinen, 2019.) However, in Europe-wide research, it was found that in 2015 more than one-third of employees work in organizations, which involve the employees in low levels and the employees have little possibilities to participate in organizational matters (Eurofound, 2017, p. 141). This difference can at least partially be explained by the fact that ideas and initiatives promoting employees' autonomy and participation in decision-making as part of improving well-being at work have been more widely promoted in the Nordic Countries in the last several decades than in the rest of Europe (Gustavsen, 2011).

2.1.4. Self-Organizing's Advantages & Pitfalls for Organizations

In this section, both the advantages and pitfalls of self-organizing are covered. However, the outcomes of self-organizing on employee well-being will not be discussed at this point since these are covered more profoundly in chapter 2.3. The suitability of self-organizing for organizations is discussed at the end of the section.

Even though there are some examples of self-organizing throughout history, several reasons can be recognized as to why self-organizing is now becoming popular. Firstly, organizational environments have become more rapid and complex, and in order to be competitive,

organizations have to adapt faster. Organizations cannot afford to leave out all the potential in the employees' decision-making in terms of knowledge and competence. Self-organizing enables the individuals and the teams of the organization to act efficiently and develop the operations rapidly. (Martela & Jarenko, 2017, pp. 11—25.) Self-managed teams also reduce middle management costs and enable innovations to be produced at a faster pace (Barry, 1991, p. 31).

Secondly, employees today and especially in the future will be performing tasks that require expertise, creativity, independent decision-making, and interaction with other humans instead of routine tasks (Martela & Jarenko, 2017, pp. 11—25). Often employees possess more knowledge about their area of specialty than their managers. For reaching efficiency, hierarchical control between the manager and employee needs to be abolished. (Barry, 1991, p. 31.) Thirdly, technology enables organizational structures that were not possible before. Instead of having a manager acting as a middleman, coordinating the tasks, and transmitting information between different parties, technology can now manage the coordination and information flow. (Martela & Jarenko, 2017, pp. 11—25.)

There are several studies made on the effects of self-organizing on the individual, team, and organizational levels, of which most of the studies have found self-organizing to have positive effects on different factors regarding work and working life. One of the critical factors studied regarding self-organizing is productivity. Birdi (2008) studied 308 companies over 22 years and found that an organizational practice that predicts productivity the best is the employees' empowerment. Millikin (2010) also studied productivity in 97 self-managed teams and found that teams, which individual members practiced certain self-leadership strategies and had a high level of self-leadership competencies, achieved higher productivity than other teams. Self-leadership skills tend to lead to higher levels of trust, potency, and commitment first on the individual level, evolving then more collectively to the team level (Bligh et al., 2006, pp. 306—310). Through the development of self-leadership at the individual level, self-organizing and shared leadership on the team level lead to more efficient creation of team knowledge and supports organizations' succeeding in their competitive and dynamic organizational environments (Bligh et al., 2006, pp. 306—310; Houghton et al., 2003, p. 135).

Other discovered outcomes regarding self-organizing are, for example, creativity, job satisfaction, and commitment; According to Diliello's model (2006), employees who have high self-leadership possibilities experience having a higher potential in creativity and innovation than employees with poor self-leadership possibilities. Also, the level of organizational support affects how likely the individual practices creativity and innovation in the organization (ibid).

Employees in SMTs also tend to experience higher-level job satisfaction (Cohen, 2016; Gallie, Zhou, Felstead & Green, 2012, p. 42) and higher contentment with their social and growth needs (Cohen, 2016). Employees in SMTs often exceed the requirements of their work (Gallie et al., 2012, p. 41) and report higher perceived improvement in the team's performance as well as experience higher levels of group satisfaction overall (Cohen, 2016). Higher decision-making authority also enhances skill development and opportunities and motivation to learn on the job (Gallie et al., 2012, p. 40). In addition, employees in SMTs have more positive working attitudes and higher organizational commitment than employees in traditional working teams (Cordery, Mueller & Smith, 1991; Gallie et al., 2012, p. 40).

At Morning Star (presented in chapter 2.1.3), having no managers reduces the costs compared to heavy hierarchical structures. Employees and teams can also make better decisions faster when everyone is responsible for their work quality and thus need to develop their expertise constantly. Through the freedom to act, employees are more initiative and more willing to help their peers since they do not compete for statuses or promotions, and it gives them better reputational capital in the company. The employees are also more committed to their company and are less likely to leave from there. (Hamel, 2011.)

Besides studies with positive self-organizing outcomes, there are also studies and literature that have found and discussed the adverse effects of self-organizing on the individual, team, and organizational levels. Millikin (2010) has found that even though SMTs are more effective than traditional teams, the team members who operate too independently can hinder the team performance when there is incoherence in the team. Also, according to Salovaara (2017, p. 70), self-led individuals do not automatically form well-functioning organizations. Self-led individuals might have more conflicts if they are too focused on leading themselves in a certain direction instead of adapting to the organization's direction (ibid). Thus, organizations should reinforce collective team processes besides individual self-leadership (Millikin, 2010, p. 697).

Also, Stewart & Barrick (2000) have found self-organizing to have adverse effects in certain situations. When the working tasks are conceptual, such as planning and decision-making, self-leadership improves the team performance, but when the tasks are routine, self-leadership hinders the performance. Bernstein et al. (2016 pp. 44—47) have recognized three characteristics of self-managing organizations that can be both valuable and problematic. Firstly, the possibility of designing roles to support both individual employees' capabilities and the organization's mission is complex in SMOs. On the one hand, this allows individuals to practice roles that support their strengths and interests, but on the other hand, the individuals

working tasks may come somewhat fragmented, and it complicates the compensation model and the hiring of employees to specific roles both inside and outside the organization. (ibid.)

Secondly, decision-making closer to work instead of bureaucratic processes makes it more efficient, but it requires all employees to practice their power (Bernstein et al., 2016, pp. 44—47). Kykyri (2008, p. 153) points out that it cannot be considered self-evident that all employees even want to participate in the organization's decision-making or development. Instead of seeing participation and empowerment only as an opportunity for the employees, it can be considered a liability as well, which aims to reach the organization's goals (ibid). Self-organizing can also lead to unformal organization structures, where employees withhold information or give biased peer reviews to get better tasks or bonuses (Salovaara, 2017, p. 71). When considering employees' various roles, this type of decision-making is also likely to increase the number of meetings between them. Thirdly, self-managing organizations can adapt quickly to the environment's and market's needs, but there is a risk that the employees and the organization aim to be too responsive to the customers instead of preserving a broader perspective on the market's development (Bernstein et al., 2016, pp. 47—48). It is necessary for the employees and the organization to find the right balance between customers' needs, employees' own will, and the colleagues' desires (Salovaara, 2017, p. 70).

At Morning Star (presented in chapter 2.1.3), employees who had previously worked in more hierarchical organizations had often difficulties adjusting to this operating model, where everyone was responsible for the leadership and operations. (Hamel, 2011.) Furthermore, when someone would offend the policies or would not meet the performance levels required, employees lacked the courage to hold each other accountable, which was the responsibility of each employee instead of managers. Morning Star also struggled with organizational growth since even though the organization grew faster than average in the industry, it resisted the desire of expanding more in fear of having to forgo its existing management model. Lastly, when there were no hierarchical structures, it was difficult for individuals to follow career development like in a hierarchical organization. (Hamel, 2011.)

Although self-organizing has been proven effective in many organizations, there are also results where self-leadership has not been sufficient in particular teams (Cohen, 2016). According to Pearce and Manz (2005), few critical factors can indicate whether self-organizing should be applied to an organization. Firstly, the amount of energy and time available for the shift to self-organizing defines when the organization should implement the change. However, even when

an organization is in an urgent situation, investing in self-organizing may be worthwhile as it can lead to better performance in the future. (Pearce & Manz, 2005, p. 135.)

Secondly, needed levels of employee commitment and creativity can also indicate whether self-organizing should be applied to the organization. Higher employee involvement and increased level of creativity in organizations can be achieved through self-organizing, and thus, when requiring more committed and innovative employees, applying self-organizing may be beneficial. Thirdly, the more complex tasks are performed in an organization, the more critical it is to have self-led experts that share the leadership for reaching high performance. In addition, the balance between self-and shared leadership should be considered according to the interdependence in the organization; if the tasks require extensive cooperation between employees, the importance of shared leadership functions is significant, when again the importance of self-leadership might be higher when the tasks require effective performance only from the individuals. (Pearce & Manz, 2005, pp. 136—137.)

Bernstein et al. (2016, p. 49) argue that most organizations, especially larger ones, should not aim to implement self-organizing throughout the organization, but only in part. Only when the required level of organizational adaptability is high, and the organization is ready to make adjustments fast, even though there might be some risks, should the organization adopt self-management practices fully. Organizations need to consider how much hierarchy is needed to ensure consistency in their operations and other ways to reach it than hierarchical processes. (ibid.) Organizations also need to make sure that their processes and technology, among other things, are re-designed in terms of self-organizing for teams and employees to be effective (Cohen, 2016). Overall, organizations should consider how self-organizing can give them the best advantage and where hierarchy is needed to achieve its goals (Bernstein et al., 2016, p. 49).

2.2. Employee Well-Being

Well-being has had various definitions over the course of time. It is often connected to health at work and the capability to work (Manka & Manka, 2016, p. 75), but can also be used to describe different non-work factors regarding well-being, such as satisfaction with social or family life, as well as general health (Danna & Griffin, 1999, p. 359). Cambridge dictionary defines well-being as “The state of feeling healthy and happy” (Cambridge dictionary, 2020). In international literature, there are many parallel definitions of well-being in the working context, such as employee well-being, well-being or welfare at work, occupational well-being

and job satisfaction. In this thesis, the term used to describe well-being in the working context is employee well-being. According to the Finnish Institute of Occupational Health (FIOH), employee well-being means “safe, healthy and productive work, which is done by professional employees and working communities in well-led organizations. The employees and working communities experience their work to be meaningful, rewarding and consider work to support their control of life” (TTL, 2020).

Employee well-being has been studied for more than a decade, but the emphasized perspectives have varied through time (Manka & Manka, 2016, p. 64). In Finland, the development of employee well-being has started from ensuring workplace safety. The purpose of developing work safety is to ensure the employee’s ability to work and that the organization can function correctly. Ensuring work safety and the working environment is mainly seen as the employer’s responsibility. However, employees also have an essential role in developing work safety through their own actions. When work shifted from industry and agriculture more into knowledge work, the workload shifted from physical to psychical work, which led to the development of mental work safety in the 1980s. In the 1990s, the labor safety law broadened to concern maintaining working capability and in the 2000s to the mental work safety. Overall, throughout the history of work safety in Finland, work safety has developed from reducing safety hazards to enhancing comprehensive employee well-being. (Suutarinen, 2010, p. 16.)

2.2.1. Factors Influencing Employee Well-Being

As described in chapter 1.1, employee well-being has significant influences on the individual employee, leading to effects on the work communities, organizations, and even the society. Thus, in the recent decades, literature and theory have focused on examining which specific factors influence employee well-being in the occupational setting. In this section, the factors influencing employee well-being are considered.

Research has identified employee well-being to form from several factors, which for instance, Manka (2012) and Nielsen et al. (2017) have presented through comprehensive frameworks. Manka’s (2012) comprehensive framework of employee well-being consists of five factors influencing employee well-being: the organization, leadership, work community, work, and individual, who interprets these other factors based on their personal characteristics. Nielsen et al.’s (2017) IGLO framework of employee well-being again consists of resources that foster employee well-being on four levels: (I) individual, (G) group, (L) leadership, and (O)

organization level. However, as the extensive body of literature has also recognized demands on these different levels besides the resources (see e.g., Bakker & Demerouti, 2007), the IGLO framework is utilized to discuss both resources and demands as factors influencing employee well-being in this thesis.

In this section, the factors influencing employee well-being are examined more closely, considering both Manka's (2012) and Nielsen et al.'s (2017) views on them. However, this thesis adopts more precisely the structure of Manka's (2012) framework, as work itself is recognized as a significant factor influencing employee well-being and thus will have a more central role than in the framework by Nielsen et al. (2017). Adapting Manka's framework (2012, p. 76), the comprehensive employee well-being perspective in this thesis is illustrated in figure 2, consisting of the organization, leadership, work community, and work factors, interpreted by the individual employee.



Figure 2. Comprehensive employee well-being perspective (adapting Manka, 2012, p.76)

Organization

Firstly, the organization-level factors are related to different practices of organizations influencing employee well-being. According to Manka (2012, pp. 75–87), a well-being organization consists of several elements. Firstly, the organization is directed by its vision, strategy, and goals, which should be formed with the employees. The employer has the responsibility to ensure the necessary well-being procedures, such as occupational healthcare,

and strategically plan well-being, but also the employees have the responsibility of maintaining well-being at work. Secondly, a well-being organization has a flexible structure, meaning that employees have the necessary information and authority to make decisions regarding their work. However, there need to be defined and shared rules for employees to know how to operate. Thirdly, developing competence and knowledge is vital in fast-paced organizational environments and should be aligned with the organization's vision and goals. Lastly, besides ensuring that the physical working environment follows the laws and regulations, the organization should also investigate other functionalities affecting the employee well-being in the organizational environment and improve them. (ibid.)

The most examined resources on the organization level are autonomy, which is highly relevant in this study and covered in chapter 2.3, and the human resources (HR) in the organization (Nielsen et al., 2017). A large body of literature supports the notion that human resources management (HRM) is positively associated with various aspects of employee well-being in organizations, such as employee happiness and relationships at work. However, some studies indicate that HRM can be both positively and negatively associated with the aspects of employee well-being, especially employee health. (Van De Voorde, Paauwe & Van Veldhoven, 2012.) Often, employees interpret HRM practices to provide them support and indication that the organization is committed to employees, which reciprocally increases the employees' organizational commitment (Whitener, 2001). Employee well-being can be enhanced through HRM actions, such as performance management, training, information sharing, role clarification, and suitable arrangements for balancing work and other life (Velda & Alfesb, 2017).

Leadership

Factors influencing employee well-being in terms of leadership usually refer to the social relationships between the leader and employee as well as leadership characteristics in the literature (Manka, 2012, p. 96; Nielsen et al., 2017). Leadership in organizations can influence overall employee well-being and the probability of sick leave and disability pension (Kuoppala, Lamminpää, Liira & Vainio, 2008). Manager behavior is associated primarily with employees' psychological well-being (Gilbreath & Benson, 2004). One of the most studied leadership resources is the transformational leadership style (Manka, 2012, p. 111; Nielsen et al., 2017). Transformational leadership can be characterized through seven key behaviors of the leader: communicating of vision, developing employees, providing support, empowering employees,

being innovative, leading by example, and being charismatic (Carless, Wearing & Mann, 2000, p. 390—392). Transformational leadership has been associated with several positive mental health outcomes and thus may be practiced to improve employee well-being in organizations (Arnold, Turner, Barling, Kelloway & McKee, 2007).

However, as will be later described in the thesis, the case organizations' leadership does not consist of these relationships between a formal manager and an employee, as there are no named managers in the case organizations. Yet, it is a common misunderstanding that there is no leadership in SMOs with no managers when it can arguably be stated that there is even more leadership that is just widely distributed throughout the organization. (Laloux, 2016, p. 135.) As described in chapter 2.1.2, the leadership in SMOs is shared between employees, and the leadership roles and responsibilities vary as the tasks and teams change (Bernstein et al., 2016, p. 44). Thus, the influence of leadership on employee well-being is likely to have a different meaning in SMOs, as in more traditional organizations.

Work Community

Factors influencing employee well-being in the work community are related to the relationships that enhance the interaction, information exchange, and forming of social capital in the work community (Manka, 2012, p. 116; Nielsen et al., 2017). Colleagues' social support is the most examined resource at the group level. (Nielsen et al., 2017.) Colleagues can provide each other information and help, thus reducing, for example, conflict and overload of job tasks. Colleague social support is related to job satisfaction and organizational engagement and may influence the employees' turnover intentions and absenteeism. (Chiaburu & Harrison, 2008.) The overall team climate and organizational culture have been positively and directly associated with job resources, organizational engagement, and overall employee well-being (Albrecht, 2012).

An essential part of a well-being working community is the social capital that the community and its individuals possess and constantly create through interaction (Manka, 2012, pp. 116–118; Clausen, Meng & Borg, 2019). Social capital is a complex concept with multiple dimensions and can be defined as "a collective asset in the form of shared norms, values, beliefs, trust, networks, social relations, and institutions that facilitate cooperation and collective action for mutual benefits" (Bhandari & Yasunobu, 2009, p. 480). High social capital can predict job performance and psychological well-being in organizations (Clausen et al., 2019), when again, low levels of experienced social capital can predict depression in organizations (Kouvonen et al., 2008).

Work

Work itself is recognized as a factor influencing employee well-being (Manka, 2012). One of the most known theories aiming to understand work's effects on employee well-being is Karasek's Demand-Control model (DCM) (1979). According to the DCM, mental strains of work are formed in the interaction between the demands of the job and the level of decision latitude, which refers to the level of control that the employee has about his work. High demands in the job and low decision latitude cause mental strains, leading to several adverse outcomes in employee well-being. However, even if the demands are high, but the decision latitude is high, a so-called active job, job satisfaction seems to remain high and symptoms of mental strain low. It leads to a significant notion of the possibility to enhance the mental well-being of the employee as well as maintaining high productivity of the job at the same time. (ibid.)

Karasek's model (1979) has also acted as an inspiration for several other significant models on work's influence on employee well-being, such as the Job Demand-Resources (JD-R) model by Demerouti, Bakker, Nachreiner, and Scaufeli (2001). In the model, the characteristics of work are divided into demands and resources. The job demands involve aspects of work that require physiological or psychological effort or skills, leading to costs on the employees' well-being. Job resources again involve aspects of work that either enhance the achieving of work goals, reduce the physiological or psychological costs of the job demands or foster the development and learning of an employee. Thus, as the DCM by Karasek assumes that the control of work protects the employee against the high job demands, the JD-R model assumes that there are several types of job demands and resources interacting and thus influencing the job strain and thus employee well-being. (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007, p. 312–314.)

Job demands have been associated, for instance, with adverse effects on work engagement and affects towards work, when again job resources have buffered employees against these negative impacts (Tadic, Bakker & Oerlemans, 2015). Job resources such as role alignment, coaching, and career development have been positively associated with employee well-being (Albrecht, 2012). Also, job crafting is another broadly studied resource in the literature at the individual level (Nielsen et al., 2017). Employees who have the possibility to craft their jobs more suitable to them gain more resources to manage their work. Increased job resources again lead to higher levels of job satisfaction and engagement and lower levels of burnout. (Tims, Bakker & Derks, 2013.)

Individual

The final factor affecting employee well-being in organizations is the individual employee and their personal characteristics and attitudes towards work. The individual employee interprets the other influencing factors based on their personal characteristics and attitudes, and thus the employee well-being inside the work community may vary significantly between employees. (Manka, 2012, p. 76.) For instance, an employee's personality and coping abilities have been found to moderate the outcomes of employee stress and thus influence an individual's employee well-being in a meaningful manner (Parkes, 1994). One of the most explored resources on the individual level in the literature is psychological capital. (Manka, 2012, p. 76, 149; Nielsen et al., 2017.) Psychological capital refers to an individual's positive psychological state, which can be described through four characteristics that are self-efficacy, optimism, hope, and resiliency (Luthans, Youssef & Avolio, 2007, p. 3). Studies have shown that the state of psychological capital can influence employee well-being in the long term (Avey, Luthans, Smith & Palmer, 2010).

Another example of studied individual characteristics is age and how it affects the employee well-being. Truxillo, Cadiz, Rineer, Zaniboni, and Fraccaroli (2012) have proposed work characteristics, such as autonomy, task significance, skill variety, specialization, social support, and interdependence, to be more positively associated with the satisfaction, engagement, and performance of older employees. Again, work characteristics, such as task variety, receiving and providing feedback, and interaction outside the organization relate more positively to younger employees' satisfaction, engagement, and performance (ibid).

Employee well-being is both the individual's and the working community's experience, and the more individuals experience well-being, the more well-being an organization is. As described, several factors affect the well-being at work, and besides that, conditions at home affect the overall well-being. (Manka, 2012, p. 77.) According to the study conducted by Nielsen et al. (2017), all IGLO level factors affect employee well-being and organizational performance, and thus, efforts to improve them can be targeted to any level or multidimensionally to all of them. A combination of interventions focused on the different level resources might be the most effective way to foster well-being and performance in organizations (ibid).

2.2.2. Expressions of Employee Well-Being

Employees can express their well-being through both positive and negative expressions of employee well-being. Job satisfaction, work engagement, and flow are recognized forms of positive expressions on well-being at work. Work boredom, stress, and exhaustion or burnout again are recognized negative expressions of well-being at work. Each of these forms of expressions, illustrated in figure 3, is now described briefly to understand how employee well-being occurs in practice.

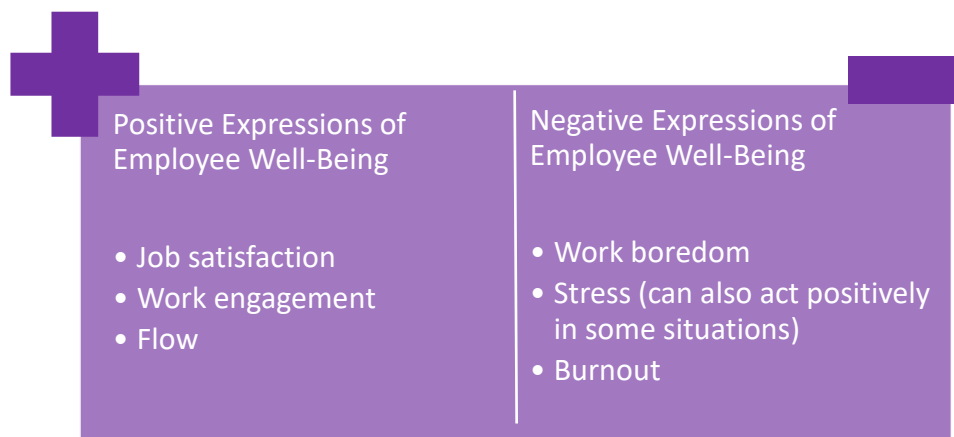


Figure 3. Expressions of employee well-being

Job Satisfaction

Job satisfaction can be described as "a summary index of how satisfied an individual is with their work" (Cotton & Hart, 2003, pp. 119–120). Job satisfaction consists of feelings of satisfaction and dissatisfaction that the employee experiences regarding diverse dimensions of work. This view assumes that the employee can experience job satisfaction by balancing satisfaction and dissatisfaction between each other. Two factors can be seen to contribute to the experience of job satisfaction: job characteristics and work values. Job characteristics refer to the amount of satisfaction that is possible to achieve from certain work dimensions when again work values refer to the employee's meanings in these job characteristics. (Kalleberg, 1977, pp. 126–127.) Job satisfaction has been positively associated with organizations' financial performance regarding return on assets and returns on equity (Kessler, Lucianetti, Pindek, Zhu & Spector, 2020). A strong relationship between employee's mental and physical health and job satisfaction has also been identified. Both job satisfaction and dissatisfaction have a

powerful influence on employee's mental health, such as on the likelihood of low self-esteem, anxiety, depression, and burnout. (Faragher, Cass & Cooper, 2005.)

Work Engagement

According to Bakker, Schaufeli, Leiter & Taris (2008), work engagement is "a positive, fulfilling, affective-motivational state of work-related well-being" (pp. 187–188). Work engagement is characterized by the employee's dedication, high-level energy, and strong identification with their work (Bakker et al., 2008). Work engagement can be facilitated by increasing job resources, such as autonomy, feedback, and social support. Work engagement further predicts an increase in job resources, thus forming a positive spiral between work engagement and increased resources. (Schaufeli, Bakker & Van Rhenen, 2009.) Work engagement has been studied to have several positive outcomes to employee well-being as well as to organizational productivity; Work engagement negatively predicts the frequency and duration of sick leaves (Schaufeli et al., 2009) and can prevent employees from job burnout (Bakker et al., 2008, p. 188). Besides, work engagement can predict employee's job performance and client satisfaction (Bakker et al., 2008) and can be linked to increased financial returns for organizations (Xanthopoulou, Demerouti & Schaufeli, 2009).

Flow

Flow is the third positive expression of employee well-being. According to Csikszentmihalyi (2014), who can be seen as the creator of flow theory and research, flow at work has been described as "an enjoyable merging of action and awareness in that actions follow each other spontaneously and unselfconsciously, yet there remains an intense and careful monitoring of feedback concerning one's goals" (p. 27). The experience of flow is momentary and is characterized by feelings of absorption, intrinsic motivation, and pleasure. Flow is facilitated through personal resources, such as the feeling of self-efficacy, and organizational resources, such as social support. Again, flow further enhances the personal and organizational resources. (Salanova, Bakker & Llorens, 2006.) Workspaces that support the employee's work patterns are more likely to generate flow, and flow is positively associated with employees' performance in organizations (Soriano, Kozusznik, Peiró & Demerouti, 2020).

Work Boredom

Work Boredom is a negative expression of employee well-being; According to Loukidou, Loan-Clarke, and Daniels (2009), boredom at work can be described as “a primarily low activation effect that is also unpleasant” (p. 396). Boredom at work can occur in monotonous jobs and lack of challenge, and besides, in organizational circumstances with a high degree of control and bureaucracy (Harju, Hakanen & Scahufeli, 2014, p. 911; Loukidou et al., 2014). Thus, the job characteristics and organizational environment can hinder and foster boredom at work (Harju et al., 2014, p. 911). Job boredom is connected to many adverse outcomes both on an individual and organizational level (Harju et al., 2014; Loukidou et al., 2014). Harju et al. (2014) found that boredom at work can lead to stress, low levels of self-rated health, decreased workability, employee turnover, and intentions of early retirement. The ability to cope with job boredom varies between employees (Loukidou et al., 2014; Whiteoak, 2014) in terms of personal dispositions, such as diligence and openness, as well as self-beliefs, such as beliefs related to managing challenges. The ability to recognize and join group dynamics that support or discourage individual engagement also affects coping with boredom at work. (Whiteoak, 2014.)

Stress

Another commonly recognized negative expression of employee well-being is stress. Stress can be described as the process where different stressors cause changes, also called strains, in a person’s well-being. Stressors refer to certain situations, experiences, or external forces and demands that produce strains in the individual’s physical or mental well-being, both short- and long-term. (Ganster & Rosen, 2013, p. 1088; Le Fevre, Matheny & Kolt 2003, p. 728.) Previously described Karasek’s Demand-Control model (DCM) and variations made of the model have also been widely used to study occupational stress. In the DCM’s hypothesis, the mental strains of work are generated through interaction between the job demands and the level of decision latitude. High demands in the job are, and low decision latitude causes mental strains, leading to several adverse outcomes in employee well-being. (Karasek, 1979.) Stress can, in some situations, also be beneficial. Short-term stress can improve mental and physical performance and also enhance immunity. (Dhabhar, 2018.) However, stress has also been associated with multiple adverse outcomes, such as increased turnover intention and burnout (Park, Kim, Hai & Dong, 2020).

Burnout

When an employee experiences chronic mental stressor on the job continually, it may lead to burnout. Burnout is defined through three key elements, that are exhaustion, cynicism, and inefficacy. Exhaustion is the most common element of burnout, which describes the feeling of being drained out of mental and physical resources. Cynicism again represents a negative and detached attitude towards work. Inefficacy refers to the feeling of being incompetent for the job and not achieving its requirements. (Maslach et al., 2001.) Schaufeli et al. (2009) have discovered that increases in job demands, such as workload, and decreased job resources, such as autonomy and support, anticipate burnout. Feelings of burnout again predict higher frequency and duration of sick leaves (Schaufeli et al., 2009) as well as job dissatisfaction, lower productivity, absenteeism, and turnover, among other adverse outcomes. Employees experiencing feelings of burnout may also negatively affect their working community through conflicts and underperforming job tasks. (Maslach et al., 2001, p. 406.)

Both positive and negative expressions of employee well-being have now been presented. It is important to notify that employee well-being varies through time and career. Variation in employee well-being occurs primarily in the early career and the context of a job change. However, maintaining employee well-being through all career phases of the individuals is essential. (Mäkikangas, Kinnunen, Feldt & Schaufeli, 2016, p. 65.)

2.2.3. Summary of Employee Well-Being

In this thesis, the comprehensive employee well-being perspective consists of several factors influencing employee well-being and can be expressed by both positive and negative forms of employee well-being. Adapting the structure of Manka's framework (2012, p. 76), the comprehensive employee well-being perspective in this thesis consists of the organization, leadership, work community, and work factors interpreted by the individual employee. Employees can express their well-being through both positive expressions, such as satisfaction, work engagement, as well as through negative expressions, such as work boredom, stress, and burnout. Figure 4 summarizes the employee well-being perspective in this thesis.



Figure 4. Summary of employee well-being in the thesis

As described in this chapter, employee well-being has been extensively studied within the last decades, and many significant results of well-being's importance to an individual employee and, more broadly, to the work community and organization have been discovered. However, in many organizations, well-being is still often understood only as supporting the physical working environment and offering leisure activities outside the work (Manka, Heikkilä-Tammi & Vauhkonen, 2012, p. 12). Thus, more awareness and empirical research are needed of the comprehensive perspective of employee well-being. In addition, emerging trends in organizational and leadership practices also challenge the traditional perceptions of employee well-being, and there is a lack of empirical studies on these phenomena's impact on employee well-being on a more comprehensive level. This study aims to contribute to this lack of research by examining employee well-being in self-managing organizations.

2.3. Self-Organizing and Employee Well-Being

The connection between self-organizing and employee well-being is studied rather limitedly. However, there are still several studies that have examined the connections between these phenomena. This chapter will consider the literature and studies on how self-organizing is related to employee well-being.

Many positive outcomes have been identified between self-organizing and employee well-being. Firstly, when examining individual-level self-leadership, employee autonomy has been associated with higher employee well-being. As previously stated in chapter 2.1.1, the satisfaction of the three psychological needs in the self-determination theory (autonomy, competence, and relatedness) promotes autonomous motivation. Autonomous motivation again is associated with higher employee well-being and satisfaction and decreased experiences of exhaustion and burnout. (Ryan & Deci, 2017, pp. 3—25, 532—558.) Autonomy has also been found to generate work engagement besides general well-being (Deci et al., 2001; Schaufeli, Bakker & Van Rhenen, 2009), and what is especially noteworthy is that Deci et al. (2001) found these results to be consistent across two different cultures, with different economic and optical systems and values. Thus, their study indicates that the basic psychological needs' satisfaction fosters motivation and psychological well-being across cultures universally (ibid).

Secondly, positive outcomes of self-organizing on employee well-being have also been recognized at the team level. According to a study conducted by Cohen (2016), employees in SMTs experienced lower levels of tiredness and higher job satisfaction levels, and thus higher subjective well-being. However, there are also some controversial results on self-organizing and employee well-being in SMTs, such as absenteeism. Even though many studies seem to report reduced absenteeism in SMTs, there are also studies that have reported neutral or even negative effects on absenteeism in SMTs, thus making the association between self-organizing and absenteeism controversial (see Cordery et al., 1991; Stewart et al., 2010).

Thirdly, when examining self-organizing at the organization level, self-organizing practices in organizations seem to lead to higher employee well-being. According to the Sixth European Working Conditions Survey (Eurofound, 2017, p. 141), employees working in organizations with high employee involvement in the decisions affecting their work and representation in the organization, experienced higher motivation levels and thus higher employee well-being. According to the Finnish working life barometer of 2018, employees who had more responsibilities and possibilities to influence inside the organization were less affected by tight schedules and working pressure than those with fewer responsibilities. Even though they had a higher amount of responsibility, they still had lower levels of work-related stress. Organizations, where employees had a strong position and the responsibilities were shared, often performed well financially and had higher employee well-being levels. It also led to higher levels of quality in their working life. (Lyly-Yrjänäinen, 2019, pp. 41—43.)

These results seem to confirm both Karasek's (1979) DCM and the JD-R model by Demerouti et al. (2001) presented in chapter 2.2.1, assuming that work control is a resource protecting the employee against the high job demands. Furthermore, they are in line with several other studies and authors (see, e.g., Gallie et al., 2012, p. 42; Sullivan & Bhagat, 1992, p. 365), according to which high job demands and work intensity are associated with lowering employee well-being only when the employees lack autonomy and decision-making authority (Boxall & Macky, 2014). Furthermore, employees who have the possibility to craft their jobs more suitable for them gain more resources to manage their work, leading to higher job satisfaction and engagement levels and lower levels of burnout (Tims, Bakker & Derks, 2013). However, as Truxillo et al. (2012) proposed, autonomy is more likely to be associated with satisfaction, engagement, and higher performance for older than younger employees.

Contrary to the many studies indicating a positive relationship between self-organizing and well-being, some studies and literature also indicate adverse outcomes. According to Sutela and Lehto (2014, p. 59), higher officials, who often have better possibilities to affect their work and organization, experience significant well-being problems. Thus, possibilities to influence work do not necessarily mean higher well-being (*ibid*). According to the Finnish working life barometer of 2018, employees in organizations with high influencing possibilities and responsibility experienced more interruptions during their workdays. Higher levels of interaction may also lead to an increasing number of conflicts at work. Moving towards organization models and leadership, where employees share the power, is not as simple as can be imagined. It raises questions and conflicts about the organization's power and authority and changes the old ways of working dramatically. (Lyly-Yrjänäinen, 2019, pp. 40—43.)

Some studies have examined whether there can be too much control for the individuals in organizations. According to these studies, a moderate level of control at work leads to satisfactory outcomes in an individual's well-being, but both low and high control levels tend to decrease it, thus creating a curved relationship between control and well-being. Too high a level of control may, for example, decrease the level of devotion, absorption, and dedication at work (Kubicek, Korunka & Tement, 2014) as well as lead to increased sick leaves (Gerich, 2019) and somatic problems, thus stating that some of the employees might not possess the necessary resources in order to benefit from the possibilities that come with the control (Rasku & Kinnunen, 2003). However, in most cases, employees experience too little autonomy and only in rare cases do they experience given too much autonomy (Stiglbauer & Kovacs, 2018).

According to Roberts and Foti (1998), an individual's self-leadership capabilities affect their suitability to specific work environments, and job satisfaction is dependent on how well one's self-leadership capabilities fit the work environment. Individuals with high self-leadership capabilities fit better into a work environment, where they have greater freedom and autonomy—being allowed to utilize the self-leadership capabilities led to satisfaction among these individuals. Individuals with high self-leadership capabilities do not fit well to highly structured work environments and are less satisfied in their work. On the contrary, individuals with lower self-leadership capabilities feel satisfaction in a more structured work environment. These individuals feel comfortable when they have clear responsibilities and roles and when someone else has higher responsibilities to whom they report their progress. (ibid.)

A relevant issue to mention is the different actors' role on employee well-being in SMOs. In traditional organizations, the leadership and supervisors' behavior significantly influence employee well-being (Gilbreath & Benson, 2004; Kuoppala et al., 2008). Also, the HRM's effect on employee well-being has been proved to be notable (Van De Voorde et al., 2012.) It raises a question on how the roles of employee well-being are divided in SMOs. As mentioned before, in SMOs, the HRM activities are more divided between the individuals and teams themselves and the HR department, which acts more as a facilitator for the teams (Renkema et al., 2020). Unfortunately, no relevant literature or studies on the different actors' roles on employee well-being in SMO's can be found. However, based on the previous notions in this paragraph, a possible conclusion could be made that in SMOs, the responsibility of employee well-being is divided between the individuals, teams, and HR department.

2.4. Synthesis of the Theoretical Framework

To better understand how the characteristics of self-managing organizations influence the experienced employee well-being, a literature review was formed describing both self-organizing and employee well-being and how these phenomena have been associated in previous theory and literature.

Figure 5 illustrates the formed theoretical framework for this thesis. On the top are the five factors influencing employee well-being in organizations, adopting the comprehensive employee perspective adopted in this thesis. The common structures, processes, practices, and cultural characteristics of SMOs are then categorized under the influencing factors. It can be

seen that the organization is the broadest aspect of the five factors. On the bottom are both the positive and negative expressions of the experienced employee well-being.

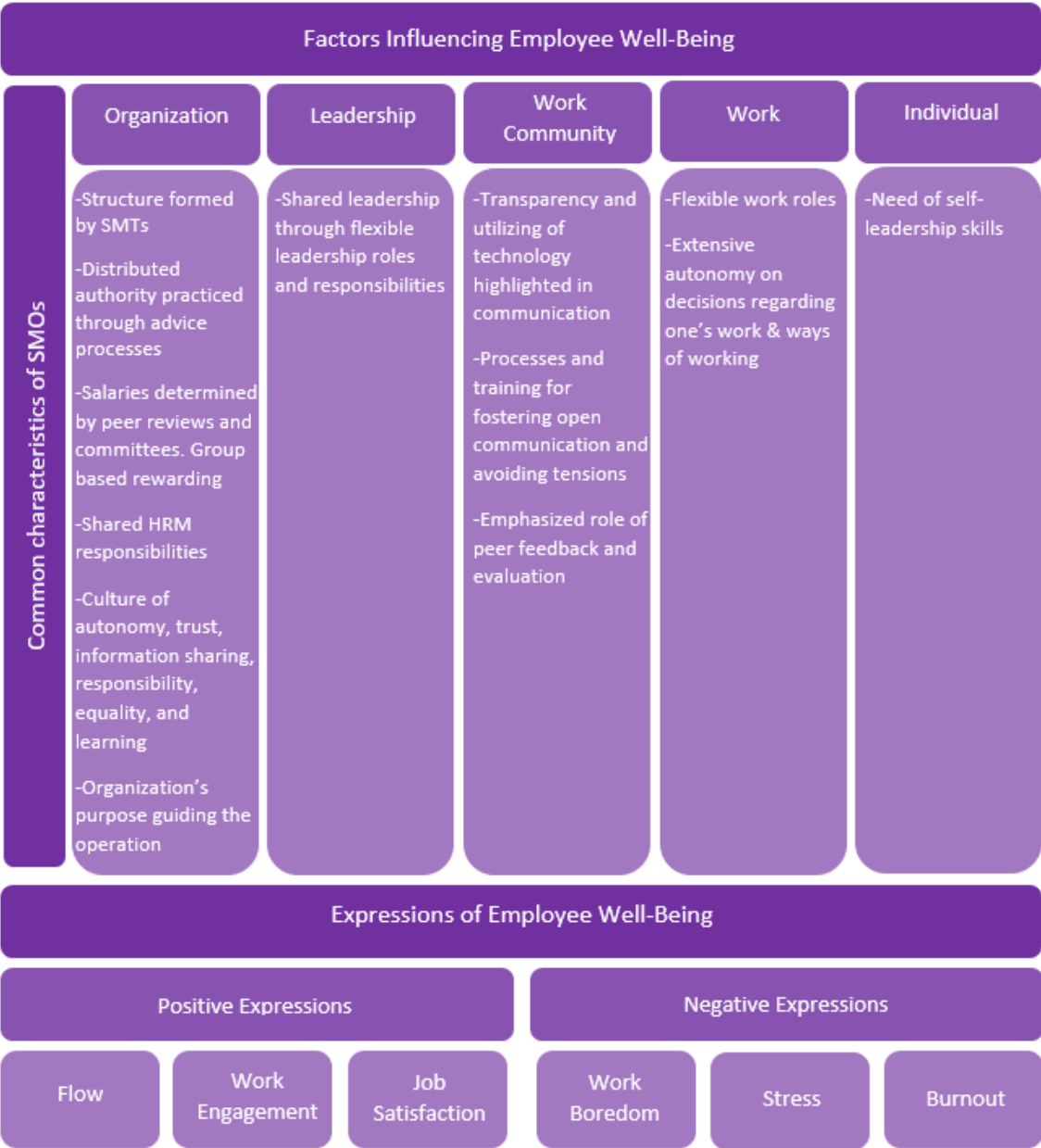


Figure 5. Theoretical framework

As described in chapter 2.3, self-organizing and its connection to employee well-being have been studied, but only from distinct aspects, and in conclusion, it seems that the literature on self-organizing and its relationship with employee well-being is somewhat conflicting. Several studies have indicated the multiple benefits of self-organizing to well-being, but some studies have contrary results. Nevertheless, with certain limitations, it seems that self-organizing can provide many possibilities for enhancing employee well-being in organizations. Still, there is a lack of understanding on how self-organizing influences the experienced employee well-being from a more comprehensive perspective, which this thesis aims to enlighten for its part.

3. METHODOLOGY

Conducting a research process requires making several decisions regarding the research philosophy, research aims, and reaching of the aims. The research philosophical choices taken in this thesis are concluded in figure 6, and more profoundly explained throughout this chapter.

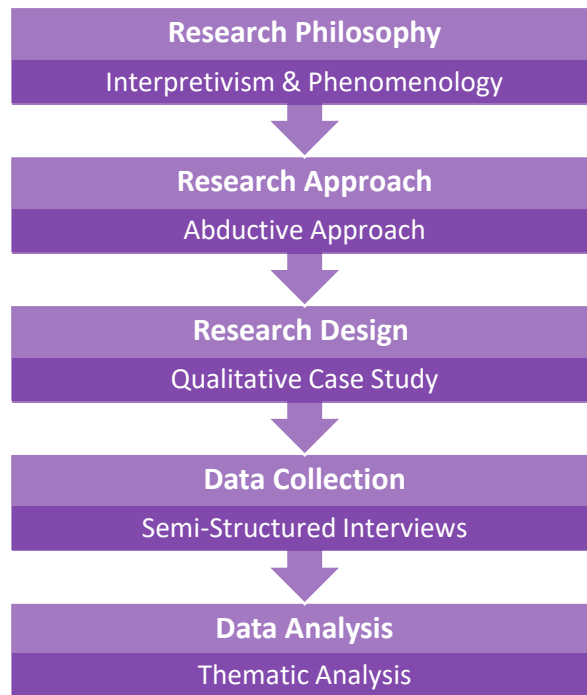


Figure 6. Summary of methodological choices in the thesis

In this chapter, the choices made during this thesis process are reviewed following:

1. The research philosophy, research approach and research design are explained.
2. The methods of collecting the data for the empirical study are described.
3. The methods used for analyzing the data are presented.
4. The case organizations are introduced.

3.1. Research Philosophical Choices

This thesis aims to examine how the characteristics of self-managing organizations, such as structures, processes, practices, and culture (presented in chapter 2.1.2), influence the experienced employee well-being in them by adopting a more comprehensive perspective on how employee well-being is formed in organizations (presented in chapter 2.2.1).

As stated in chapter 1.2, the research question of this thesis is following:

How do the characteristics of a self-managing organization influence the experienced employee well-being?

Research philosophy, which refers to “a system of beliefs and assumptions about the development of knowledge” (Saunders, Thornhill & Lewis, 2019, p. 130), guides the research and choices made during the process. As this thesis aims to create an enhanced understanding of the experienced employee well-being in SMOs, the focus is on studying the individual employees’ interpretations and meanings. Thus, interpretivism was adopted as the research philosophy to guide the thesis process. Interpretivism differs humans from the physical world since humans create meanings to different phenomena. Research conducted in the field of interpretivism concentrates on studying these created meanings and creating more profound understandings of the complexity of the world. Interpretivism is distinctly subjectivist, and it is essential to understand that the researcher’s own assumptions and values influence the research process. (Saunders et al., 2019, pp. 148—149.)

Practical research in the field of interpretivism has several streams that vary from each other (Saunders et al., 2019, p. 149). One of these strands is phenomenology, which acted as the more precise research philosophy of this thesis. Phenomenological research examines phenomena as the experience of people. Phenomenological research aims to understand the studied phenomenon as it occurs to the person experiencing it. Thus, the reliability of phenomenological research does not come from objectivity but from interpreting a phenomenon and describing it to the audience. In business research, phenomenology can be utilized to study employee experiences, leadership, and well-being at work. (Huhtinen & Tuominen, 2020.) Thus, phenomenology is a relevant research philosophy to guide the choices and research process of this thesis.

Typically, research approaches have been divided into either inductive or deductive approaches. However, it can also be considered that both the approaches lie on a spectrum, and the adopted research methods have features from them both. An intermediate form of these approaches is the abductive approach. (Young, Varpio, Uijtdehaage & Paradis, 2020.) The abductive approach was adopted in the thesis since the aim was to enlighten a relatively little studied research phenomenon yet still examine it in the light of existing literature. The abductive approach was justified as the research consisted of a dialogue between the theory and empirical data. Both existing theory and the empirical data guided the forming of the theoretical framework, yet the data was not coerced into it, and aspects outside of the theoretical framework, found relevant to the research question, were also considered.

The research design in this thesis consisted of a qualitative case study. As the thesis's purpose was to enlighten a relatively little studied research phenomenon from the perspective of individual employees, qualitative methods were seen to fit the research design. Qualitative research aims to understand the studied phenomenon from the perspective of the studied person. Qualitative research examines people's experiences, feelings, thoughts, and meanings given to phenomena. (Juuti & Puusa, 2020; Saunders et al., 2019, p.179.) Since this thesis focused on understanding the experiences and meanings given to employee well-being in self-managing organizations, qualitative research methods were considered appropriate.

Case studies are relatively common in business research as they enable examining complex and diverse business phenomena vividly and practically, avoiding oversimplifying the research phenomenon. Case studies can be conducted in several ways, depending on the philosophical background, the purpose of the study, and the research design, among other issues. A classic case study focuses on understanding and interpreting the case and elaborating the perspectives of the case participants as well as meanings created by them. (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2008, pp. 116—119.) The case study in this thesis examined two organizations participating in the TEOT -research project described more in detail in chapter 3.4.

3.2. Data Collection

In a case study, the empirical data can be generated from one source or a combination of them (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2008, p. 125). This thesis was conducted as part of the TEOT -research project, which is introduced more in detail in chapter 3.4. In the TEOT -research project, both qualitative and quantitative data was collected through interviews and a survey. The interviews focused on the participants' experiences on their work, organizational practices, and employee well-being. The survey again focused on measuring the employee well-being through validated employee well-being indicators, and in addition, tested the occurring of self-organizing in the participating organizations through a recently developed self-organizing indicator. As this thesis aimed to examine the employees' experiences and perspectives, the qualitative interviews were considered to fit the purpose of the thesis best. In order to focus on describing and interpreting the interview data in a rich manner, the quantitative survey was narrowed out of the scope of this thesis, and only the data from the interviews was utilized.

Types of research interviews can be divided, for example, by the number of participants and the level of structure in the interviews (Saunders et al., 2019, p. 436). The conducted interviews

were individual interviews, and they were semi-structured, meaning that they included a predetermined list of themes that guided the interview. The data collection was informed by previous research on SMO's and theoretical understanding of how employee well-being is constituted, which influenced the forming of the themes in the interviews. However, the interviews were designed to encourage participants to freely describe their experiences and bring new aspects to the discussion as well. Thus, the data collection was considered to be abductive from its nature. The course of semi-structured interviews depends on the philosophical assumption adopted in the research and the research approach. (Saunders et al., 2019, pp. 437—438.) Accordingly to the interpretive assumption and abductive approach, the interviews followed the themes, yet the course of the interviews varied depending on the shared information during each participant's conversations.

The semi-structured interviews included themes on how the participants experienced their current work, which kind of resources and demands they experienced in their work, how they experienced the various organizational practices and how they experienced their well-being to be supported in the case organizations. Each theme contained several sub-questions to gain versatile insights into the theme. The questions were mainly predetermined (see appendix A) but also generated depending on the course of discussion. The leading guiding theory regarding employee well-being was the Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) model, presented in chapter 2.2.1. The broad addressing of the research phenomenon, varying from individual factors to organizational factors, offered an excellent opportunity to examine the data in the light of the theoretical framework and the comprehensive employee well-being perspective.

Information on the research project was sent to every employee in the participating organizations, and voluntary participants were chosen for the interviews. Participants were all of legal age and knew the purpose of the study and the use and processing of the information they provided. Informed consent was acquired from all the participants (see appendix B). The organizations and individuals participating in the research will also be informed of the results.

Altogether thirteen interviews from two organizations participating in the TEOT -research project were examined in this thesis. Both organizations operated in the software industry, as will be later described in chapter 3.4. The participants worked in expert roles, and in addition, a few participants had a leadership role required by law, such as the CEO. However, as the leadership roles possessed relatively little authority over the other employees and had no significant leadership statuses in the organizations, as will be described in chapter four, no separation was done between those roles and the other employees. Both organizations and their

employees were addressed anonymously during the research project to gain more genuine insights into the participants’ actual thoughts and views of this delicate research topic.

All the interviews were conducted online via Teams due to the global pandemic in 2020. At the beginning of the interview, the participants were again explained about the research project and its purpose. The participants were also informed that they might not answer any of the questions, which they wished not to, and that they may discontinue the interview at any point. If the participant wanted to discontinue the interviews, they could also request the destruction of the material already collected in the interview by then. However, no participant refused to answer any questions or discontinued the interview. The interviews ranged from 31 minutes to 115 minutes in length, with an average of 75 minutes per interview. The interviews were recorded and transcribed using an outsourced partner. The transcriptions were made in as much detail as possible. The number of transcribed pages varied from five to twelve pages, with an average of 24 pages per transcription.

Below is table 2, where the interviews’ lengths and number of transcribed pages (font Calibri size 12) are listed and referred to with a code to maintain the participant’s anonymity. The letters in the codes represent the participants’ organization.

Table 2. Length of the interviews

Code	Length (in minutes)	Number of pages
A1	65	24
A2	31	19
A3	87	25
A4	115	29
A5	79	27
A6	76	20
A7	71	22
B1	101	31
B2	72	23
B3	67	21
B4	90	29
B5	94	25
B6	38	11
Total	986	306

The interviewed person’s name was not stored together with the material, but codes identified the material. The table linking the codes to the participant’s name was kept separate from the research material and could only be accessed by designated research team members. The

interviews were conducted in Finnish and English. The Finnish interviews' quotes were translated into English by the author in this thesis, maintaining the meaning and tone as precisely as possible.

3.3. Data Analysis

Making scientifically sustainable conclusions in qualitative research requires careful consideration and handling of the collected data. Qualitative data analysis aims to create a coherent view of the data, which provides a justified and versatile understanding of the studied phenomenon. It includes analyzing and classifying separate parts of the data and creating a coherent synthesis of them. However, it is not enough that the analysis is a mere description of the data, but the researcher needs to rise to a higher level of abstraction to be able to make relevant notions and conclusions of the data as a whole. (Puusa, 2020.)

Thematic analysis was chosen as the data analysis method in this thesis. Thematic analysis is an analysis method used for identifying, analyzing, and reporting themes or patterns that occur across the data set (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 79), such as in the interviews conducted in this research. As in this thesis, when having interpretivism as the philosophical background of the research, thematic analysis can be used to examine the various interpretations of the studied phenomenon (Saunders et al., 2019, p. 652). Since the research approach was abductive from its nature, the analysis process consisted of continuous dialogue between the data and theory.

An essential part of thematic analysis is the coding of data into identified themes that can further answer the research questions. When having an abductive approach, the coded themes can be originated from the existing theory but then altered or expanded during the analysis. (Saunders et al., 2019, pp. 651—652.) In this thesis, the themes were derived from the comprehensive employee well-being perspective, presented in chapter 2.2.1, outlining the analysis's direction. Nonetheless, as the research aimed to create an understanding of a relatively little-studied phenomenon, the analysis was not deductive from nature but instead abductive, as it aimed to explore the phenomenon broadly within the research question.

The thematic analysis consists of several phases that can be divided into various ways. In this thesis, Braun & Clarke's (2006) and Saunders' et al. (2019) analysis procedures were followed and combined, as the analysis was conducted according to the four following phases: familiarizing with data, coding the data, recognizing relationships between codes and categorizing them into themes, and producing the report. However, it is essential to recognize

that the analysis process is not linear with phases following each other, but a recursive process, where the phases can be happening simultaneously and revisited multiple times (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 86). The analysis process is illustrated in figure 7.

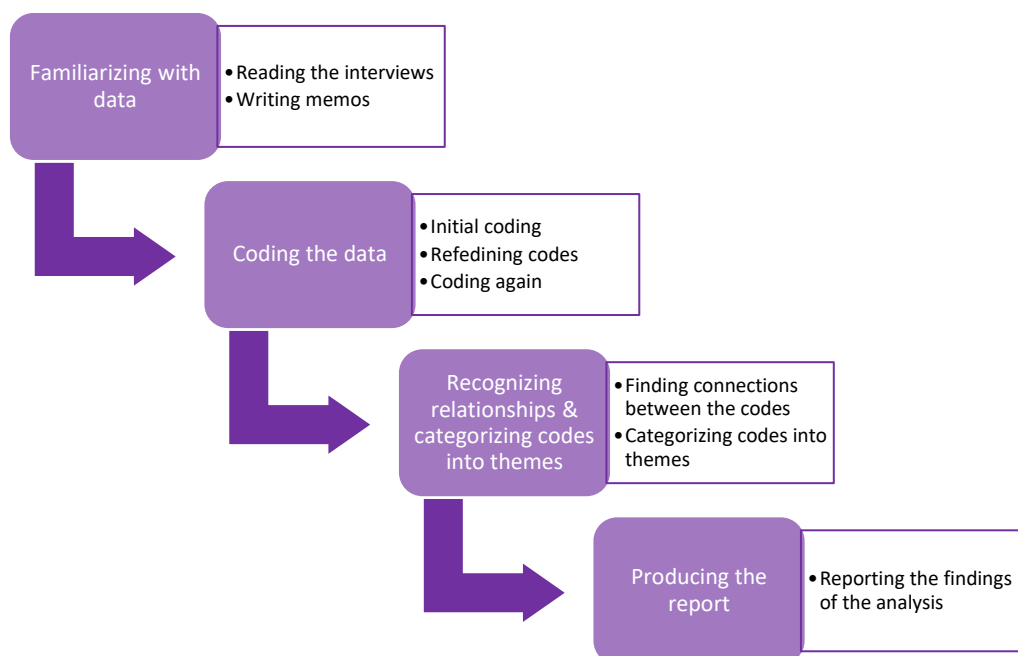


Figure 7. The thematic analysis process in the thesis

The analysis started with the familiarizing of the interviews. The interviews were first read-through with a free flow of thoughts. The interviews were then read a second time, and short memos were written of the issues that seemed significant and the ideas during the reading. Even though becoming familiar with the data is emphasized, especially at the beginning of the analysis process, the immersion into the data occurs throughout the analysis process (Saunders et al., 2019, p. 652).

The second step of the process was coding the data. Coding refers to the symbolizing and summarizing of meanings in the data through a set of codes (Saunders et al., 2019, p. 653). The interview transcripts were imported to ATLAS.ti, a data analysis program to code and organize data. The transcribed interview quotations were assigned codes, which emerged during this initial coding phase. As the analysis had the abductive approach to it, the data was coded rather widely, but the defined research question guided selecting which data was relevant to code. After the first round of coding, the codes were redefined as some of them were overlapping or were inconsistent. The second round of coding was then conducted, during which several new

codes were created and the existing coding further unified. Altogether, 31 codes were finally identified and printed out as excel sheets to handle the data better.

The third phase of the analysis was recognizing relationships between the codes and categorizing them into themes. A theme refers to a category that consists of multiple codes related to each other (Saunders et al., 2019, p. 657). In this phase, the codes were compared to find which of them had significant relations, and then they were categorized into the themes. In this thesis, the themes were derived from the comprehensive employee well-being perspective, presented in chapter 2.2.1, and as the codes and findings were seen to support this view of the existing literature, the codes were then categorized into those existing themes. An example of how the data was coded and categorized into themes is presented below in table 3.

Table 3. Example of coding and thematizing in the analysis

Quotation	Codes	Theme
<i>“So, there are a lot of things, where the individual can make a decision on their own. But then there are things, where a certain conclave is authorized to make decisions on more important, bigger things” (A4)</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Autonomy ○ Decentralizing authority ○ Organizational structures ○ Decision-making 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Organization

The fourth phase of the data analysis was producing the report. The data were organized according to the themes and codes, following by concluding findings from the organized data. The findings were then structured into a coherent view to support the audience’s understanding. The data description was intended to be particularly rich, extensively utilizing the quotes from the interviews to emphasize the employees’ voices in this thesis.

Thematic analysis is a widely used analysis method and has both advantages and disadvantages. It is a relatively flexible analysis method since it is not engaged in any specific research philosophy, and it can be used regardless of the research approach adopted for the research (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Saunders et al., 2019, p. 651). It is used for describing data precisely but again requires minimal organizing of the data and is relatively easy to conduct even for inexperienced researchers. Thematic analysis can be used to emphasize the similarities or differences in data, as well as offer unexpected insights. Finally, it allows the researcher to interpret the data rather than just describing it. (Braun & Clarke, 2006.)

Despite the advantages, utilizing thematic analysis possesses some challenges and disadvantages as well. A challenge regarding the flexibility is narrowing down the focus on the

data, as thematic analysis offers broad views. The thematic analysis also requires utilizing a theoretical framework to support the interpretations made from it. When comparing with some other analysis methods, thematic analysis generates only detached views from the data instead of creating a coherent picture of a data unit, such as a single individual's interview. Besides, it does not offer the means to analyze the used language or other observations that could be made from the collection of the data. (Braun & Clarke, 2006.)

3.4. Case Organizations

This thesis was conducted as part of a research project on employee experiences in self-managing work (TEOT), conducted by Tampere University. The research project intends to create a better understanding of self-managing organizations in practice and how they are connected to employee well-being, by examining on what level is the general employee well-being in self-managing organizations with no managers and how the characteristics of work, individuals, and organization influence employee well-being in them. The purpose is also to support Finnish working life by creating guidelines and suggestions on how organizations can move towards a self-managing organization model and what needs to be considered to support employee well-being in self-managing organizations.

Organizations from various industries were asked to participate in the TEOT -research project, and altogether five organizations then participated in the project. These organizations had purposefully aimed to differ from traditional, hierarchical organization models and instead functioned in ways that aimed towards self-organizing. Between five and eight employees were interviewed from each organization during spring 2020. The aim was to cover various work tasks to gain a more comprehensive understanding of the organizations. All the participants were voluntary, of legal age, and active in working life.

In this thesis, two organizations participating in the research project were examined. As a master's thesis is relatively brief research, the scope of the research target needs to be relatively tightly narrowed. Organizations and the work in different fields possess different characteristics to them, and to be able to examine the organizations and work more in-depth, the organizations were selected from the same industry. Both the organizations operated in the software industry, and the work in the case organizations concentrated on handling high-level knowledge. As knowledge work and high strains in it have been associated with poorer health and less job satisfaction (McClenahan et al., 2007), examining the employee well-being in these self-managing organizations was especially meaningful.

The two organizations shared certain characteristics: Firstly, both organizations had operated in a self-managing way since their establishment. However, it should be noted that even though these organizations are considered self-managing, SMOs do not consider themselves to be ever ready with their learning journey and thus aim to develop constantly. Secondly, there were no managers in the company besides the positions required by law, such as the CEO. Teams or the so-called cells formed the organizational structure and organized the operating of different functions. Thirdly, employees had main work roles, which were most often formed through recruiting but often had side roles in addition. The interviewed employees' roles were mainly focused on software development and sales, but a few participants had an administrative role or leadership role required by law, such as the CEO. Finally, both the organizations' income was based on project work.

Both organizations and their employees were addressed anonymously in the research project to gain more genuine insights into the participants' actual thoughts and views of this delicate research topic. However, limited information about the organizations is shared below to understand the organizational environment better.

Organization A

Organization A consists of around thirty employees and is a privately owned limited company. It was founded in 2012 and has an office in Finland.

Organization B

Organization B consists of around one hundred employees and is a limited company founded in 2012. In 2019 the organization was acquired by a larger corporation that has around a thousand employees and several other segment companies. The studied organization has offices in Finland and in Germany.

4. FINDINGS

This chapter presents the findings of this thesis. The findings are addressed through five themes that consist of the characteristics influencing employee well-being in SMOs. The themes are divided according to the organization, leadership, work community, work, and individual factors influencing employee well-being, derived from the comprehensive employee well-being perspective presented in chapter 2.2.1. Most of the results were found from multiple interviews, but as this is a qualitative and interpretative study, it is still essential to recognize that these results present only views and experiences of individuals and should not be considered the official stand of the organizations. The description of the data was intended to be particularly rich in the form of the interview quotes to emphasize the employees' voices in this thesis.

4.1. Organization

The first theme is the organization factors influencing employee well-being. This theme is the broadest of the five themes since it includes findings regarding variety of organizational aspects, departing from the other themes, which are more narrowed from their nature. The main results of this theme are described below and discussed more thoroughly one by one.

- **Autonomy and authority to make decisions are experienced significant for the employee well-being, but the decision-making process may also cause stress for the employees**
- **The employees have a highlighted role of their own well-being in SMOs, but the organization can support it in various ways**
- **Competence development is a significant mean of employee support in SMOs**
- **Rewarding is experienced to be fairer in SMOs, but detecting every employee's performance is challenging, as well as their individual recognition**
- **Meaningful organizational values create satisfaction among employees in SMOs**

Autonomy and authority to make decisions are experienced significant for the employee well-being, but the decision-making process may also cause stress for the employees

The first significant organizational factor influencing the employee well-being in the case organizations was the employees' autonomy. Employees had significant autonomy and authority to make decisions in the organizations, which created feelings of trust, freedom, and

equality for the employees. Autonomy requires trust from the organization to the employees and simultaneously gives the employees responsibility, which was as well experienced as motivating and meaningful, and thus can be considered significant for employees' satisfaction and work engagement.

"it is motivating when company trusts its employees rather much." (B6)

"Trust and give responsibility. It creates a spiral. Because you have responsibility and authority, you want to take care of things well." (B4)

"responsibility tastes little differently, which makes the work a lot more meaningful, because if you have no responsibility, then you can ask what meaning does it (work) have." (B1)

Employees had the authority to make many decisions concerning their work and ways of working by themselves, as will be described in chapter 4.4. Furthermore, employees could participate in the decision-making at the organizational level. The organizations had both somewhat similar structures, where these cells, in the interviews referred to as circles or conclaves, acted as a way to organize different functions and make decisions in their hemisphere. Employees could join or leave these cells freely, which gave everyone the possibility to influence matters in the organization and enabled trying out new things and ways of working agilely. They could be created or ended based on the organizations' needs and facilitated agile changes when there was a need for that. The cells were also experienced to enhance the decision-making. Lack of hierarchy and bureaucracy in the organizational structures was experienced to create satisfaction among the employees.

"we have tried to share things so that nothing is behind one person. Instead, we have groups, conclaves who are responsible for recruiting, or learning, or well-being. It is that kind of structure so that no one has to think about something alone, but there are always a couple of wise heads with whom you can ponder things. That will also likely create better decisions when you do not have to think about them yourself." (A7)

"making changes is much easier because we can decide and define how we want to function. So, we do not have to get it approved by some management team if we wanted to do something differently. So, even now, we can just test it, so that let us try, for example, these roles until the end of the year. And if it does not work, then we just take them down. Like this. So, it is good that we can try out different things fast, with a tight schedule, and find out if they are good or not." (A1)

In terms of higher-level decision-making, organization B had a company lead cell, which acted as the company's steering group. Previously, when the organization was smaller, even organization-wide decision-making could be done quickly together with most employees. However, as the organization grew, including around one hundred people in the actual decision-making process would have been complicated. Not everyone could join the current lead cell, but everyone still had the possibility to bring up concerns and suggestions for them and have their voices heard, which was seen as important. For creating and updating the organization strategy, organization B had a strategy circle, which gathered employees' views and conducted workshops to co-create the strategy.

"we have a management circle, and if you have something to say, then you are allowed to tell your opinion and give suggestions or critique, so there is freedom of speech, and everyone is listened to" (B1)

"however, it is not that free access to it (management) if you think about, for example, strategy. However, tools are offered to take part in forming the strategy; when it is informed, you get to put a message in Slack and, again, that brings those different aspects visible, but of course, how I feel is that the management is the management. But they are required to have transparency and. A conversational way of doing things." (B4)

However, after organization B became a part of the parenting company, the power to create the strategy and make the organization-wide decisions was seen to become limited and unclear.

"This is the case in our own company's affairs now, there is a situation where it is not clear who decides in some matters, and the structures that have been formed as we have become part of this parent company group have clearly created hierarchy. Then it is no longer clear which things we can influence and which ones come from the company's upper levels. On that gray area is that kind of an area of ambiguity where it is perhaps more difficult to act." (B6)

In organization A, there was no such management structure, but a need for more precise structures and processes was recognized to support the decision-making throughout the organization instead of acting based on momentary opinions. Organizational growth also created a higher need for common structures, processes, and practices.

"So, I am not saying that the corporate world is thoroughly bad. Some kind of, hie-, I cannot say hierarchy but in a certain way the structures, so they are actually good. Something like, some things from there and, some things from here, a golden mean would actually be good. Good option." (A1)

“In the beginning, the small group of us were all able to go to the meeting and do things there. The bigger the company grows, the more it has to rely on, for example, tools to agree on the work. Like whom does which project. We have to rely on processes, common rules, practices. These kinds of things.” (A3)

What comes to decision-making in practice, both organizations used a so-called advice process in the decision-making. That meant that the individuals could make decisions affecting themselves independently but needed to consult other people or have them as a part of the decision-making process if the decision would affect them as well. This advice process was considered an excellent organizational practice since it considered all the necessary factors in the decision-making and was fast and easy. Instead of voting, the conclusions would be reached through a joint discussion.

“I think one thing that makes everyone’s lives easier is probably the whole idea about this advice process. If you need something, ask about it and if it is fine, do it. You do not need to write an application or something like that; that is very, very easy to get things done. And if you feel there is a need to create a new role, a new team for doing something, you do that. That is again so that there are not really any obstacles.” (B2)

“But it is very, very distributed and, like, yeah. So, it is not like we are voting, so it is not like democracy as such, we just come to a consensus. I would say that is the way it works.” (B2)

Even though the advice process was mainly considered a great way to make decisions in the organizations, there were also disadvantages to it, which caused stress for the employees. Having to gather information all around the organization and discuss with multiple people to make a decision was considered demanding at times. The employees considered it especially straining if they felt like being part of a discussion that did not actually concern them or had to participate in the decision without being acquainted with the topic. Also, decision-making processes, where the discussion dwelled on without proper conclusions or action plans, were considered frustrating— common goals needed to be set in the cells so that things would advance.

“this our organizational model. It is straining in the sense that when knowledge, one could say that power, decision-making power, and knowledge, is fragmented throughout the organization. It brings the challenge that those little pieces of information need to be collected from different people. And in turn, if we want to make a joint decision. Then you have to discuss with so many people. [...] On the

other hand, with small decisions, this operating model is speedy. I myself support this approach, even if it strains.” (B3)

“I feel that on the other hand, it motivates me, that the decision making and deciding the direction for the company, and these things are democratic at least in a way. Or open. It is not that I do not like that end result, but I do not enjoy that process, maybe.” (A4)

Furthermore, it also caused stress, when decisions were made constantly at a fast pace, and changes were often implemented simultaneously. Some of the employees experienced it challenging to keep up with all the changes, and especially changes regarding the organizational structure created confusion when there were no organization charts or information on how the structure was formed. Besides, it was thought that these different changes and experiments should include more retrospective and documentation of them to learn from them for the future.

“We have the experimental culture as a good thing. But then when many things are tried out at the same time, it creates maybe some unnecessary stress.” (A7)

The employees have a highlighted role of their own well-being in SMOs, but the organization can support it in various ways

With no managers in the case organizations, individual employees seemed to have a highlighted role in taking care of their own employee well-being. However, the work community aimed to also detect and support others' well-being through the various contact surfaces in the existing organizational structure.

“in this type of work, you might be alone for long at a customer without seeing your own colleagues in the organization. Or you might spend long periods at home working remotely. Then the responsibility of recognizing things, in my own opinion, is at the individual. So, no one can help unless the individual brings it up. But when comparing to a pyramid organization, there is the line manager, whose antenna should waver when everything is not right with the employee. But again, in this type of self-managing organization, there are hopefully lots of other contact surfaces (where the state of employee well-being is recognized)” (B3)

However, both organizations had specific roles, processes, and practices, which aimed to foster employee well-being as well. In organization A, there was no separate role for matters concerning employee well-being or HRM, but a cell in charge of HRM and aimed to observe the employee well-being in the organization and develop it on a more strategic level. It was also

possible to use psychological services and utilize occupational health care services. However, some employees experienced these structures somewhat unclear and had at least previously hoped for a fixed HR role to better support the employees' coping.

"I thought for a long time. I was saying for a long time that we should have an HR person. It was before we had this well-being conclave. Because so many of us experienced exhaustion, and it went unnoticed. And I think it is crucial to notice it fast. Many times, people who get exhausted, so they do not make a fuss about it. We should have more of those tentacles upright in terms of if people are doing all right. And now it has gone in a better direction." (A7)

In organization B, there was a separate HR role, which, together with the occupational safety and health manager, health and safety representative, and a few other employees, formed a health and safety cell. This cell well aimed to observe and develop the employee well-being. There were also separate cells for work ergonomics as well as maintaining and developing the working environment. In addition, employee well-being was seen to be supported by the domain leads and growth coaches, who aimed to observe the organization's daily well-being and support employees regarding that when needed. However, the division of roles regarding employee well-being was experienced as unclear, at least by some employees.

"Domain Lead role takes care of their own members. Of course, HR takes care of observing how many people are absent and whether there are any problems or how many people are sick. There are also those health and safety -people who take care that everyone has working conditions in order and work is safe and healthy." (B6)

"But then we have these growth coaches, you can (discuss) with your own growth coach, and it's really worth discussing, that if you don't cope, or if you have problems." (B5)

Both organizations invested in the comfortability in the offices, working spaces, and ergonomics. They also organized training on well-being and pulse questionnaires of the organization's current state of employee well-being. Both organizations organized a variety of happenings within and outside of work time as well. Some of the activities were also open for the employees' families, which was experienced positively. In addition, employees had high influencing possibilities for these matters themselves. These practices and processes were seen as significant for the well-being. However, it was also recognized that these alone were not enough to foster the employee well-being, but other organizational factors affected the well-being as well.

“these are kind of small stuff, but they are important stuff so that it is a cozy and nice place so that people feel like they can come there in a way outside of work as well” (A2)

“we identify these burdensome parts of the work quite well already, and information is shared with people about how to act or what kind of things to look out for.” (B6)

"We have recognized that we spend time also outside of customer projects or especially that we do something with customers, like go to the sauna or, something like that, so that it welds people together which makes it easier to do the work, solve those tensions and problem situations and, there will be some shortcuts to doing things. So, it is a reasonable investment in terms of work as well, going on a cottage trip with a group, or going eating every now and then, on an office day having lunch together and ordering some pizzas or something small like that, so it makes the working more efficient and nicer" (A5)

A challenge identified in both organizations regarding employee well-being was the support of the employees' coping and noticing when someone needed help. Even though there were the structures and practices to support employees coping and well-being, there were still risks and cases where the employees' need for help was not recognized early enough if they did not actively ask it for themselves. More systematic processes and organizational development on this matter were required in both case organizations.

"Well, there is that danger that when the job is so free, like all working hours and everything, it just creates challenges to how these people are like found or noticed, so to say. In a way, it is pretty typical that someone then just does not come to common events and just works from home and does not come to the office at all, or often when people have trouble coping, they withdraw from social contacts. Thus, of course, it creates some challenges for us then, challenges in how we find out who needs help." (B5)

"Yes, you can get help when you shout out, but it is kind of on you, so I feel like a lot goes a long way before you start shouting that hey I have too much work or have a too-tight schedule or something, so there is really no mechanism for talking to someone regularly about what is going on and whether things are going in the right direction. I think it is even a little dangerous at times." (A5)

“In a way when I said about it (feeling exhausted) too lightly, it was not noted at all. And I have later discussed it with them. That it was kind of a mistake. And they did not realize it” (B4)

Competence development is a significant mean of employee support in an SMO

A significant aspect to the support and thus employee well-being in the case organizations was competence development. Both organizations perceived competence development as essential, and thus resources and effort were used to foster it, creating satisfaction among employees. The actual working tasks played a significant role in competence development and learning, but the organizations had their own processes and practices to support competence development as well.

In organization A, the employees experienced freedom to develop their competence very extensively independently, but the organization also had a cell dedicated to supporting it. They had the permission to use the organization's budget and resources within certain limits for competence development purposes. The cell designed learning paths for the employees to follow, and any learned knowledge was encouraged to be shared.

"Moreover, over the past year, we have begun to build learning pathways about artificial intelligence and accessibility. [...] And it is also easy for the employees to see which things are encouraged. If you want to learn something, then you have a clear path to what you will start to study. But we can do things pretty freely."
(A7)

In organization B, there was a competence development process called Personal Growth as a Service, which aimed to foster learning in the organization. As part of the process, there were growth coach roles whose purpose was to support employees in finding a vision regarding competence development and guiding them on how to achieve that. There were clear guidelines on how competence development should be planned and executed and how knowledge should be shared.

"And basically, together with your growth coach, you figure out what is your vision, where do you want to be, in the next x number of years maybe. From that, you then create some shorter-term actions, [...]. And when you have this growth coaching session, and you have your vision, then you can also begin learning at your own time. So, basically, outside of work you can read books, take courses, and you will get some payment for that. But it has to align with your vision, and you have to, when you are done, do some kind of presentation, some kind of knowledge sharing. We also support going to conferences, and taking certificates, going to courses and things like that." (B2)

However, some employees felt that the direction in which competence could be developed was too restricted. It was also seen as necessary that young employees' competence development would be fostered even more and that a specific type of mentoring process could be more broadly implemented into the organization.

Fairer rewarding in SMOs creates satisfaction, but the lack of individual performance management and recognition processes may cause stress among employees

Another factor influencing employee well-being on the organizational level was the rewarding and recognition of employees. The salary was seen as the primary form of rewarding employees and both organizations very similar processes for the salary reviews. In these salary reviews, a particular group or cell would go through the employees' salaries to see if raises were needed and to maintain certain equality in the generation of salaries in the organizations. During these salary reviews, the employees collected feedback on their work and could argue if their salary should be raised or if a colleague's salary should be raised. These salary reviews were considered a good process, creating satisfaction among employees. The salary reviews ensured that there was certain equality in the salaries, instead of having the most demanding employees having the highest pay. They were seen to be very transparent and helped the employees to understand their responsibilities better and, thus, in a way, balance their expectations for their pay. The salary review result was also considered easier to accept since it did not depend only on one manager's view or will.

“Because in the past it worked a bit like that, that who dared to go ask for more pay and demand and such, then they probably got it. But those who conscientiously did (work) and were calm and did not make a fuss about themselves, so for them, it did not automatically get raised” (A7)

“The reasoning for applying for pay raise so there has been only one person who has been your manager who may like you, maybe not, but now there is a group of your own colleagues and your peers, so then their opinion is much easier, their assessment is much easier to accept as the individual manager's, who may or may not be suitable for that role.” (B1)

Even though the salary review was mainly seen as a good process, it was considered problematic when there were no managers who would have seen all the employees' performance. Instead, it was the employees' responsibility to bring forth their efforts. Some employees experienced uncertainty on what they were supposed to accomplish, and this lack of

goals was experienced to create stress. The employees' performance was not measured either, which created uncertainty about whether the salaries were determined correctly.

“But of course, in a way, I think the challenge is that because of it. People you work with every day. So, there is no such traditional manager who would see your high input. So, they are not the ones deciding your salary. Instead, it is a person who does not necessarily see it, is not necessarily in daily contact with you at all. It poses challenges; of course, there is that feedback system because of it. But on the other hand, [...]it is about you being pretty much at the mercy of the person giving the feedback, and also it is about how you yourself can argue it” (B4)

“if there was more precise follow-up and goals, then it is quite independent, regardless of whether you know how to present yourself really well” (A1)

The salary information was utterly transparent in organization A, and organization B had available salary categories. Transparency in salaries was seen as a good practice since it could prevent injustices between employees' salaries. At least some of the employees wished to have the salary information as completely transparent in organization B.

“It has been discussed it has been going on for a long time, and I do not understand it. I do understand that maybe some people do not want to share it, and that is fine but, if most people want to share it, why not have somewhere where we can see like, at least on some level. I do not even think we have, well, we have these salary paths, but that is the only thing. It would be nice with maybe some more transparency.” (B2)

Employees in both organizations also hoped for more clarity on how the salaries were determined. However, this was seen as challenging to conduct so that it would be fair for everyone.

“It is always challenging that, on the other hand, it would be nice to have clear levels on what would be required to the next level. However, then it goes too, I have heard examples where it has been the worst decision what is made somewhere, in a company, that then it guides it so that when a new person comes in, and they want a certain salary, it easily becomes quite unfair if it is started to be determined so that you are now a junior plus and you are a senior, minus medium, advanced whatever. It becomes rather artificial, and when, however, we are doing the same job” (A5)

Besides salaries, other ways of recognizing were also conducted in organization A, as they had a separate cell for rewarding and recognizing the employees and their efforts. Individual employees were recognized in case of special occasions, which was considered as a good practice. However, there were no practices or processes to reward individual employees based on performance in the short term, causing dissatisfaction. The organization used to have a bonus system, which was then discontinued since the employees saw the monetary value as lesser than using the money for common activities.

"But there is a downside to it, that if someone succeeds really well in a project or sells some big case, so there is nothing special for that. Maybe then, the next time we negotiate the salary, it will be that 'hey, here were these good things and stuff and, well, now give you a hundred more on the salary.' It comes with a delay so, yes, I remember that someone has missed for, so it would be nice to get like some spa gift card or some kind of symbolic gesture that hey now you've done really much work so here is this nonrecurring day-off or a chocolate bar or something like that" (A5)

In organization B, this type of rewarding and recognizing was seen as unclear and lacking. In addition, the contradiction in rewarding and recognizing between the customer work and internal operations created dissatisfaction and stress among employees.

"Well, maybe it is that, somehow, there is a contradiction between the core work and this circle work, or, I do not really know what we think about it in our company right now because, like, we're rewarded for our core work because that is what makes money, and brings in new customers, then at the same time people are complaining and wailing why people will not then do this like circle and these things for the benefit of the community. That is maybe a bit of a whimsical conflict of values" (B5)

Meaningful organizational values create satisfaction among employees in SMOs

Finally, the organization's values and cultures were appreciated and experienced to create satisfaction among employees in both case organizations. Having the people and employee well-being as cornerstones of the organizations' existence as well as promoting the values of transparency and trust throughout the organizations were experienced meaningful. Also, operating according to the organizations' vision and values and defining them together with the employees was significant. In conclusion, the self-organizing organization model and its values were considered truly meaningful, despite its challenges.

“There is leadership that also like it is not only about, money but also about people and thinking about the well-being of everyone so I think it is good.” (B2)

“Openness, in my mind, is an interesting thing so, that when you create it—a culture where everything is open. So, you start from salaries and contracts and so on. It leads people to be quite open in itself. So that they tell even about their own life really openly, which is part of the wholeness, in my opinion. You can be as you are, which is something that is brought up at us. People appreciate that they do not have to pretend anything.” (A3)

“because of these soft values, it would be hard to leave, so that I would have to think really carefully where I would be switching. So, this type of self-leadership fits me well when you can influence so much. (B4)

4.2. Leadership

Leadership often refers to the relationship between a manager and an employee, but in SMOs, the leadership is mainly shared between the employees. Thus, its meaning differs from that of a traditional organization. It is a common misunderstanding that there would not be leadership in SMOs, when in fact, the leadership seemed to be in a highlighted role in the case organizations. However, as the leadership is practiced extensively through the organizational processes and practices, instead of practicing traditional manager-employee leadership, this theme is also addressed through other chapters. The main findings are listed below:

- **Lack of hierarchy and shared leadership create satisfaction in SMOs**
- **Sharing of leadership, as well as the lack of leadership, can also cause stress and challenges among employees**

Lack of hierarchy and shared leadership create satisfaction in SMOs

In the case organizations, the leadership was shared between employees, and there was very little hierarchy, which created satisfaction among the employees. Even though the organizations had CEOs and other formal leadership positions required by the law, they still possessed relatively little authority over the other employees and had no significant leadership statuses.

“There is not as much bureaucracy, which is nice. And, there is also not really this thinking about who is my boss as such, [...] so you are not like afraid of saying.” (B2)

Still, leadership was experienced as necessary in the case organizations. Leadership positions were often formed through a need at the moment, and they were essential for the work to advance. Having no managers acting as middlemen also supported the fluency of customer work.

“Well, let us say that we rarely define that you take the lead in this project or that you are now the leader. So, it is more like that I feel like they (leader roles) are formed organically depending on who are part of it there, something like Leadership as a Service.” (A4)

“often it is thought that this self-managing, it needs no leadership. But that is the last thing that it means.” (B4)

Sharing of leadership, as well as the lack of leadership, can also cause stress and challenges among employees

The leadership roles were, however, not always experienced as positive but as stressful in some parts. Too much control from the team leaders in some situations was also felt straining. Then again, lack of leadership and unclear leadership roles in some situations was experienced as stressful and led to unfinished ideas and internal development projects.

“I experience it rather burdensome, the responsibility of the colleagues, so if I do not do my work, they cannot do theirs. So, I know that there are people who like to get into these positions because they want authority, they like to lead people and decide what others do, but it has never been the thing for me. Instead, I have done it if it has been seen that I am the best one to do it, so I do it then, but it does strain me quite a lot, the worry about how others can do their work in the best possible way.” (B1)

“mentally straining has been, for example when there are these kinds of situations, where there have been some challenges with some employee, where there would have been needed, or where afterward it has maybe been easy to realize that more sturdy leadership would have been needed” (A4)

“this our model for leading or guiding this company, which has not always been really coherent, and it has not been that apparent whose responsibility it is in things, which is the big downside of the coin. It has haunted us in many things. It has also, in a certain way, I feel, been in many cases a resource on the other hand.” (A2)

When leadership was left missing also employee support was experienced to be lacking when no one took responsibility for it, which in turn caused stress. The exhaustion of an employee

could also go unnoticed when there were no managers to detect it. In situations where there were many time pressures and too many work tasks simultaneously, traditional managers were longed to gain more support.

“especially if you feel like you are left alone with something, it is rather stressful.” (B5)

“Sometimes when I have pondered some work stuff with my wife, she has told me that you should have a manager whom you could talk about this with instead of me.” (A5)

4.3. Work Community

Factors influencing employee well-being in the work community refer to the relationships and interaction in the work community. Work community, both inside the case organizations and in the customer organizations, was experienced to significantly influence the employee well-being. Below are the theme’s main results described:

- **The work community influences the experienced employee well-being and has an essential role in supporting the employee**
- **Self-organizing fosters work engagement and co-operation in the work community**
- **Communication has a significant role in the functioning of a work community and its social capital**
- **The work community has a highlighted role in supporting each other by providing feedback**

Work community influences the experienced employee well-being and has an important role in supporting the employee

The work community was experienced as an essential factor influencing employee well-being. The work community members offered help and support to each other, which was seen as a significant resource for employee well-being.

“The work community is probably the best thing (at work). Of course, you get to do interesting things and be part of interesting projects, but it is not constant that you would have the best project going on all the time; instead, the working community and its practices are the things that are constantly well” (B6)

“it has been an enjoyable experience of certain psychological safety, that we have agreed that I can ask my team all the stupid questions so that I do not have to ask them from the customer, so it is an excellent feeling [...] that the team is really good and you know that you always get help. That we play really well together.” (B4)

However, it was considered to create stress if some work community members were not coping well or if the employees felt being alone during the projects.

“But maybe the other side of it, when I think about the team. If someone has a rough time at home or some difficult situation. Then it is brought to the workplace, and it might be stressful as such” (A3)

Besides informal support in the work community, both organizations also had more formal roles and processes to offer support for the employees. The organizations had specific leading or supporting roles, which purpose was to support other employees, for example, by coaching them regarding their competence development or solving problems that they encountered. In organization B, new employees were assigned with “buddies” who initially acted as their instructors. Even with these support structures, inexperienced employees experienced a need for higher support.

“Then we have that, well, other companies have line managers, so we kind of have line coaches, so they are not in a managerial position, but they help like in this competence development, so, for example, you can talk to them and thereby to seek, for example, a different kind of role.” (B6)

“we have this buddy system, and that works, really long way. You can ask your buddy a lot of questions but, maybe also continue that after the first three-four months, so like have some kind of mentoring, both from the technological part, especially as a junior developer, but also for the more, just organizational part. Somebody, you know, like I can always ask this person. That is maybe something that is missing that I would like to see. Because I think that is my biggest problem with this kind of organization, it is hard to be a junior.” (B2)

In organization A, the supporting roles were still forming, as the previous support roles were discontinued, and a new type of supporting roles were planned for.

“it started to get pretty frustrating that we had a couple of these cases that then someone, a person left and that support person was like ‘I could not help them in any way with this’ if they had a bad project or something. In a way, those things

came to light, but then they could not be resolved. So, it was done a bit of halfway through that job. And in the end, maybe it showed up to people like as those support persons were not really present and, then if the person did not have any confusion, then it felt like this was just some, every couple of months, a nice chat with someone. When asked if people wanted to continue it, it was just like a few people, who thought it was an excellent thing and others were a bit like 'does not matter to me.' So, then we stopped it after about a year." (A5)

The work community also had a significant role in detecting the state and changes in the well-being of its employees, as described in chapter 4.1. However, it required employees to know each other well and clear communication in the work community.

"Of course, if I would recognize if some of my colleagues or a close friend from work whom I work a lot is not coping so that it can be seen. I always ask how they are, and from that, I can recognize if they are not okay, but again you need to be able to read people and to know that person." (B4)

"of course, we expect that if someone feels that they are too stressed, that they can say that it is so." (A1)

Self-organizing fosters work engagement and co-operation in the work community

Self-organizing was seen to support the work communities in the case organizations. It allowed the employees to fulfill their interests broadly, fostering work engagement, instead of limiting their roles and autonomy, which again was seen to passivate the employees.

"what gets the spirit up and also kills it in the working community is that there are people who would like to do more, but they are not let to. So they are told that your role is this, stay inside it and in the end it always passivates the person in the long run, but that we let people to get excited and take it forward and sort of let people to fulfill their selves, it keeps the work community well" (B1)

The spirit and cooperation between the employees were experienced as excellent when the operations' responsibility was shared between everyone. Also, the possibility of influencing their working environment was seen to build the work community's spirit, and effort was put into its development.

"There is an excellent spirit at the workplace. And the cooperation works well. It feels like everyone pulls on the same rope. Here comes up the same thing that I told in the beginning that the individual has a quite great responsibility to take

things forward. Then everyone gladly brings out their point of view and presents it in a good cooperation spirit.” (B3)

Equality and respect for each other were seen as essential values of the work community. The lack of hierarchy naturally promoted equality, and there were no silos between different teams or between the employer and employees. It was considered to be fair and favorable that there was no single manager that the employee should please, but instead, the employee needed to act as an advisable part of the work community.

“the cooperation between employees works well and so does the cooperation between the so-called employer and employee because it is not that strictly defined who is, for example, the employer representative, but instead most of us are like equal” (B6)

“there is no one person you need to please, and no one person who kind of decides of your destiny, but it is the working community there” (B1)

Communication has a significant role in the functioning of a work community and its social capital

A significant part of the work community was the communication in them. Open communication was necessary for SMOs to function since it was needed for everyone to participate in decision-making and create an atmosphere of trust. However, it was not enough to make the data or information transparent, but it also needed to be organized and presented for the employees to understand correctly. Technology, such as Slack, was extensively utilized when communicating, but joint meetings were also an essential part of the organization-wide communication.

“Maybe that is (a good organizational practice) that people are encouraged to tell if there is something. So, whatever it is, for better or worse. That openness that you can tell how you feel, without having to worry about anything. That someone, the supervisor, would look at you somehow twisted or so.” (A1)

“We know that all data is stored, so all documents are usually either in Dropbox or Google services. So, any of us can find them when needed. However, because the number of people has gradually increased, not everyone can see everything, so such structures are created. [...]. And there, we go through those financial issues so that everyone knows the company’s financial situation. Since no one can do that, take into account the company’s interests in their decisions if they do not know what the company’s financial situation is. That is why it has been done in

that way so that people who have that information make it as accessible as possible to everyone." (A7)

However, inoperative communication, such as constant interruptions from colleagues, was experienced stressful, and joint meetings could be easily dominated by a few employees unless there was no facilitating. Thus, understandable frames and guidelines were also needed for communication to function in the work communities.

"And now in turn, when you are at the office there are amazing people present, but then you recognize the challenge of focusing. And when people come asking. Asking things." (B3)

"for example, in our weekly meetings, we always try to share the responsibility for all people in it, so that anyone in there can (facilitate them) and we are put to facilitate them, and thus guide speech and other things per se, so that it would not become only a few peoples' show and so on." (A2)

"Maybe those best tools, though, are kind of some kind of open discussion about problems, and maybe even a little facilitated discussion in a certain way. [...] we also have a Difficult Things -channel and such. That Difficult Things channel is good when it is kind of sacred. There is a rule that if someone says that something is hard for them, then you should not go there to wise off like that is not right. So, if someone has some though experience and if someone else would say that this is the process actually, that is forbidden. You do not get to act like that in there. That works well." (A3)

Open and honest communication played a crucial role in avoiding any tensions between employees. In organization A, employees received training to support communication in the work community. In organization B, conducting personality tests was a practice, which was considered to foster communication in the work community. Personality tests had at least previously been conducted when entering the organization, which helped the employees understand how each of them preferred to work and communicate and develop their self-knowledge.

"After all, no one is against anyone. However, many times, there may be a different perspective on a topic that one may not understand when one is not able to communicate clearly enough. We have now in recent years had a lot of common workshops and like how you communicate, interaction training. And it has been reflected in the fact that there have been no conflicts between individuals. People have learned a lot, and they communicate more clearly and share more things, overall talking and communicating better. It has reduced that unnecessary conflict away." (A7)

"So, I had, for example, this colleague, who then told about their personality. So, as it was, I do not remember that letter combination, but it was exceptional. And that was told then. And they say, 'I am like this, I seem like a real introvert, and I am really quiet, but I like to participate, so if I am quiet, it does not mean I do not want to participate.' And I told them, 'thank you, and now I can interpret you.' And it has been really easy to take that into account. On the other hand, it has been really valuable too and then when you saw which box you actually went to. So then even though there is self-awareness, it still kind of added to it." (B4)

Even though conflicts seemed relatively rare in the case organization, they both had similar processes for resolving any tensions or conflicts. These processes were considered particularly good and helped create an atmosphere of trust among the employees, fostering the supporting and social capital in the work community.

"For example, there has been a situation where I have been myself, that I have experienced that there is now a considerable tension like between some two people. Then I have been like, 'hey, can we go like to that meeting room and have a talk the three of us.' And I have been there like that 'I am now clearly seeing some tension here, and here is my point of view, what might it be because of this thing, and what do you think about this' and then we talk about it. And of course, if there is possibly a need, then we can have a tripartite discussion with the occupational health care" (A4)

"We have this conflict resolution method which, in fact, when you come to the company, you have to practice it. Once or twice. [...] And, the idea is that if I get if there is just any conflict, be it small or big. It has to be dealt with. Because if you do not handle it, then it will grow. Moreover, it is quite a fact that when you put different people, a hundred of them, in one unit, then most certainly there are conflicts. It is just people, that is it. [...] So, in a way, this is a really trust-building way in my opinion, and on the other hand, I feel it as that atmosphere, a guarantee of a good atmosphere." (B4)

The work community has a highlighted role in supporting each other by providing feedback

An important form of employee support was the feedback, in which the work community had an emphasized role. Feedback was generated through different processes and channels, such as Slack. Feedback was also given in joint meetings inside the organizations, as well as during the salary weeks. Also, external feedback from the customers was seen to have a significant role.

"whenever someone experiences, that anyone, an employee experiences that someone has worked really well, then they can give, we have for example this

Slack communication tool in use. So, they can there, like praise directly, and we have had also usually on Fridays that, this automatic reminder that you should praise some coworker, this type of thing. And people can praise there. And we have these kinds of weekly meetings. So, there is usually also this ending part, to praise a coworker. We have that live as well. Yes, we are quite sensitive to give feedback and, in particular, positive feedback. And there are different channels you can give it through, too. That is quite nice” (A1)

“Every couple of times a year, so, there are the salary discussions. So, also regarding that, the person themselves asks the people, from the client, teammate, project manager for written feedback. There are sample questions that you can ask; you can shape them a bit. And then, this person compiles the feedback they receive, and then the discussion will be based on it. And I have done it, regardless of whether if I am going a salary negotiation or not. So, it is precious knowledge, what I get for my own reflection on what went well and what could develop” (B4)

In addition, both organizations had so-called retrospectives after projects, where the members of the project teams gave feedback to each other, which was considered a well-functioning and essential process. In organization A, a particular employee had requested information on what things or how the other team members would like to receive feedback during or after a project, which was considered a helpful process that could be utilized more.

“Especially here in agile development methods, the processes include this retrospective, which is also meant to act as a backup valve for the team, that if there is much pressure on the project, of course, it means people get tired, and there will be tension, so it is a way to make sure people get to vent their feelings and talk through all things within the team” (B3)

“At least one nice idea, which I do not think that has not really been implemented, but is that one coworker started doing this thing in their projects, where they asked the team at the beginning of the project, that what kind of feedback and how do you want it, so on what types of things and at what point” (A5)

Even though the organization had these processes regarding feedback, the employees' proactivity was also required to receive feedback. The employees in both organizations were hoping for more feedback and easier ways to provide it for others themselves. Especially organizational level and more constructive feedback were seen to be lacking.

“it is by asking for feedback that you get feedback, at least for me. Also, because now, since I am working always at the customer, I do not really have any interaction with many of my other colleagues, so in that case, there is not a lot of

opportunities for feedback from there, but yeah. It is mainly for me at least I have to ask to get feedback” (B2)

“But perhaps what also many times I have maybe sensed what people miss is, that so you can get feedback pretty well from colleagues if you have for example worked together in a team, but then that kind of company level, that have I done the right things for like the last six months. So, in that, I do not think we have been that good in that. We have had some development discussions, but relatively rare, so as we do not have traditional managers, then you might be left in the dark about what is everyone doing, and I have been saying that we should always put effort into making everyone’s work visible” (A5)

4.4. Work

The content of work and ways of working were considered to have a significant influence on employee well-being. The main results are described below:

- **Work tasks and the authority to influence them, and the ways of working are significant resources for the employee well-being in SMOs**
- **Flexible employee roles contain both resources & demands for the employees’ work**

Work tasks and the authority to influence them, and the ways of working are significant resources for the employee well-being in SMOs

A significant factor influencing the employees’ well-being was the work itself and the authority to impact it, and the ways of working. Pleasant work tasks and the ability to choose them were essential resources for the employees’ work. Job crafting enabled making the work more versatile and developing the employees’ competence, motivating the work. Furthermore, the authority on work tasks was experienced to help cope with the demands and stress caused by work.

“It brings the versatility to it. That you have very different projects, where you get to learn new technologies and new ways of doing things, and you might get to apply something of your own to it.” (A1)

“Well, of course learning new things and interesting challenges are the things that motivate the work.” (B6)

“What helps to tolerate the stress is that I have much authority to influence the content of my work. So that if I am unhappy with my project, I can say that I want out of it.” (B3)

However, if the tasks did not fit the interests or capabilities of the employees, when there were fewer tasks to choose from, or if there was no one else would not either be interested or able to do a specific project, it was experienced stressful and was thought to cause employee turnover.

“(stress is caused) if you sometimes have work on tasks that you do not really fit doing and someone else would fit it better. For example, if you do not have earlier experience of it and you would need to study the necessary technology so that you could actually do something about it, but sometimes there is no one else to do it either, so then you just have to do it.” (B1)

“software developers have such hot labor markets that if they have to be for long in a bad project, then they will switch the company” (A5)

Also, the authority to choose the time and place of working very independently were considered mainly as positive as it enabled the employees to experience flow in their work and better balance their work and private life together. However, it was also noted that it was sometimes consuming when no one set boundaries to the working times when experiencing this type of flow.

“when you have things kind of rolling, and you get to really focus on things, then the hours disappear. You do not even know what is happening. [...]We talk about being in some kind of flow or being in an extremely productive state.” (A2)

“the best thing (about work) is probably that you can make work your own-looking very easily and to fit your life situation.” (B5)

Flexible employee roles contain both resources & demands for the employees' work

Roles in the case organizations could be created and changed agilely according to the organizational needs and the capability and interests of the employees, which was experienced positively. Employees could possess several side roles besides the main roles, and through this type of job crafting, they could complement the meaningfulness of the main role. The main roles and work tasks were usually defined through recruiting but taking new side roles or changing them could be done quickly through a process or simply discussing it with others.

“the determining of roles and the division of work happens to a large extent according to who has the time to do it and what is the need, what kind of knowledge is required.” (B6)

“And it (flexibility and the possibility to influence) gives people the opportunity to change their job content without running some internal job openings or some magic tricks. It is possible to grow there and learn new things and change some tasks.” (A7)

“when my main work, this project work, was not that rewarding because it was so scattered and fragmented, I kind of compensated it. Or my satisfaction came more from the circle things. So, I thought that it was rewarding and motivating that you can do these kinds of things on the side of your main work” (B5)

However, having too many simultaneous roles or too much disjointedness in work was again seen as demanding and caused stress. Furthermore, unclear roles and unrealistic timetable expectations from other employees were considered as stressful.

“when you are hurling all over the place, and you sort of have many hats on your head. Then that is sometimes straining” (A1)

“then if there is too much content switching, too fragmented. When you know that you would rather like to go deeper. Then of course, that creates stress” (B4)

“Finding the right information and people are the demanding factors. Because in a way, if there was a pyramid chart, you could find that thing from there. However, now instead, people have several roles, standpoints, and responsibilities. Some of them are clearly documented, and some are tacit knowledge. So, it creates a challenge, and this way stress.” (B3)

In addition, when new roles were created in organization B, it was sometimes considered unfair and lacking transparency when other employees had no chance to apply for these roles, but instead, it was about being at the right place at the right time. Then again, some roles required certain qualities from the employees, which was considered unclear.

“And that is, we might come back to that later, but that is both a good and a bad thing about this kind of organization that some things are kind of random. So, I feel sometimes that some of the transparency might actually go away because you are suddenly told that now this person has got this role, and you are like, “Oh, was that even possible, I did not know that role existed, what if I would have liked to have that role.” (B2)

“Then again, there are some roles, which I also have my-self tried to pursue, but then they have indicated that I might not somehow possess the required qualities.”
(B5)

A notable observation regarding the roles was the conflict between customer work and the internal operations in the case organizations. According to some views, customer work was more important than internal operations regarding the working environment and community, and too much time should not be put into it. Then, again, employees who were more involved in the internal operations felt it stressful when the work was focused only on a few employees. Some employees also experienced the side roles in hindering their development in their main roles. Besides, employees who worked in projects for other organizations felt to be left outside of the internal operations and not having the possibility to participate.

“Well what stresses in the working community is that people are divided into two camps, so we have the kind of work-oriented people, who are focused on their own project and customer and that they bring money into the house and then we have those who also see the other work, these circle stuff as important, and in the end, it is quite a small group who run these side functions. [...]sometimes there is some fraction about the use of time, so others think that we need to work hard and get the deadlines done and bring monetary value to the customer, and then there are others who also think the work community is important and this workplace and developing things there. So, there might be some collisions from time to time.” (B5)

“what has to me felt like as maybe the disadvantage in it (having side roles) is that I have not developed or advanced in my main work as well as I would have maybe like to.” (B5)

Thus, some fixed roles were hoped to perform these internal operations or more defined processes on what internal projects should be done by the employees and which outsourced. However, the organization’s resources should be considered in these decisions.

“So, we have not really found that stable solutions on how we could advance some of the essential things so that people could also do their work [...]. I think that it is reasonable that after some point it is not worth hanging on so that X number of people do it besides their work and if it is not done properly, because they are not professionals in that. So, it is always good to consider what should be done by ourselves and what should not.” (A5)

4.5. Individual

The last theme to consider is the individual factors influencing the experienced employee well-being. The individual factors from the comprehensive view of employee well-being in this thesis consist of the individual employee and their personal characteristics and attitudes, through which they interpret the other influencing factors as well. The main results are described below:

- **Self-leadership skills are essential for employee well-being in SMOs**
- **Certain personal characteristics and the experience and age of the employee are significant for their employee well-being in SMOs**

Self-leadership skills are essential for employee well-being in SMOs

An individual characteristic, which was recognized as necessary regarding the employee well-being was the individual's self-leadership skills. They were seen as necessary for the individuals to recognize their limits regarding employee well-being and to avoid too much stress caused by work. Taking care of employee well-being was seen mainly as the employees' responsibility.

“Perhaps the most important trait of all is the ability to lead oneself. Because there is no one out there saying what you should do if you do not know what kind of project you want, and you do not know how to ask for help with it, and you cannot allocate your resources or schedule your day, that will be a big problem. And typically, the people applying here are proactive people who get excited about many things. It is something that was warned about in the beginning. So that you will say yes to too many nice things and then there will be too much, and you will get tired and burn out. So, it is about recognizing that your carrying capacity is limited. So that you know how to prioritize and know what is important to you.” (B4)

“Everyone is responsible of their selves per se. I think it is pretty clearly communicated in our organization. Everyone is responsible for their own well-being.” (B3)

Certain personal characteristics and the experience and age of the employee are significant for their employee well-being in SMOs

Other personal characteristics which were emphasized in the case organizations were the proactivity of the individual and the capability to endure and adapt to constant changes. In the case organizations, these were also experienced as stressful by some employees.

“Also, need to be able to work in a, in an environment where, that it can be, chaotic is maybe the wrong word, but again it can be a little bit random what is going on around you, so you need to be fine with that, that you might not necessarily know everything what happens.” (B2)

“stress can be found from the requirement of proactivity. So, to be able to actually be part of the working community and the dynamic organization, you have to be active constantly [...] the more actively you take part, the better you will make it in the working community, and the better you find the new projects and get to do the thing you want” (B1)

In addition, the ability to communicate clearly and having the courage to ask for help were highlighted.

“I think that you need to be able to communicate well because if you cannot communicate well, there will be conflicts or collisions or obscurities easily.” (B5)

The experience and age of an employee were also seen as significant in terms of the employee well-being. For employees, who were relatively young and had not been in working life for long, the autonomy and responsibility could feel overwhelming when there was too much independence. They also felt a lack of expectations and support from the organization.

“this was my first software development position and software development job, and I had no idea on where I would like to focus or how to proceed on my career or this field [...] I really felt that it caused me disadvantage that I did not know what was expected from me or where I am headed” (B5)

“When I started at the company, I was a junior like I came directly from a university, and I had thought that I would come into a company where I could always ask and could get much help. That did not happen at all, so basically, I was just like thrown to the fishes, thrown to the sharks and then, had to learn to swim and you learn a lot from that, but also you make mistakes and, I was very frustrated by that.” (B2)

4.6. Summarizing the findings

The main findings from this chapter are summarized in table 4 below:

Table 4. Main findings of the analysis

Theme	Main Findings
Organization	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Autonomy and authority to make decisions are experienced significant for the employee well-being, but the decision-making process may also cause stress for the employees ○ The employees have a highlighted role of their own well-being in SMOs, but the organization can support it in various ways ○ Competence development is a significant mean of employee support in SMOs ○ Rewarding is experienced to be fairer in SMOs, but detecting every employee's performance is challenging, as well as their individual recognition ○ Meaningful organizational values create satisfaction among employees in SMOs
Leadership	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Lack of hierarchy and shared leadership create satisfaction in SMOs ○ Sharing of leadership, as well as the lack of leadership, can also cause stress and challenges among employees
Work Community	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ The work community influences the experienced employee well-being and has an essential role in supporting the employee ○ Self-organizing fosters work engagement and co-operation in the work community ○ Communication has a significant role in the functioning of a work community and its social capital ○ The work community has a highlighted role in supporting each other by providing feedback
Work	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Work tasks and the authority to influence them, and the ways of working are significant resources for the employee well-being in SMOs ○ Flexible employee roles contain both resources & demands for the employees' work
Individual	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Self-leadership skills are essential for employee well-being in SMOs ○ Certain personal characteristics and the experience and age of the employee are significant for their employee well-being in SMOs

To summarize the results, employees experienced self-organizing mainly positively and experienced it to influence their well-being in many aspects favorably. Regarding the organizational factors, high autonomy and authority to make decisions created satisfaction and enhanced the employees' work engagement and motivation, among other outcomes. Employees had significant responsibility for their own well-being, but the case organizations also supported it in various positive ways, such as through fairer rewarding and extensive competence development possibilities. In addition, the case organizations' values and operating according to them were seen as meaningful. In terms of leadership, low hierarchy and flexible forming of leadership positions also created satisfaction among the employees.

Regarding the work community factors, the work community itself was experienced to impact employee well-being significantly, and self-organizing supported the work community on many levels, reflecting on individual employees' well-being. The work community's support for each other was also considered significant. Open communication in the case organizations had an essential role for the work community's co-operation and social capital and thus the employee well-being.

Having extensive authority over the work tasks and the ways of working were essential resources for the employee well-being. In addition, the possibility to adapt or change the side roles flexibly also enabled the employees' job crafting. When considering the factors on the individual level, good self-leadership skills, specific individual characteristics, and higher working life experience and age were experienced significant for the employee well-being.

However, there were also some characteristics in the case organizations, which caused the employees stress and challenges. Regarding the organizational factors, the distribution of authority was experienced positively, as stated above, yet the decision-making process itself was considered stressful at times. Even though there were the structures and practices to support employees coping and well-being, there were still risks and cases where the employee's exhaustion was not recognized early enough, and more organizational development on this matter was required. Furthermore, detecting every employee's performance was considered as challenging, as well as their individual recognition. In terms of the leadership factors, sharing of the leadership caused stress for some employees since not everyone enjoyed having the leadership position when needed. In addition, the lack of leadership was considered to cause challenges for the work and work community.

On the work community level, inoperative communication, such as constant interruptions from colleagues, was experienced to create stress, and thus, clarified frames and guidelines were needed for the communication to function. Also, easier feedback processes and more constructive feedback were hoped for. Regarding the work, many simultaneous roles and context switching were experienced as stressful, and the informal, flexible creating of roles was considered unfair and vague at times. The confrontation between the customer work and internal processes caused conflict in the organizations and having no fixed roles for particular internal work and processes was considered straining at times. In terms of individual factors, especially inexperienced employees considered the constant need for self-leadership and proactivity as straining and overwhelming, and required more support.

5. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

5.1. Research Summary

The aim of the thesis was to examine how the characteristics of self-managing organizations, such as structures, processes, practices, and culture, influence the experienced employee well-being in them by adopting a more comprehensive perspective on how employee well-being is formed in organizations.

When addressing this research topic, the following research question was formed:

How do the characteristics of a self-managing organization influence the experienced employee well-being?

This thesis covers two broad phenomena of self-organizing and employee well-being and their relations to each other. As shown in the literature review, both the phenomena are diverse, and there are no single definitions for them. Instead, they hold several meanings, interpretations, and aspects to them. The two phenomena have been previously studied together rather limitedly and only from distinct aspects. That is a research gap recognized in this thesis which it aims to fill for its part.

Answering the research question, interpretivism, and more precisely, phenomenology acted as the guiding research philosophies in this thesis since the purpose was to understand the studied phenomenon as it occurs to the person experiencing it. Both existing theory and the empirical data guided the conducting of the thesis, and thus the research approach adopted was abductive from its nature. The research design was a classic case study involving qualitative data collection and analysis methods. This thesis was conducted as a part of a TEOT -research project, aiming to study employee well-being in self-managing organizations with no managers and minimal hierarchy. Two software organizations participating in the TEOT -research project were examined in this thesis.

Thirteen semi-structured interviews were utilized in this thesis and analyzed through thematic analysis. A fundamental part of thematic analysis was coding the transcribed data from the interviews and categorizing the codes into themes. The characteristics influencing employee well-being in SMOs were addressed through five themes that consist of the factors influencing employee well-being in organizations, derived from the existing literature. The themes were the organization, leadership, work community, work, and individual factors. To briefly

summarize the results, several characteristics of SMOs were identified to influence the experienced employee well-being regarding each of the themes. Self-organizing was experienced mainly positively, and many of the characteristics of SMOs were experienced to influence the employee well-being favorably. However, some characteristics also caused challenges and negative impacts on the experienced employee well-being.

5.2. Theoretical Contribution

The thesis aimed to study how self-managing organizations' characteristics influence the experienced employee well-being adopting the comprehensive employee well-being perception. That was an identified research gap in the existing body of knowledge as far as the researcher knew when conducting the research. This research contributes both theoretically as well as practically to the phenomenon of employee well-being in SMOs.

A significant theoretical contribution of this study was examining SMOs, and especially employee well-being in them, in practice. Even though self-organizing is considered a relatively new concept in organization literature, there is already a significant body of literature on the phenomenon. However, there are not many empirical studies conducted on the topic. Instead, a few case examples have been utilized in multiple publications. Furthermore, there are even fewer studies conducted on employee well-being in SMOs.

Contrarily, employee well-being and well-being, in general, are relatively established phenomena and have been studied extensively in various organizational settings. However, as stated above, there are not many studies conducted on employee well-being in SMOs and none from the perspective of comprehensive employee well-being perception to the researcher's knowledge. This study supports the perception of employee well-being forming from various factors in the occupational setting according to the understanding of Manka (2012) and Nielsen et al. (2017). Thus, efforts to improve well-being in SMO's can be targeted on any or all the factors.

Self-organizing and employee well-being together have been studied relatively little, and most studies have concentrated on distinct aspects of employee well-being regarding self-organizing and self-leadership. That can be at least partially explained because of the diverseness of the two phenomena, thus not being particularly simple to study from a more comprehensive perspective. No studies have previously examined SMOs from the perspective of more comprehensive employee well-being perception, which was the purpose of this study, thus

contributing to the existing body of knowledge. Composing the existing but scattered body of literature and research on the phenomenon in chapter 2.3 provides a more comprehensive view of the connections between the two major phenomena, contributing to the existing body of knowledge for its part.

The empirical study contributes to the existing theory and literature by providing insights into the employees' individual experiences of the research phenomenon. Firstly, this study confirmed several advantages and opportunities of self-organizing on employee well-being, as found in previous research and literature. Employees in the case organizations experienced high autonomy and shared authority as significant resources, enabling their job crafting and motivating their work. These resources were also seen to enhance the work engagement and general employee well-being, which was in line with the DCM by Karasek (1979) and JD-R model by Demerouti et al. (2001) as well as with several other existing studies (e.g., Eurofound, 2017, p.141; Deci et al., 2001; Schaufeli, Bakker & Van Rhenen, 2009, Tims, Bakker & Derks, 2013).

Furthermore, the importance of the work community, its support, and especially the communication were seen as essential for creating the social capital in the case organizations, significantly influencing the employee well-being. That supported the views of literature both in self-organizing (Hamel, 2011, p. 55; Laloux, 2016, pp. 111—114; Martela, 2019) as well as employee well-being (Chiaburu & Harrison, 2008; Clausen, Meng & Borg, 2019; Manka, 2012, pp. 116—118). Also, competence development was experienced as an important form of organizational support in the case organizations, and the employees had significant authority and resources to foster it, which was experienced to influence their employee well-being positively. That was also in line with literature on self-organizing (Laloux, 2016, pp. 158—183) and the employee well-being in organizations (Manka, 2012, pp. 75—87).

In addition, many of the case organizations' organizational characteristics also seemed to be in line with the literature regarding the SMOs' common or ideal characteristics presented in chapter 2.1.2. Processes, such as decision-making, salary reviews, and conflict resolution, were similar to those presented in the literature and thus confirmed that these characteristics are likely to be relatively common in SMOs. Self-organizing's advantages in literature often include fast decision-making and changes (e.g., Hamel, 2011, pp. 50—58; Martela & Jarenko, 2017, pp. 11—15), which was also experienced positively in the case organizations. Many organizational practices, such as rewarding, and compensation also supported the literature's views on the SMOs common characteristics. In addition, there were cultural characteristics, such as transparency of information shared through technology, and training of communication and

conflict management, which followed the literature on self-managing organizations in chapter 2.1.2.

This research also confirmed some of the disadvantages and challenges of self-organizing on employee well-being, as found in previous research and literature. Firstly, the decision-making process was considered mainly positively but was also considered straining at times. As Kykyri (2008) pointed out, not necessarily every employee wants to be part of the decision-making, as it can also be considered a requirement instead of only an opportunity (p. 153). Secondly, according to the Finnish working life barometer (Lyly-Yrjänäinen, 2019, p. 42), employees in SMOs experienced more interruptions during their workdays, which was an observation also found in this research. Thirdly, Bernstein et al. (2016) recognized that, on the one hand, flexible role designing allows individuals to practice roles that support their strengths and interests, but on the other hand, the individual's working tasks may come somewhat fragmented (pp. 44—46). It was also experienced in the case organizations, since having many roles caused the work to have much context switching and time pressures, yet having these side roles could complement the main role's meaningfulness.

Finally, a disadvantage brought up in the data was that the constant need for self-leadership was often considered straining and overwhelming, especially according to young, inexperienced employees. According to Roberts and Foti (1998), employees' self-leadership capabilities affect their suitability to different work environments, and that job satisfaction is dependent on how well one's self-leadership capabilities fit the work environment. Furthermore, Rausku & Kinnunen (2003) have stated that some of the employees might not possess the necessary resources in order to benefit from the possibilities that come with the control. Also, Truxillo et al. (2012) proposed that autonomy is more likely associated with satisfaction, engagement, and higher performance for older than younger employees. Thus, some reflection can be made that it is possible that young employees, who are relatively new in the working life, may not possess as solid self-leadership skills as some of the more experienced employees, which could then explain some of their feelings.

Even though the results mainly supported the existing literature and theory, a few counter observations were also found. Firstly, as described in chapter 2.3, a few studies (e.g., Gerich, 2019; Kubicek, Korunka & Tement, 2014; Rasku & Kinnunen, 2003) indicate that a moderate level of autonomy at work leads to satisfactory outcomes regarding an individual's well-being, but both low and high levels of control tend to decrease it. The case organizations could be considered to have almost as much autonomy that it is possible in work organizations. However, during the interviews, no employees implicated that they would have felt to have too much

autonomy as it was. Instead, some employees felt unclarity regarding the roles and the lack of support straining, as in the case of younger employees. So, reflection from the interviews could be made that it was not the high autonomy that would strain the employees as it was, but the lack of some organizational characteristics that would support self-organizing and self-leadership in them even better.

Another contradiction between the results and existing research was that according to the Finnish life barometer (Lyly-Yrjänäinen, 2019, pp. 42—43), higher interaction in SMOs could be leading to an increasing number of conflicts in the organization. According to both case organizations, there seemed to be very few conflicts between the employees, which could be affected by the open communication culture and well-defined processes regarding any tensions.

The interviews conducted in the case organizations also provided new aspects to the phenomenon, which did not occur during the literature review. Firstly, there was no literature on the different actors' roles on employee well-being in SMO's. A possible conclusion was made in chapter 2.3, that in SMOs, the responsibility of employee well-being could be divided between the individuals, teams, and HR department, which seemed to apply in the case organizations. However, challenges on detecting the straining of an employee seemed to be highlighted in both case organizations yet were not addressed in the existing literature.

Secondly, shared leadership in SMOs was described mainly in a positive light in the literature, as described in chapter 2.1, when in the case organizations, it was discovered that not everyone enjoyed having the leadership positions, which were formed at the moment. Also, the lack of leadership, as well as unclear leadership roles, caused straining in employees. Furthermore, having no managers caused challenges in having everyone's efforts visible and supporting the employees' coping. Thirdly, even though the agile making of changes regarding structures and roles was considered an advantage both in literature in chapter 2.1.4 and the case organizations, constantly changing organizational structures also created confusion among the employees. Flexible creating of roles was also considered to be unfair and vague at times. In addition, the lack of fixed roles for internal work and processes in organization A was considered straining.

The observations above were not addressed in the existing literature but were still significant for their parts and would thus then require further examination.

5.3. Practical Implications

In this section, some practical implications are proposed based on the findings in this study. These implications are aimed at organizations in the software industry, which possess at least some characteristics of a self-managing organization. Self-managing organizations in other fields of business can benefit from these implications as well. The main topics of the practical implications are listed below in figure 8:

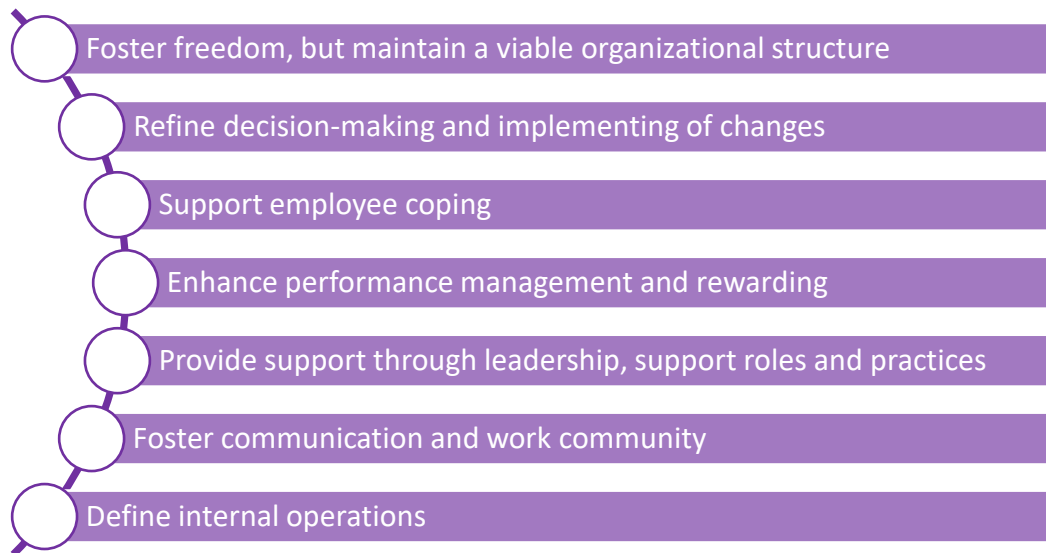


Figure 8. Practical implications

Foster freedom, but maintain a viable organizational structure

As described in the results, employees experienced even extensive freedom and autonomy to influence their well-being positively. Thus, organizations, which operate or wish to operate in a self-managing way, should provide as much freedom for employees in the organization that is possible but still maintain a viable organizational structure. This freedom considers different organizational levels from the level of an individual's autonomy to organization level freedom, where the employees can influence the organizational level matters accordingly to the commonly agreed processes and guidelines, which the employees should be aware of. What seems to be especially important for the employees is the possibility to influence their work tasks, which should be fostered as much as possible. Nonetheless, as unclear organizational structures may strain some employees, organizations should aim to clarify what established, fixed structures or cells they have and what are the ad hoc structures at the time. When forming the cells, their purpose should be defined, and this information should be shared with other employees. However, it does require active updating of the data in the communication systems.

Refine decision-making and implementing of changes

The decision-making processes in the case organizations were experienced as especially good, and thus organizations operating in self-managing ways could adopt these processes into their decision making. However, the decision-making processes could still be advanced so that organizations define more clearly who should participate in the process so that no employees participate in decision-making processes that do not consider them. Also, the authority on making organization-wide decisions should be clarified if specific organizational structures, such as corporation structure, create uncertainty on it. The decision-making processes and other development projects should always have a particular purpose and clear goals so that there is no unnecessary dwelling during the processes and that they would advance efficiently.

Furthermore, the different changes and experiments should include more retrospective and documentation of them to learn from them for the future. As constant, simultaneous changes are experienced as straining, the changes should be planned thoroughly, so no unnecessary changes are conducted, and perhaps it could be evaluated whether the changes could be scheduled better. Thus, as a summary, the decision-making guidelines could be refined to make the decision-making even more efficient and pleasant.

Support employee coping

The coping of employees was a concern that was brought up in the findings. Even though the responsibility of employee well-being can be seen to be at the individual responsibility to a large extent, organizations operating in self-managing ways could still support it even more. Employees' self-leadership skills play an essential part in their well-being, and thus training on relevant matters such as time management could be organized. The organizations should also seek roles and structures that could better the employee well-being better. Organizations could, for example, provide outside occupational psychiatric services for the employees or build up coaching structures and roles, which could provide relevant support regarding the nature of the work and inside the organizations' frames. The need for a fixed HR role should also be investigated and considered thoroughly. Some self-managing organizations such as Vincer in Finland provide employees leadership and support as several services through a platform (LaaS). SMOs need to contemplate and evaluate which type of structures, roles, and practices would support employee coping the best way in their organization.

Furthermore, the facilities in which employees work and practices targeted to support employee well-being are significant, even though they alone cannot generate employee well-being in an SMO. The comfortability and functioning of the working offices and spaces are essential to foster efficient working and the satisfaction of the employees. Different events within and outside of working hours are also a way to enhance the work community's functioning and create a better atmosphere. Having the possibility for the employees to organize events themselves and affect their working environment is also seen as significant to build the spirit of the working community and foster employee well-being in them.

Enhance performance management and rewarding

Determining salaries is a process that has to be redefined when moving from traditional organizations to SMOs. Salary reviews described in the results were considered as good practices and processes since they promoted equality and fairness in the case organizations. Thus, they could be adopted by organizations, which aim to operate in self-managing ways. However, there are still other issues that should be considered regarding employees' performance and rewards. Determining salaries and salary levels can seem unclear, as employees possess several roles, and there is no single manager to evaluate the performance. It could be beneficial for organizations to measure the employees' performance even if the goals would be set only by themselves and perhaps reviewed with a growth coach or such support role. These reviews could also be used as part of the salary reviews justification, thus bringing employees' efforts better visible.

In addition, a coherent salary system could enhance equality regarding salaries. The transparency of salaries also seems to be necessary for equality in SMOs. Even though other kinds of recognitions are often provided commonly to the whole organization, some forms of individual recognitions and rewarding seemed to be hoped for. For this, organizations could create processes or practices where employees could reward each other with small gifts, such as chocolate bars or movie tickets, which would not create any unequal rewarding practices but would still provide them the hoped recognition.

Provide support through leadership, support roles and practices

Even though employees in SMOs are self-led to a great extent, they still require support and leadership to act as part of the organization. It is necessary to have certain leadership positions

in the different teams and cells in order for work to advance and to avoid unclear work tasks and roles. Thus, the leadership positions should be defined even though they are created flexibly. As some employees experience these leadership responsibilities as burdensome, enough support and training should be provided for employees to act in leadership positions. Another issue that was brought up in the findings was the lack of support for young employees. Organizations should put effort into supporting young or new employees, by, for example, organizing tutoring practices for them at the beginning of the employment. Also, organizations could organize and provide all interested employees mentoring programs. Supporting competence development at the organizational level is also considered an essential part of employee support. The practices and processes presented in the results were experienced positively by the majority of employees.

Foster communication and work community

Communication and the work community's functioning seem to be in a highlighted position in organizations operating in self-managing ways. Transparent sharing of information is necessary for the SMOs to function. However, it is not enough that the information is visible for everyone, but it needs to be shared to be aware of the current matters and what they mean for them. Clear guidelines for communication should be established to know how information should be shared and how employees should communicate with each other to avoid too much interruption or straining of other employees. In case of any tension or conflicts, conflict resolution processes presented in the findings help solve those situations and create an atmosphere of trust and social capital in the working community. Communication can also be fostered by providing communication training as well as encouraging employees to introduce their selves and ways of communicating to each other by, for example, organizing self-assessment tests for employees to conduct and share with each other.

Providing and receiving feedback is also an important matter. Providing different communication channels and processes is needed to foster feedback in organizations. Conducting retrospectives after projects is an excellent way to reflect everyone's performance and to learn from the project for the future. Also, discussing how or what kind of feedback the employees are looking for can provide them more relevant feedback. A ready set of feedback questions or feedback forms could provide more constructive feedback for the employees.

Define internal operations

What seemed to strain the employees in the case organizations was the unclarity in how the internal operations were performed and valued and how the roles for them were formed in some cases. Thus, organizations should define how much employees should focus on customer work and internal operations and then communicate them to employees. Similarly, rewarding on those tasks should be performed accordingly to this valuation. Organizations should also seek ways for the employees working outside the organization to participate in the internal operations, if possible. Even though flexible forming of roles was valued, there should still be internal recruiting processes to the roles or cells, which not anyone can join if desired. When thinking about forming a new cell or role to perform some internal development project, organizations should evaluate whether it is more efficient to have the project outsourced or to perform it inside the organization. Organizations should also consider whether it would be better to have some of the internal operations performed by a fixed role, with the expertise to it, than by having other employees perform them besides their main roles.

5.4. Evaluation of the Research

Traditionally the trustworthiness of a study has been evaluated through the concepts of reliability and validity. However, they have been criticized since these terms originate from evaluating quantitative research and are thus not adaptable to qualitative research. There are several views on how qualitative research's trustworthiness should be proven, which differ from each other quite remarkably, and thus there are no universal guidelines on evaluating a qualitative study. (Tuomi & Sarajärvi, 2018.) In qualitative research, the researcher and their subjectivity can be seen as the most important research tools. Thus, the researcher and the conducted research process can be considered the main criteria in evaluating a study. (Eskola & Suoranta, 1998.)

The aim of this study was to explore interpretations and meanings created on employee well-being in SMOs, thus creating an enhanced understanding of the phenomenon. With this research aim in mind, interpretivism, and more precisely phenomenology, was chosen as the most appropriate way to approach the research to gain rich and comprehensive views on the phenomenon. As business organizations' contexts and situations are rather complex, the interpretive approach can be seen as highly suitable for research in business and management. When conducting research from the interpretive approach, it is essential to recognize that the

researcher's assumptions and beliefs and the interpretations of the collected data significantly influence the research process. (Saunders et al., 2019, p. 149.)

Data was collected through semi-structured interviews, as described in chapter 3.2. The participants were voluntary, all of legal age, and knew the purpose of the study and the use and processing of the information they provided. Informed consent was acquired from all the participants. As the participants were voluntary, instead of randomly selected, it may have affected the study results. If employees have poor experiences from work and their well-being at work, they might not be willing to participate in such a study.

Furthermore, the interviews were conducted by several interviewers from the TEOT -research group, which according to the nature of qualitative research, influenced the course of the interviews. Even though the interviews were anonymous, the participants may still restrain their answers and leave out, for example, negative aspects of the topics. However, also challenges were brought up during the interviews, and the participants seemed to share their experiences openly.

The interviews were transcribed through an outsourced partner in as much detail as possible. The participants' names were separated from the data and instead referred to codes to maintain their anonymity. Besides, any information that would have revealed the identity either directly or indirectly was left out from this thesis. As the interviews were conducted only once at a specific time, the results could be considered only as experiences of the interviewed group of people at a specific time. However, this thesis's duration, from conducting the interviews to finishing the thesis, lasted altogether approximately a year, which may increase the trustworthiness of the research.

The analysis of the collected data was conducted as thematic analysis, as described in chapter 3.3. The analysis process started with the coding of the data, line-by-line, and each point in the data was observed equally. The codes were formed from the data and constantly developed when proceeding with the data and comparing them to each other. The coding was done systematically throughout, and any development in the coding was then implemented to the entire data. As the study's purpose was to examine the phenomenon through the comprehensive employee well-being perspective, the themes were generated from the existing theory. The codes were carefully compared to each other to find which of them had significant relations before categorizing them into the themes. Rather than only describing the findings generated from the data, also interpretations were made on their meanings. Extracts from the actual data

supported these findings. Each stage of the analysis process was conducted thoroughly with particular caution paid to the analysis process's consistency and trustworthiness.

What is noteworthy regarding the literature review is that most of the sources used were peer-reviewed research articles, which are considered trustworthy sources. However, more popularized sources, such as *Reinventing Organizations* by Laloux (2016) and *Työnilö* by Manka (2012), were also used through careful consideration. The authors of these sources had been recognized in the scientific community broadly, and the sources could be considered significant in their field of subject. Furthermore, these types of sources were justified and supported through other publications on the topic.

Since this thesis contained examining and handling sensitive data when describing individuals' experiences in their working environment, the significance of following research ethics in this thesis's conducting was recognized. In the research project and this thesis, the responsible conduct of research formed by the Finnish National Board on Research Integrity (TENK) was followed when considering the ethics of the study. The research's responsible conduct contains principles of conducting research overall, methods applied, referencing, and managing a research project (TENK, 2012). In addition, the *Guide to Writing Academic Papers* by Tampere University (Bethwaite, 2019) was utilized to follow the standards set for academic writing.

5.5. Limitations and Future Research

As described in the previous section, the study was conducted following a scientific approach to it, but intrinsically the study still contains some limitations as well. The main limitations of this study consider the collected sample of the data and the research methods.

Firstly, in this study, two organizations operating in a self-managing way were examined, and altogether thirteen employees were interviewed. Both organizations operated in the software industry, and the interviewed employees' offices were located in Finland. Thus, this study's results cannot be generalized to self-managing organizations in other fields of business or other countries either. The industry's characteristics in question influenced the results and studied perspectives broadly, and thus would not likely be possible to repeat in organizations from other fields. Some of this study's topics were related to Finnish laws, such as labor and occupational health and safety laws, which is why the results may not be adopted to organizations operating under different laws.

Secondly, the interviewed employees were highly educated knowledge workers who worked in the software industry, which has a highly requested labor market. It may influence their employee well-being itself and their capabilities to work in a self-managing organization. The employees also participated voluntarily in the interviews, knowing its topic, which raises a question, whether their level of employee well-being was higher than the other employees in the organizations.

Thirdly, there are limitations regarding the conducting of the study. As the interviews were conducted only once at a specific time, with a relatively limited sample, the results can be considered only as experiences of the interviewed group of people at a specific time. Thus, they cannot be generalized to reflect the interviewed organizations' views or even the interviewed employees' perceptions at all times. Indeed, part of the nature of interviewing is the uncertainty, whether the participants dare to tell their experiences as they are, even when being aware of the anonymity. The chosen methods for analyzing data also possessed challenges and disadvantages, in addition to their advantages, as described in chapter 3.3.

The collected data was rich and offered many perspectives to the studied topic. As this study was a master's thesis and had its limitations regarding its extent, many exciting but not relevant matters had to be left outside the scope. However, this leaves many possibilities for future research on the topic. Firstly, as part of the TEOT -research project, organizations from other business fields were interviewed. By analyzing the data from the other organizations focusing on the research questions in this study, more broad views regarding the field of business could be reached. In addition, the data from the quantitative survey could be utilized to gain a broader understanding of the employee well-being in the participating organizations. Furthermore, there are other business fields outside of the TEOT- research project scope, which could be examined as well.

Secondly, future research could examine the topic culture-wide, thus gaining a better understanding of the different views and organizational practices in other countries and cultures. Thirdly, quantitative research could be conducted based on the different findings found in this study. With a larger quantitative sample, this study's results could be confirmed or challenged and generalized more. However, what is notable in this study is that it was conducted as part of the TEOT -research project, and thus by acquainting oneself to the other publications of this research project, a relatively comprehensive view on the topic and from the collected data can be reached.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A: Employee interview

Work:

- How long have you worked for this organization?
- How would you describe this workplace if you compare it for example to your previous experiences? What is special in this workplace?
- Please, describe your typical day at work. What do you do? Which tasks do you spend the most of your time on?
- What are your current responsibilities at your work?
- How was your current (working) role created or defined?
- If you want to change your (working) role, how does it happen? Are you capable to doing so by your own initiative?

Subjective wellbeing:

Resources:

- What is best in your own job? What motivates you most at the moment?
- What kind of employee gets on well in this organization? (What kind of skills/competences should one have to succeed?)
- How does your organization support learning?
- In what ways do you receive feedback at your work? How do you give feedback to others?

Demands:

- What is demanding or exhausting in your own job? If you have stress, what causes it?
- What is psychologically demanding at your work? What is socially demanding at your workplace?

Leadership:

- How do you think this company / organization is managed?

Organization practices:

Task division and creating new tasks:

- How are tasks allocated at your workplace? And how are roles determined?
- If a need to create a new team / role / task emerges, how does it happen? Can you influence on creating such a new team/role/task if you see that it is needed?

Decision-making:

- How would you describe decision-making at your workplace?
- Do you have the authority to make decisions concerning yourself and your own work? Do the employees in general have this kind of authority?
- What kind of decision-making processes are used at this workplace?

- If you have to buy something you need for example tools, software, etc. How does the decision-making process work in this case?
- How can you participate in decision-making concerning the whole company?
- How can you participate in developing the organization and its processes?
- How is the strategy created in the organization (strategic goals and plans of actions to achieve these goals)? Who participates / or has an influence on strategic planning?

Information / Transparency:

- What kind of information do you need in your work and how do you get it? What kind of (information) channels and tools do you use? Is this information easy to access? Is it adequate?

Rewarding:

- What kind of reward and compensation mechanisms there are in your workplace?
- How are salaries determined? Can employees have an influence on salary levels and other compensation mechanisms in your workplace?
- Are the salaries transparent information for everyone?

Organizational demands:

- What kind of company practices are demanding for you? What kind of company practices help you at work / or motivate you?

Supporting well-being at work:

- What kind of climate there is at your workplace? How does cooperation work in practice?
- If there are conflicts or tensions between employees, how are they handled?
- How is employee wellbeing taken care of? Who takes care of it?
- If there are problems in personal wellbeing or other challenges what kind of support is available?
- Do you know how to get support at your work or in your wellbeing if you need it?

Close-up:

- In your opinion what are the particularly good practices at this workplace?
- What would you like to be changed at your workplace?
- Is there something else you would like to tell us?
- Would you like to ask something?

Appendix B: Consent Form



INFORMED CONSENT

Research project on employee experiences in self-managing work (TEOT-project)

I have been asked to participate in the forementioned scientific research project, and I have received both written and oral information on the research as well as I given an opportunity to ask questions from the researchers.

I am fully aware that the participation is voluntary and that I have right to suspend or withdraw my participation without any given reason. I understand that the information I provide will be treated confidentially.

_____ .20

Place

I agree to participate:

Signature

Name

_____ .20

Place

The recipient of the consent:

Signature

Name

Permission to archive interview in the Data Archive

My interviews may be archived in anonymized form for release to research, study, and teaching (or for research and advanced theses from pro graduate). The transfer of data to the Data Archive shall take place no earlier than 1.7.2026.

My interview must not be archived anonymously in the Data Archive.