How context creates motivation: The effects of social context in a situation of job insecurity – a case study

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Abstract

Title	How context creates motivation: Meaning and complexity of the magic formula
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Purpose	This research project provides insights in how knowledge workers make sense of their context of job insecurity in terms of motivation and aims to develop a theoretical understanding on motivation from a more conceptual point of view.
Relevance	There are several universally acknowledged motivation theories that claim to explain what motivates people. According to these theories, the job-threatening situation of our research should result in a lasting decrease in motivation. However, our findings suggest otherwise.
Methodology	Following an interpretive, qualitative approach, we conducted fifteen in-depth, semi-structured interviews with fifteen knowledge workers of ToTech. During this research project we took a reflexive standpoint.
Findings	Job insecurity does not necessarily lead to a lasting decrease in motivation, as the meaning making process of knowledge workers is determined interactively. The interactive aspects culture, norms, morals and identity influence what motivates knowledge workers. From the findings of this research that highlight the complexity of the meaning making process of knowledge workers, we can conclude that there is no magic formula that generates motivation.
Contribution	This research contributes to the motivation literature by applying the 'motivation triangle theory' to a real life context for the first time in order to understand motivation from a socio-cultural perspective. As such, we also contribute by testing its validity and usability, even though it cannot be generalized (yet).
Key Words	Motivation, job insecurity, motivation triangle, interactive motivation, knowledge workers, redundancy, downsizing, reorganization

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1. Introduction

The concept 'motivation' has intrigued many academics throughout the decades and is a popular subject both in academia as in everyday life. Notwithstanding who discusses motivation and how, the topic seems to keep fascinating people for the paramount reason that motivation creates (Ryan & Deci, 2000). As a result, researchers have been, and still are, captivated with the idea to find out how people are motivated. And would it not be a delight to uncover the mysterious ingredient or secret formula that can simply 'motivate'? In this research project we will demonstrate that because of the human aspect, motivation is much more context-related than has been suggested in common notions so far. Instead, we suggest that the way people can be motivated is highly dependent on interactive aspects such as identity, morals, norms and culture. As such, we place the individual in its context and point out how both individual and environment interrelate, influencing sense-making and self concept. The rationale behind our course of action is that we want to add to motivation theories by placing a relatively new approach – the motivation triangle – in a real life context. The uniqueness of the context at ToTech[1], the company where we conducted our research, contributes to the depth in which we can test its validity and usefulness. After contacting ToTech, a knowledge intensive firm (KIF), we had scheduled a meeting with a HR representative to discuss potential research topics at the beginning of February. The day before this meeting, February 4, an email was sent to all employees of the Gothenburg site to inform them about upcoming redundancies[2]. The relatively new CEO announced that a significant number of employees would be made redundant at the Gothenburg site, however, the exact number remained uncertain. As a result of this meeting we agreed on a research topic, namely employee motivation in the context of job insecurity.

1.1 Empirical and theoretical problem

One month after the CEO's e-mail regarding the upcoming redundancies, it was announced at the so-called all-employee-meeting in Stockholm that half of Gothenburg's workforce would be made redundant as a consequence of the global radical reorganization. We deem the current situation of ToTech a situation of radical job insecurity for all employees, because half of the workforce will be laid off. In addition, there is no information available yet regarding which employees or departments will be affected. We immediately considered this a very interesting setting to study and were interested in conducting an open exploration of how employees make

1 Due to the integrity of the case company, names have been replaced with pseudonyms.
2 For an overview of the communication regarding the redundancies, please refer to appendix I.

sense of their current and uncertain situation within the organization. However, ToTech was mainly interested in the concept of motivation and requested us to investigate how employees are motivated in the current situation. Therefore, we started conducting empirical research with an open approach to discover how employees make sense of their current situation, yet with a focus on motivation. Our findings had surprising results and formed a mystery, namely that employees regained motivation after only a two-day dip, even though they remained in a radical job-threatening situation. From this mystery we derived our empirical problem and consequently we wondered if job insecurity does not influence motivation, what *does* influence motivation? During our literature review the intrinsic and extrinsic motivation theories (Maslow, 1943; Alderfer, 1972; Herzberg, 1959; Adams, 1963; Vroom, 1964; Locke & Latham, 1990) did not provide an adequate answer to our empirical problem and, as a result, we focused our attention on the 'motivation triangle theory' (Alvesson & Kärreman, 2012) and in particular interactive motivation. This element of the motivation triangle predominantly considers context and enabled us to analyze our empirical findings in terms of meaning and complexity. The addition of interactive motivation to intrinsic and extrinsic motivation provides a better understanding of what happens in the case we study. Interactive motivation has not been applied to a real life context before. By applying interactive motivation to the context of our research project, we aim to circumnavigate a potential theoretical problem.

1.2 Empirical and theoretical purpose

What differentiates this research from most other research on motivation (Maslow, 1943; Herzberg, 1959; Vroom, 1964), is that we take the complex meaning-making process of the individuals of this story seriously. As such, our aim is twofold in that we focus on the one hand on an empirical and on the other hand on a theoretical purpose. Our empirical purpose is to explore how knowledge workers in our case study make sense of their context of job insecurity in terms of motivation. Once this is discovered we arrive at our theoretical purpose, which aims to develop a theoretical understanding of motivation from a more conceptual point of view. This latter purpose is also why we take an open approach in this research. By exploring the sense making of interviewees in their specific context, we will be able to determine whether motivation is dependent on anything other than intrinsic and extrinsic motivators. As such we aim to develop a foundation for our research.

1.3 Research questions

The research questions that guide us in our research are:

- How do knowledge workers make sense of job insecurity?
- How does job insecurity in the context of radical reorganization influence the motivation of knowledge workers?

1.4 Report structure

The empirical material of this research project consists of semi-structured interviews with fifteen employees who are in radical job insecurity. The empirical data was gathered at the knowledge intensive multinational mobile phone manufacturing company ToTech and approached from an open, interpretive perspective. After presenting our methodical approach in-depth we will discuss the theoretical framework of our research. We start by presenting the method before the theory, because this is a pivotal aspect of our research, which forms a paramount understanding of this research project. Then, after describing the background and knowledge intensive context of the organization ToTech, we will investigate the research questions presented above. During our investigation we will highlight the importance of considering complexity and meaning in understanding motivation. In our discussion and conclusion we examine how context influences the way in which knowledge workers make sense of job insecurity and how this influences the motivation of knowledge workers. Finally, we draw the bold and controversial conclusion that challenges the universally acknowledged motivation theories concerning their applicability to various contexts and thus usefulness in general.

2. Method

This chapter's objective is to outline the methodological understanding our research is based on. Since the aim of our study is to gain understanding of the interviewees' meaning making regarding motivation in the context of job insecurity, we will conduct a qualitative case study, where in depth interpretations and reflexivity are important. In this section we will inform the reader about our metatheoretical starting point and our research design. Subsequently, we will elucidate the method we used and explain how reflexivity played an important role in our research in order to secure the credibility of our research. This chapter ends by discussing the knowledge contribution.

2.1 Our metatheoretical starting point

We chose the interpretive paradigm for our case study on how employees experience the current situation of job insecurity and motivation, as we are interested in analysing and interpreting the subjective understanding of our participants. We aim at understanding situations in their uniqueness at a particular point in time, as part of a particular context and interactions (Merriam, 2002) between knowledge workers and the social context. We will try to discover how knowledge workers attach significance to their setting and how this influences their motivation. Our goal of understanding is an end in itself, rather than to pursue what may happen in the future (Merriam, 2002). The interpretive paradigm is particularly interesting in our case study as we aim at understanding how the interviewees make sense of their situation, and thus their work, in terms of moral, norms, identity and culture. Moreover, the interpretive paradigm defines the specific research design for our case study (Merriam, 2002).

In our case study we work from the assumption that reality is socially constructed through acts of interpretation (Prasad, 2005) and that individual realities are subjective (Merriam, 2002). Likewise, we consider knowledge as subjective, and hence, notions of true knowledge as misleading (Burrell & Morgan, 1979). We seek to understand the meaning people have constructed (Merriam, 2002) and we will study how the interviewees understand their realities by looking at how they talk about their experiences of the current situation. This connects to the wider goal for social constructionists, namely to study how reality is socially constructed (Alvesson & Sköldberg, 2009). Thus, what is stated in our analysis and what conclusions are drawn from our analysis, are not to be considered as representative of an objective truth or reality. Participants' views expressed in interviews are value laden and should be understood in that particular context.

As part of the interpretive paradigm, we as researchers are influential and have a particular weight in our research. We are part of, interact with and thus influence the social construct in which we find ourselves as researchers. This entails that our social and educational background influences the way we conduct, interpret and analyse our empirical material and our research in its entirety. In addition, we believe that the pre-understanding we gained from our studies, will enable us to respond and develop the process so that we have the opportunity to understand our participants better (Alvesson & Sköldberg, 2009).

2.2 Research design

We performed a qualitative study, as we wanted to conduct an open exploration of how the interviewees make sense of job insecurity and how they are motivated in this situation. We aimed at understanding how the interviewees in a situation of job insecurity attach importance to their context. The key of understanding qualitative research lies within "(…) the idea that meaning is socially constructed by individuals in interaction with their world" (Merriam 2002, p.3).

We followed inductive reasoning for our research, trying to stay as open as possible to the data and our research. However, we are aware that we are naturally biased by means of the experiences we gained during our social, educational and working life and will elaborate on this more in depth when we discuss our reflexive approach. We started collecting empirical data before going into the theory, as, according to Charmaz (1990, cited in Ryan & Bernard 2003), the creation and shaping of unusual ideas and correlations can be inhibited by theorizing before the data collection process. In addition, we aimed at an open understanding of the interviewees' sense making of job insecurity, and by digging into the theory before collecting and analysing our empirical material, there was a risk that we then tried to discover only the phenomena we were looking for (Ryan & Bernard, 2003). As an inductive approach, we collected empirical material in order to build concepts, hypotheses and theories, rather than deductively deriving suppositions or hypotheses to be tested (Merriam, 2002).

2.3 Method

The primary sources of our empirical data are fifteen face-to-face, semi-structured interviews we conducted on site at one of the organization's headquarters. We believe that semi-structured interviews are the most suitable qualitative method for our research since our research is based on individuals' perceptions and semi-structured interviews allowed us to not lead the interviews in the direction of our expectations. By this means we were able to uncover what interviewees believed to be occurring in the organization. The first two interviews were introductory interviews held on February 25, after an email was sent out by the new CEO on February 4 concerning coming redundancies. At this point the actual number of the redundancies was unsure. These two interviews were conducted with two employees from the HR department to gain more insights in the current situation of ToTech from an employee's perspective. Shortly after these interviews, on March 9, the so-called all-employee meeting in Stockholm took place were the actual number of one thousand layoffs was announced. From March 16 onwards, in a timeframe of two weeks, we conducted the remaining thirteen interviews. We only consider these thirteen interviewees to be in a situation of radical job insecurity, since they were interviewed after being informed that half of the workforce would be laid off, but that details concerning who would be laid off and when were not known. An overview of our sample can be found in appendix II.

We strived to have an unbiased sample to understand how employees experience the current situation of ToTech. Our sample existed of fifteen employees spread over the six departments that consist within ToTech. Fifteen participants on a workforce of two thousand employees might seem a relatively small number, however, as Alvesson and Sköldberg (2009) argue, when the research is focused on meaning making rather than frequency, the number of interviews is less relevant. Every tenth employee on the department list was selected for our research. By this means, selecting our interviewees randomly, we created an unbiased sample in terms of gender, age, function, department, work experience and number of years working for ToTech. We interviewed eleven men and four women, whereas the man woman distribution at ToTech is 80:20.

As part of the semi-structured interviews, we created a list of questions we wanted to touch upon during the interviews. This list functioned as a guideline during the interviews, however, we sometimes deviated from the list when appropriate, for example when we asked follow up questions. In general, we asked follow up questions when we had the idea that we came across a, for the interviewee, significant topic. Furthermore, some themes that were mentioned by the interviewees were worth investigating, partly as a result of the encounter with unexpected phenomena.

The interviews were conducted with an open, or storytelling, approach where we asked our interviewees to describe their perception of the situation as freely as possible, with the aim to discover the employee's sense making of job insecurity. We allowed the interviewees to interpret the question from their own perspective as we explained the interviewees that they were free to talk about whatever popped up in their mind and that we were not looking for anything specific.

As the interviews continued, we steered towards questions concerning motivation, in order to investigate how their current context of job insecurity influences their motivation. Participants were asked to elaborate on the term motivation in the hope to gain insight in their meanings of motivation (Alvesson & Sveningsson, 2003). Typical key questions contained *'Do you feel motivated at ToTech? Why? Why not?'* and '*How does your motivation translate in your daily activities?*'

Both researchers conducted all interviews together. This interview arrangement worked particularly well since both researchers posed different questions and had time to reflect on the formulation of these questions. The interviews lasted approximately one hour and were recorded, transcribed, anonymized, coded, thematized and analysed afterwards in order to discover patterns, contradictions and fragmentations (Alvesson & Sveningsson, 2003). We rendered the transcripts of the interviews anonymous, as to be less biased while coding, thematizing and analysing. In addition, we independently coded, thematized and analysed the interviews in order to create our own interpretation of the data and encourage reflexivity by combining separately created interpretations. Subsequently, we started the coding process with different interviews so that we had different starting points. After we transcribed and coded the interviews, we started thematizing the interviews. Thematic data analysis was conducted in regard to explore the answers to our research questions. The themes were entered into an Excel document, in order to easily compare between the different interviewees. We looked for both paramount as well as smaller, yet significant, themes. To order the themes, we established clusters that consisted of different themes. Afterwards, we discussed our interpretations together, not necessarily 'killing ideas', yet with the pre-understanding that it is acceptable to interpret differently.

2.4 Reflexivity and credibility

When conducting qualitative research, one has to be aware of the possible weaknesses of the method. For example, empirical material used in qualitative studies does not mirror an objective reality and research hypothesises and theory cannot be objectively proven through the analysis of data (Alvesson & Sveningsson, 2003). Hence, the results of this research project may be applicable to the context of this specific research, but are not generalizable. For both readers and researchers of qualitative research, it is important to acknowledge the issue of trustworthiness of qualitative research, especially since we as researchers have an active role in the production and analysis of the descriptive data (Merriam, 2002; Shenton, 2004). In addition, Alvesson and Kärreman (2007), argue that the empirical data is effected by, dependent on and related with the interpretation or meaning of the researchers. Thus, as Alvesson and Kärreman (2007, p. 1266) conclude, "(…) empirical material never exists outside perspectives and interpretative repertoires". Therefore, this makes reflexivity inevitable in order to secure credibility of our research.

Reflexivity refers to the continuous process of self-reflection and thereby improves qualitative research and increases the credibility and understanding of the findings (Darawsheh, 2014; Alvesson & Sköldberg, 2009). According to Alvesson and Sköldberg (2009), being reflexive indicates that you view the empirical material through different lenses and take a step back from your research by asking questions, such as *What are our interviews actually telling us?* and *What is the meaning and understanding behind the interviewees' expressions?,* to gain different insights, credible interpretations and an adequate understanding of the empirical material by interpreting the material from a range of standpoints. It is important that researchers are aware of the reason for their view, where they stand, what they see, how they got there and how they communicate their findings in a way that is understandable for their readers. Reflexivity involves a critical awareness of what the researcher's particular view means for the research and the results and, in addition, reflexivity moves away from the assumption that there is one single school of thought that has superior authority (Alvesson & Sköldberg, 2009). Being aware of our biases and assumptions is essential in qualitative research since pre-understandings influence the way we interpret the same data (Alvesson & Sköldberg, 2009).

Throughout our research we aimed to be as reflexive as possible by using reflexivity as a framework by using the four key reflective elements Alvesson and Sköldberg (2009) identified: grounded theory, hermeneutics, critical theory and postmodernist schools of thought. Using these four key elements was particularly useful in helping us to openly explore the concept of motivation and job insecurity within organization. As we approached our research form the interpretive approach, our main focus within the framework of reflexivity was on grounded theory and hermeneutics.

The first element is grounded theory or dataism, and took place during the first stage of our research, namely where we had interaction with the empirical material by conducting and transcribing the interviews. At this level we relied on our access to the reality and stayed close to the reality through following the data, while our interpretations were low or abstract (Alvesson & Sköldberg, 2009). To increase the possibility of diversity in our findings and not to be influenced by the interpretations of one another, we anonymized all interviews and individually thematized and analysed the interviews so that we increased the opportunity to discover different research results. After we separately analysed all interviews, we discussed our interpretations together, not with the aim to eliminate ideas or interpretations, but with the understanding that it is valuable to have different interpretations and that there is not one, domineering truth. As a result of discussing our interpretations together, we agreed, but also disagreed about certain findings. For example, before we started the interviews, we always explained to the interviewees that we conducted the interviews for academic purposes and that all interviewees would be kept anonymous. During the interview with Johan Svensson from the Companion Products department the following happened:

"So, you are free to say whatever you would like."

"I would probably have done that anyway. The atmosphere is quite good in here, so."

One of the researchers interpreted this as if Johan Svensson meant to say that he felt very at ease in the meeting room and, therefore, felt free to express all his thoughts and feelings throughout the interview. The other researcher, however, interpreted this rather differently: as the interview just started and no conversation between researchers and interviewee had taken place yet, the researcher considered that statement not to be about the atmosphere in the meeting room, but rather about the atmosphere at ToTech in general. Such a big difference in interpretation at the beginning of the interview could have influenced how we interpreted many of the other statements Johan Svensson made. Therefore, it was very valuable to exchange our viewpoints and understand each other's interpretations in order to make sense of the interview from different perspectives.

The second element is hermeneutics, an interpretive methodology where researchers intend to look for meanings beyond the surface (Alvesson & Sköldberg, 2009). At this stage, we as researchers aimed to uncover the underlying meaning beyond the surface of the data by interpretation. After transcribing the interviews, we looked for meanings beyond the surface by asking ourselves critical questions such as *What does the data tell us?*, *What is really going on here?*. While moving backwards and forwards between the empirical material, we looked for linkages between the data and the wider context (Prasad, 2005). Following the circle of objectivist hermeneutics, we aimed at achieving an understanding of one element of the paramount context and conversely, as we were aware that meaning can only be attributed to a part, if the part is understood in the context of the whole (Alvesson & Sköldberg, 2009). Therefore, our research is based on our discoveries concerning how interviewees' worldviews and meanings regarding motivation are expressed in the interviews and can be related to the organizational or cultural context they are exposed to. Furthermore, we separately delved into different theories and literature regarding motivation and job insecurity to gain a broader knowledge base, which in turn increased reflexivity and the diversity of our analysis. We were aware that our pre-understanding formed our understanding and knowledge of the topic research and that interpreting and analysing the data added to our pre-understanding throughout the research (Alvesson & Sköldberg, 2009).

At the third element, critical theory, we took a more critical and distant point of view on our research and findings. From a more distant view we considered all social forms that influenced us and our research so far, such as power, power relations, politics and ideology and created self-evident or taken for granted assumptions that perhaps became apparent through hermeneutical interpretations (Alvesson & Sköldberg, 2009). We asked ourselves how, for example, our Dutch background, work experience and previous education in applied sciences influenced the way we developed our findings. In addition, we questioned the effectiveness of the mainstream literature regarding motivation in relation to our research.

Lastly, postmodernism or post structuralism focuses on the reflection of language use, written statements and what that tells us. Postmodernism claims that language is ambiguous and only establishes temporal meanings and is thus disconnected from reality (Alvesson & Sköldberg, 2009). In this stage we had the talk and expressions of the interviewees at our disposal where we tried to develop credible interpretations of the expressions. Although we were interested in discovering the meaning interviewees ascribe to the current situation and their motivation, we couldn't assume that there *is* a meaning behind what they express. Therefore, we strived to create credible interpretations of their expressions. We asked ourselves if we could see our findings differently, since there is a multitude of different perspectives. In addition, we wondered if we could see our findings differently, whereby we could gain insight into the various phenomena. Unlike postmodernism, we describe the boundaries of traditional motivation theories in chapter 3, but like postmodernism we blend the existing theories with a new genre (Prasad, 2005), namely the motivation triangle theory. Likewise, we did not celebrate the chaos and dissimilation we stumbled upon, but we acknowledged and pointed out their presence and the ambiguity it brought along (Prasad, 2005).

As the theme reflexivity is one of the key themes throughout our research, we understood the significance of being reflexive. One way of being reflexive was to interpret and reinterpret our findings of the empirical material. During this process we bumped into differences in interpretations, which did not necessarily mean that we needed to derogate our interpretations. Those differences in interpretations ensured that we remained reflexive and critical towards our findings. Simultaneously, we understood that there is not one truth or reality, as we are conducting an interpretive, qualitative research. Therefore, we closely focused on the participants, and the social context (Alvesson & Sköldberg, 2009). Our interpretations of the empirical material will not be taken for granted. Instead, we will critically look for the meanings behind the surface. As we tried to ensure reflexivity throughout our research, we are aware that biases can never be completely avoided (Alvesson & Sköldberg, 2009). Therefore, we clearly distinguished between what interviewees have said and what our interpretations are from the data in order to guarantee credibility and transparency in our analysis.

2.5 Contribution

When conducting a case study, one should question whether that case study can represent and be generalized to other organizations (Yin, 2013). Our findings are not aimed at complete generalization, but rather serve as inspiration and insights for other organizations facing similar situations. It could help other organizations to understand complexities of employee experience and motivation in a downsizing situation. Referring to Stake (1978, cited in Gomm, Hammersley & Foster, 2000), this can be called 'naturalistic generalization'. Readers of our case study report must determine themselves whether our findings are applicable to other cases, or not (Gomm *et al.*, 2000).

Our knowledge contribution will aim to influence theories regarding employee motivation by inventing deeper insights into what influences motivation. We aimed at explaining a present circumstance and gaining extensive and in-depth descriptions of a social phenomenon, which is relevant in conducting case study research (Yin, 2013). As a result of our findings we applied a relatively new motivation theory to these findings in order to understand motivation from a socio-cultural perspective. In addition, by applying this conceptual tool to a real life context for the first time, we aim at testing its usefulness and validity and intend to increase its accessibility.

3. Unpacking Motivation and Job Insecurity

Theories of motivation and job insecurity will be discussed in this chapter in order to provide the reader with the same angle as the researchers. We aim to provide a clear view on some of the most familiar motivation theories, where these theories fall short and why the motivation triangle theory, which is relatively new and barely used, contributes to the existing theories in the field. Knowledge about motivation and job insecurity theories is important since it provides the reader a context for subsequent analysis of the empirical material and discussions there upon. Finally, we will argue for why we have chosen to take an interpretive approach to the theory.

3.1 Motivation

First we will give a brief overview of the history of motivation theory, after which the concept of motivation is analysed. Thereafter some of the most relevant intrinsic and extrinsic motivation theories will be discussed and as well where they fall short.

3.1.1 The Story of Motivation

Motivation is difficult to manage because it emerges from within employees and characteristically varies for each person (Daft, 2008). A review of the literature on motivation from the beginning of the 20th century to the present, shows that there have been many changes in the research approaches and hypotheses concerning this topic. One of the early approaches to motivation, the traditional approach, was developed by Frederick W. Taylor in the beginning of the 20th century and was based on the concept of *homo economicus*, the idea that people would work harder for higher pay (Daft, 2008). The work motivation of the individual would receive little to no attention until the humanistic perspective on motivation first gained interest with the "human relations" movement (Daft, 2008). The human relations movement arose between the 1930's and 1940's as a result of the famous Hawthorne studies at a Western Electric plant and interest in the social aspects of the work environment increased (Wallgren, 2011; Daft, 2008). For the first time, employees were studied as people and the *economic man* was gradually replaced by the *social man* (Daft, 2008). Since the humanistic perspective on motivation emerged in the early 1930's, many theories about motivation have been suggested (e.g. Adams, 1963; Alderfer, 1972; Herzberg, 1959; Locke & Latham, 1990a; Maslow, 1943; McClelland, 1987; McGregor, 1960; Vroom, 1964).

Between these theories is a dichotomy of content and process perspectives on motivation, or intrinsic and extrinsic motivation. Content theories focus on intrinsic motivation such as what people need, like monetary rewards, recognition or accomplishments, to be motivated (Daft, 2008). Some examples are Maslow's hierarchy of needs theory (Maslow, 1943), Alderfer's ERG theory (1972), Herzberg's Two-Factor theory (1959) and McClelland's Acquired Needs Theory (1987). Differently, process theorists are more interested in extrinsic motivation, how employees choose their behaviours to satisfy their needs with and whether or not their decisions are successful (Daft, 2008). Several examples of process theories are Adams' equity theory (1963), Vroom's expectancy theory (1964) and the goal-setting theory proposed by Locke and Latham (1990).

3.1.2 The Concept of Motivation

Perhaps one of the main factors that has resulted in the demand for this research is that "motivation is highly valued because of its consequences: Motivation produces" (Ryan & Deci, 2000, p. 69). Nevertheless, motivation is a concept that often is used in many different ways (Schou, 1991) and the essence of motivation, therefore, can be interpreted variously. As a result, it can be argued that organizations require people to be motivated in a broad sense. Alvesson and Kärreman (2012) for example, argue that possible effects of having motivated people in an organization are to attract and retain personnel, to stimulate the workforce to develop their productivity and/ or to have employees strive to do a good job. As has been discussed before, many different theories have been developed that are supposed to aid management in how to motivate employees to do what management desires. But what *are* the driving forces that motivate people in organizations? Alvesson and Kärreman (2012) suggest that, among others, it could be power, money, status or more noble motives such as developing oneself or working for a greater cause. Or that it could be the urge to belong to a certain group, or to *not* belong to another (Alvesson & Kärreman, 2012).

In the following paragraphs we will discuss three fundamental and distinct ways in which organizations can incentivize motivation: intrinsic motivation, extrinsic motivation and interactive motivation, which Alvesson and Kärreman (2012) refer to as "the motivation triangle" (p. 360).

3.1.3 Intrinsic motivation

The paramount group 'internal motivation' focuses on humanistic psychology, needs and expectations (Alvesson & Kärreman, 2012). Ryan and Deci (2000, p.70) define intrinsic motivation as "the inherent tendency to seek out novelty and challenges, to extend and exercise one's capacities, to explore, and to learn". Pinder (2008, p. 81) defines intrinsic motivation as "behavior that is performed for its own sake rather than for the purpose of acquiring any material or social rewards". Indeed, this type of motivation highlights the individual's inner needs and driving forces (Alvesson & Kärreman, 2012).

Even though human beings are naturally inclined to be intrinsically motivated, this essential inclination does require supportive conditions, especially since it can rather easily be obstructed by non-supportive conditions (Ryan & Deci, 2000). Since the human relations movement, several theories concerning intrinsic motivation have been developed. Abraham Maslow (1943) for example developed the 'hierarchy of needs' theory, which suggests that 'human motivation' can be influenced by several needs that exist in a certain, hierarchical order. Maslow (1943, p. 372) diversified between "physiological needs, safety needs, love needs, esteem needs and the need for self-actualization", that need to be satisfied in ascending order. According to Maslow (1943), low-order needs need to be satisfied before high-order needs can be addressed. Another theory that has been developed is the 'two-factor theory' of Frederick Herzberg. Herzberg (1968) differentiated between 'hygiene factors', aspects that can increase or eliminate job *dis*satisfaction, or extrinsic motivators, and 'motivators' that when absent keep employees neutral towards their work, but when present can increase employee motivation, or intrinsic motivators. Ryan & Deci's (2000) 'cognitive evaluation theory' agrees with Herzberg's two-factory in terms of intending to point out the factors that clarify the variability of intrinsic motivation.

3.1.4 Extrinsic motivation

Extrinsic, or instrumental perspectives on motivation, are based on how humans adjust their behaviour in order to gain more rewards and avoid punishment (Alvesson & Kärreman, 2012). According to Ryan & Deci (2000, p. 71), extrinsic motivation "refers to the performance of an activity in order to attain some separable outcome" and thus is different from intrinsic motivation, which "refers to doing an activity for the inherent satisfaction of the activity itself". Extrinsic motivation often focuses on (some sort of) remuneration (Alvesson & Kärreman, 2012).

In Herzberg's 'two-factor theory', the hygiene factors refer to extrinsic motivators such as pay and working conditions (Herzberg, 1968) and thus, in line with the quote above, do not increase motivation, but can eliminate job dissatisfaction. Another theory is the equity theory by J. Stacy Adams (1963), who proposes that people are looking for relative justice in the rewards they expect for performance. According to Adams (1963), people who perceive themselves as being in a state of inequity thus are motivated to find social equity. Indeed, it is argued that perceived inequity generates certain tensions that, as a result, motivate people to restore equilibrium (Montagno, 1985; Vecchio, 1982). According to Adams (1963), people as a result can increase input, decrease input, increase outcomes, decrease outcomes, leave the field or distort their perceptions in pursuit of reaching (perceived) social equity. Another extrinsic motivation theory is the 'expectancy theory' of Vroom (1964). This theory suggests that a person's motivation is dependent on the individuals' expectations about both their aptitude to complete certain tasks and the prospect of receiving desired compensation (Vroom, 1964). Indeed, not being motivated is a result of people not feeling competent to accomplish a certain activity (Bandura, 1986), or not expecting it to yield a desired outcome (Seligman, 1975).

3.1.5 Where intrinsic and extrinsic motivation theories fall short

Theories about intrinsic motivation such as Maslow's pyramid of needs have become well-known throughout the decades and could even be argued to be universally known (Alvesson & Kärreman, 2012). However, Alvesson & Kärreman (2012) argue that even though a theory might be adherently accepted, that does not mean it is true, especially since theories regarding intrinsic motivation often regard human behaviour as more machine-like and thus more explainable and logical than is actually the case. It is questioned that a singular motive can be responsible for the motivation of a human being, and should not be dependent on other aspects, such as social needs, security, status and self-fulfilment (Alvesson & Kärreman, 2012). Moreover, how 'true' can a theory be, if one third of the article that discusses a certain theory, is dedicated to exceptions to the theory, like is the case in Maslow's article 'Theory of Human Motivation' (Maslow, 1943)? Or, like Herzberg's 'two-factor theory' that takes many aspects into account, but not the prevalent factor of autonomy that is necessary to motivate people intrinsically (Ryan & Deci, 2000). Another aspect that increases the questionability of intrinsic motivation theory is that it is very possibly based on American middle class ideology, since all intrinsic theorists mentioned above, Maslow, Alderfer, Herzberg and McClelland, are American. This can be problematic because people from other cultures could be motivated by several additional, for example social aspects, than merely the individually oriented ideas of humanistic psychology (Alvesson & Kärreman, 2012). The individualism and collectivism index of Hofstede is an example that strongly argues for differences in preferences regarding aspects between cultures (Hofstede & Hofstede, 2005).

Additionally, extrinsic motivation theories such as Vroom's 'expectancy theory' do not consider the importance of instrumental motivation for people from different social groups (Alvesson & Kärreman, 2012). This is of significance because it differs between communities, organizations and professions how important loan or other means to show off one's value are for self-esteem (Alvesson & Kärreman, 2012). Therefore, the extrinsic motivation theories are of value because they imply the existence of certain ties between needs and rewards. However, it lacks specific information on how a person can be motivated, since this is different for every individual. Likewise, according to the 'expectancy theory', a person might feel competent to fulfil the task and expect a certain outcome, but when this person does not value the activity assigned, the person will still be unmotivated to complete the task (Ryan, 1995).

Without going further into detail, we can determine that the theories discussed above are valuable in terms of pointing out several important aspects concerning motivation. However, because of their simplified nature, these theories do not take social and cultural contextual aspects into account. Since people are social creatures, however, it is crucial to also consider the context (Alvesson, 2004). The lack of social and cultural sensitivity makes intrinsic and extrinsic motivation theories less useful to understand specific situations in organizations, because they are too general. Besides that, individuals make meaning of the world in different ways, as for example Palmer, Dunford and Akin (2012) emphasize how people have different perspectives and preferences. Likewise, Alvesson (2014) suggests that people today can be described as *homo consumericus*, buying their way in the pursuit of establishing a stable identity, as it currently is perceived as highly important how people regard one's identity. In contrast, intrinsic and extrinsic motivation theories do not acknowledge 'meaning' as such, nor take into account the complexity of context and so undermine the applicability of these theories in real life. Accordingly, what we can conclude is that the theories discussed so far are going without how people make sense of the world around them, and how social-contextual aspects influence people's motivation. This resulted in us choosing the motivation triangle to frame our research. Next, we will elaborate on the motivation triangle theory, to discuss an alternative way to understand motivation.

3.2 The motivation triangle

Above we have discussed several ways in which motivation can be organized, such as Maslow's motivation pyramid and Herzberg's 'two-factor theory'. Also, we have discussed what is lacking in these theories, namely 'meaning' and 'complexity'. Another relatively new approach to motivation is the motivation triangle, which was elaborated upon by Alvesson and Kärreman in 2007 in a chapter of the Swedish book "Organisationer, ledning och processer" by Alvesson and Sveningsson. Since then, this motivation theory has barely been used in English literature, except for example in the thesis written by Wallgren (2011). Because of the relative novelty of this theory, we will thoroughly discuss it in this chapter.

The main aspect that diversifies the interactive motivation theory from the intrinsic and extrinsic motivation theories, is that it takes into account the social aspect of motivation. Because, as Alvesson and Kärreman (2012) argue, within organizations motivation is not just regulated through intrinsic and/or extrinsic motivation. A facet that also needs to be considered is that organizations consist of social groups that influence the identity of individuals and vice versa (Alvesson, 2004). Alvesson and Kärreman (2012) introduced the 'interactive motivation theory', arguing that motivation is not only dependent on intrinsic and extrinsic motivation, but is also a question of norms in the most essential respects, as well as living up to the expectations of the employer, who provides identity in return. The motivation triangle can be simplified in the following figure:

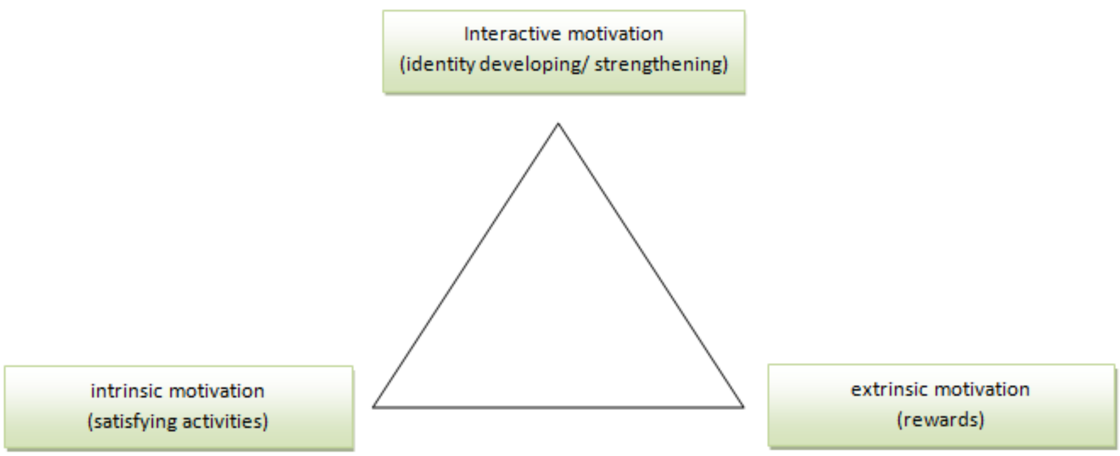

Figure 1: The motivation triangle (our translation, adopted from Alvesson & Kärreman, 2012)

3.2.1 Interactive motivation

The interactive perspective emphasizes the social aspects of motivation (Alvesson & Kärreman, 2012) and thus adds to the intrinsic and extrinsic motivation theories by taking the local situation, the context, into account. There are three interactively, interrelated factors that influence motivation: norms, reciprocity and identity (Alvesson & Kärreman, 2012). Finally, we will also discuss what role culture has in this theory.

Norms

The norms that are cultivated within the frame of a social setting represent how people are expected to act based on the prescribed behaviour of other group members (Jacobson, Mortensen & Cialdini, 2011). Additionally, norms are not only dependent on the culture of a certain organization, industry or social group, but are also contingent on instrumental conditions such as career structure (Alvesson & Kärreman, 2012). Sometimes it is the career structure that provides the explanation as to why people adhere to certain norms, since in certain professions, for example, one needs to work hard to get promoted (Alvesson & Kärreman, 2012). Nevertheless, also when people are not interested in being promoted, they tend to conform to the norms of their social environment (Alvesson & Kärreman, 2012) as norms guide a person in what is appropriate behaviour in a certain social setting in general (Sansfaçon & Amiot, 2014). This is a result of the human desire to feel 'normal', thus inclining people to follow norms (Alvesson & Kärreman, 2012; Bailey, 2013). Normative isomorphism thus entails that people want to behave, think and look similarly as a result of the social forces that belong to the organization, industry or professional group people work in (Bailey, 2013).

However, besides wanting to feel 'normal', people, and especially knowledge workers, simultaneously desire to have a prestigious image (Alvesson, 2004). This prestige is based on ideas about uniqueness and major characteristics that are typical for the organization and follow from the conviction of being superior (Alvesson, 2004). By strongly diversifying between what is accepted in the 'in-group' and the 'out-group' people thus form their identity, which is ambiguously constructed by their desired identity and their anti-identity. Adhering to a certain set of norms, people thus pursue 'normalness' within a certain group. The normative isomorphic tendency to belong to a certain group thus stimulates people to adapt to the group, this adaptation underlines the interactive character of motivation.

Morals

Reciprocity concerns what is true and fair regarding social compliance at the workplace (Alvesson & Kärreman, 2012). Reciprocity frames a moral dimension that alludes to what one should do based on a certain set of norms (Alvesson & Kärreman, 2012). Alvesson and Kärreman (2012) suspect that in such cases the output of mutual understanding – concerning loyalty or being prepared to perform to a certain level of expectations for example – is bigger than what one gains back from an employment that provides a lot of non-monetary rewards. Moreover, also a high wage normally results in the will to 'give back', which can be far beyond what has been agreed in the employment contract (Alvesson & Kärreman, 2012).

When people receive several non-monetary benefits, such as a high degree of freedom or the possibility to enjoy certain social activities, this tends to create a culture of 'quid pro quo' (Alvesson & Kärreman, 2012), an exchange relationship that transcends the formal contract. Since the employee can enjoy certain advantages, such as learning and innovating, as is a priority for software development employees of ToTech, or creative problem solving for all employees in general (Løvendahl, 2005), he or she is inclined to give something in return. As such, benefits tend to result in longer working days on a voluntary basis (Alvesson & Kärreman, 2012). A long-term and reciprocal relationship between employer and employee increases the propensity to go an extra mile for the organization (Alvesson & Kärreman, 2012).

Identity

The perception of the self that individuals acquire, defines the way in which they feel that they should act (Alvesson & Kärreman, 2012). Identity exists both on the individual as on the organizational level and is very popular in management and organization theory (Alvesson, 2004; Sveningsson & Larsson, 2006; Alvesson & Kärreman, 2007; Kirk & Wall, 2011; Galliers, Markus & Stein, 2013). Generally speaking, identity is being seen as essential to how organizations behave and how people have a mutual relationship with their working environment (Alvesson, 2004; Alvesson & Empson, 2008; Hatch & Schultz, 2002). In organizations with a distinct organizational identity, the identity of an individual often is associated with the identity of employee of that particular organization (Alvesson & Kärreman, 2012). The organizational identity can become a source of identity for the individual, especially in long-term relationships with the employees (Alvesson & Kärreman, 2012; Hatch & Schultz, 2002). Identity thus is as much a process as a stabile collection of characteristics and can be influenced by, for example, the culture of a certain profession or organization (Alvesson & Kärreman, 2012). In organizations the social identity, which refers to a category such as nationality, profession or organization, people identify with is more relevant than the individual identity (Alvesson & Kärreman, 2012).

Since identity is socially constructed (Alvesson, 2004; Dutton & Dutterich, 1991) this aspect connects the individual to its context. In a knowledge intensive firm such as ToTech there are three aspects to social relations that need to be managed carefully: gaining and retaining access to the appropriate kind of network, carefully managing social relations in particular work contexts and attentively arranging the social and political processes in multifaceted projects (Alvesson, 2004; Hatch & Schultz, 2002). An organization and its employees thus are very dependent on its and their connections to be and remain successful. As a result, image and rhetoric are important, especially since quality and price in a knowledge intensive context are determined by perceived image (Alvesson, 2004; Alvesson & Empson, 2008; Hatch & Schultz, 2002). Vice versa, the image and rhetoric of a company are dependent on how for example managers and employees express their image, or 'self concept' in everyday situations (Alvesson & Empson, 2008; Hatch & Schultz, 2002). In ToTech we could for example see that employees used to be proud of the organization. However, as it is commonly known in their environment that the company has been going through rough times and still is, their external social relations stopped recognizing this sense of pride, influencing also the employees of ToTech to reduce their proud feelings towards the companies.

Probably *because* people make sense of themselves through context, it is rather common that people experience a feeling of 'we' and 'them' even though there are only small differences between the separate groups (Alvesson & Kärreman, 2012). As a consequence, social identity seems to be of importance in terms of how people make sense of the world around them. The reciprocal character of identity thus once again underlines how important context actually is. At ToTech we could identify such behaviour, especially in terms of 'I' or 'we' being better than the rest.

Culture

Above we have discussed how organisations can influence the norms, morals and identity of individuals concerning what is important about one's job and what is not. This means that not only individual and universal incentives and motives, but also organizational culture has strong influence as to what motivates a person (Alvesson & Kärreman, 2012). Of paramount importance is that we a priori indicate to treat culture and identity as two separate concepts. As Alvesson and Empson (2008) affirm, researchers tend to have complications with differentiating between these two terms, which might be a result of their ambiguous nature and obvious overlaps. Like Hatch and Schultz (2002, p. 9, emphasis in original text), we interpret culture as "being relatively more easily placed in the conceptual domains of the contextual, tacit and emergent than is identity which, *when compared with culture*, appears to be more textual, explicit and instrumental".

The culture in a KIF often is apparent and strongly reiterating the idiosyncrasy of the organization to congregate people around one shared identity (Alvesson, 2004). While organizational culture and identity tend to overlap, they do not necessarily have to exist next to each other. Some firms, for example, might not have an individual corporate culture (Starbuck, 1992, 1993 cited in Alvesson, 2004) but still have a distinctive organizational identity based on prominence and excellence (Alvesson, 2004). Most cultural meanings such as technical and administrative systems, gender and diversity issues thus not concern identity issues such as 'Who are we?' and 'What is distinctive about us?' (Alvesson, 2004). However, in terms of image management it is important that an organizational culture and identity are aligned *if* they exist next to each other (Alvesson, 2004).

In the previous paragraphs we have discussed the several aspects that construct interactive motivation. During the following research and analysis we will focus on interactive motivation, but will first touch shortly upon theories concerning the specific context of this thesis, namely job insecurity. In order to understand the meaning interviewees assign to their motivation in a situation of job insecurity and discover the effects of job insecurity on interactive motivation, it is necessary to have an understanding of this context.

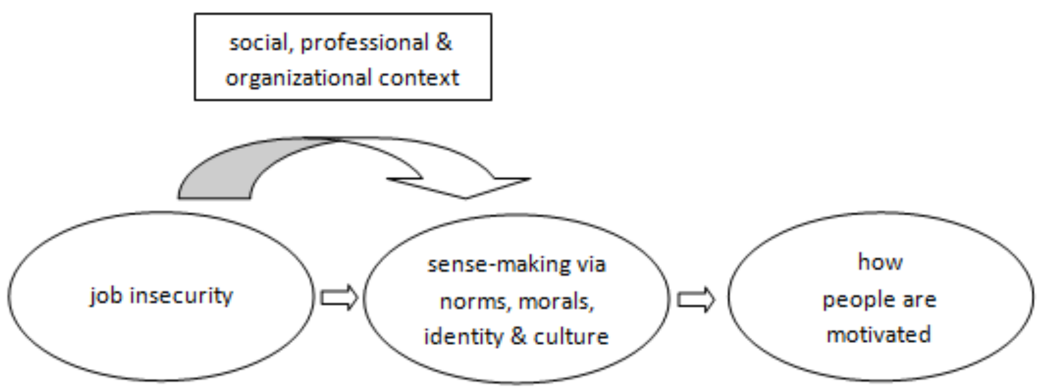

Figure 2: How job insecurity and motivation relate

3.3 Job insecurity

First we will briefly discuss what job insecurity actually is, how the nature of working life has altered in terms of job insecurity and how job insecurity affects motivation.

3.3.1 What is job insecurity?

Job insecurity is situated between employment and unemployment, whereas the ones employed feel threatened by unemployment (De Witte, 2005) and can be defined as "the perceived powerlessness to maintain the desired continuity in a threatened job situation" (Greenhalgh & Rosenblatt, 1984, p. 438). Heany, Israel and House (1994, p.1431) refer to job insecurity as "the perception of a potential threat to the continuity of the current job". In this study, job insecurity is defined as the individual concern about the future continuity of one's job.

Situations that cause job insecurity are in many ways ambiguous as there is a lack of information or a high degree of uncertainty in most situations (Van Vuuren & Klandermans, 1994). For example, a redundancy announcement innately arouses job insecurity for employees (Ivancevich, Schweiger & Power, 1987; King, 2000). Moreover, employees could hear rumours about jobs that might be at risk, but they may not know for certain what specific jobs that might be, or when it will happen, if at all.

3.3.2 The nature of work life

Throughout the past decades, factors such as heightened global competition and the progress of information technologies have led to substantial changes to the nature of work life as we used to know it. Reorganizations such as mergers, outsourcing and downsizing have become more common processes in order to respond to the ever more rapidly changing environment where global competition, economic uncertainty and an increasing need for flexibility play a big part (Cascio, 1995; Huang, Niu, Zhao, Ashford & Lee, 2013). According to Schifferes (2009), job insecurity is increasing. Already more than half of the world's workforce lacks job security and this number is even expected to keep growing (Schifferes, 2009). The sense of insecurity that the majority of organizational changes causes among the workforce can have harmful consequences to both the organization and the employees (Schumacher, Schreurs, van Emmerik & de Witte, 2015). Therefore, it is not remarkable that job insecurity in the context of organizational change, such as reorganizations, has received increasing attention from various authors (Baillien & De Witte, 2009; De Witte, 2005; DiFonzo & Bordia, 1998; Fugate *et al.*, 2012; Oreg, Vakola &

Armenakis, 2011; Pfeffer, 2007; Schreurs, van Emmerik, Günter & Germeys, 2012, cited in Schumacher *et al.*, 2015; Astarlioglu, Kazozcu & Varnali, 2011).

3.3.3 The effects of job insecurity on motivation

The major changes in the nature of work life may induce feelings of anxiety, stress and job insecurity (Ashford, Lee & Bobko, 1989), which for many employees can be a stressful experience (Van Vuuren & Klandermans, 1994). Huang *et al.* (2013) even argue that continuous job insecurity has a larger impact on one's health condition than the actual loss of a job or unemployment. Not only one's physical and psychological well-being are impacted, job insecurity has attitudinal and behavioural effects as well, which are harmful for both the individual employee and the organization that employs the individual (Huang *et al.*, 2013). For example, consequences of job insecurity are absenteeism, turnover, lower job satisfaction, and poor performance (Ashford *et al.*, 1989). In addition, violation by the employer of the employer-employee contract will decrease work effort (Astarlioglu *et al.*, 2011).

Other consequences of the insecurity that results from job insecurity are mechanisms such as self-serving bias, in-group favouritism and out-group denigration. These mechanisms of causal attribution entail that positive events are attributed to the self, or the in-group, and the negative events to the anti-self, or the out-group (Van Vuuren & Klandermans, 1994). Employees are insecure and look for mutually shared definitions (Van Vuuren & Klandermans, 1994) and illusory superiority guides them to believe to be in a more positive situation than might actually be the case. However, the most important effect of job insecurity in the context of this research is that job insecurity negatively affects employee motivation (Borg & Dov, 1992; Greenhalgh, & Rosenblatt, 1984).

There are a lot more interesting theories that could be discussed in the context of job insecurity and motivation. In order to only stick to the most relevant theories, we restrict our theoretical framework to what has been discussed so far.

3.4 Approach to literature –interpretive

The attention attributed to motivation is, as discussed previously, desired because of the effect that motivation produces (Barba-Sánchez & Atienza-Sahuquillo, 2012; Ryan & Deci, 2000; Wang & Li, 2014; Sepp, Liljander & Gummerus, 2011; Morin & Renaud, 2000). Approached from a functional understanding, motivation has been understood as a means rather than as a concept on itself. As a result, traditionally mainly quantitative methods have been used in order to discover what aspects motivate people and still today authors from different fields try to uncover a 'magic formula' taking this approach (Güngor, 2011; Pirkkalainen Jokinen & Pawlowski, 2014; Zareen, Razzaq & Majtaba, 2014; Uguroglu & Walberg, 1979; Walter, 1959). Defining concepts such as motivation is challenging as people interpret differently based on their different contexts, hence definitions are ambiguous. According to Habermas (1972), there are three types of knowledge: critical, analytical and hermeneutic knowledge. In this research project we shall pursue hermeneutic knowledge as our aim is to understand, interpret, how knowledge workers make sense of job insecurity and how this factor influences the motivation of knowledge workers. As such, we will be able to uncover why certain theories were acknowledged in a certain context and why they might not work in ours. In order to edify the concept to find out what exactly influences motivation in our context, an interpretive approach to theory is prevalent.

An interpretive approach facilitates an inductive focus on the sense making of job insecurity and the subjectivity of individuals' meanings concerning motivation. Thus, instead of assuming motivation to simple 'be out there', we are open to interpret the meaning and complexity of this concept through the expressions of our interviewees. Consequently, we can better attribute meaning to why and how employee motivation was influenced in the way it did as a result of interviewees' perceived job insecurity.

4. Background

To better understand how we approached the phenomenon motivation in this research project, it is vital to be aware of both the kind of organization where we obtained our empirical material and its knowledge intensive context. First the background of the organization will be sketched and thereafter we will clarify the context of ToTech. It is of importance to be aware of the background of the organization because the last few years have been rather turbulent and the following additional information will facilitate to understand the empirical findings presented later on in this research. The major aspect we aim to highlight in the following section is that the redundancy process researched in this research project is not the first redundancy for this organization in a rather short time frame.

ToTech is a well-known multinational mobile phone manufacturing company that designs and develops small technological devices. Its parent company has become eminent in the IT industry throughout the decades. ToTech is the result of a merger with another unit of the company Siphon for 11 years, called ToTech Siphon that was established during the dot-com crisis. The company flourished from 2004 and reached its peak in 2007, employing approximately 8.000 people. Then, as a result of the increased market competition and the financial crisis of 2008-2009, sales strongly started to decline and since then ToTech Siphon went through multiple organizational changes aiming to (re)secure its market position. For example, since 2008 profits and market share declined and when ToTech Siphon saw net profits crash by 97% in the second quarter of 2008, it announced a 2.000 job cut worldwide. This resulted in the closing down of an entire plant abroad, an office in Sweden and further redundancies across offices. The cost-cutting program did not finish here and more redundancies followed in 2009 and 2010. When ToTech acquired Siphon's share of ToTech Siphon in 2012, the business became a wholly owned subsidiary of ToTech. The head office was moved from Gothenburg, Sweden to Singapore, Malaysia, but ToTech remained unstable and has been going through multiple other redundancies since. In this thesis we will research the biggest redundancy of ToTech so far.

4.1 A knowledge intensive context

Adding to the ambiguity of the already multi-interpretable concept 'motivation', this research has been conducted in a knowledge intensive context. Understanding how knowledge intensive firms are different from other, non-knowledge intensive firms, is of importance because knowledge workers have different priorities than non-knowledge workers as a result of the high ambiguity of knowledge intensive work tasks (Alvesson, 2004). The high uncertainty of the work needs to be balanced by a stabile identity and thus asks for relatively much identity work (Alvesson, 2004). The high importance of identity facilitates understanding the empirical material presented in the following chapter.

Several criteria diversify knowledge intensive firms from non-knowledge intensive firms (Alvesson, 2004; Newell, Robertson, Scarbrough & Swan, 2012), so we have chosen to attribute the term knowledge intensive to the firm ToTech because of several of those reasons. First of all, we have recognized several features that tend to be archetypal for knowledge intensive firms. For example, instead of drawing in manual labour, highly qualified individuals have a pivotal role in the firm (Alvesson, 2004; Alvesson & Sveningsson, 2003). In addition, employees have indicated to be self-organizing and indicated that the complexity of problems and the solutions thereof consist of elusive aspects that require subjective and erratic evaluations of quality (Alvesson, 2004).

The aspects within the organization that are not congruent with the description of knowledge intensiveness, such as the bureaucratic character of and formal hierarchy within ToTech (Alvesson, 2004; Newell *et al.*, 2012), are neglected because we attribute these aspects to the culture of the company rather than to a possible non-knowledge intensiveness. It does need to be mentioned, however, that these cultural aspects keep the knowledge intensive level of the firm lower than would be possible as the bureaucracy and hierarchy work against knowledge intensive aspects such as improving communication and coordination between teams for problem solving.

Managing a knowledge intensive firm implicates that aspects such as image, rhetoric and identity work are important to maintain a stable workforce (Alvesson, 2004). Moreover, as knowledge intensive firms score high on ambiguity because of the complexity of work tasks and centrality of highly professional knowledge, the possibility to evaluate performance is complicated (Alvesson & Sveningsson, 2003). As a result atypical types of control, such as cultural control, are adhered to and thus the importance of a congruent and stable image, rhetoric and identity are of high importance to knowledge workers (Alvesson, 2004). Therefore, not entirely surprising, in a knowledge intensive context motivation is strongly linked with identity and is a driving force to maintain one's identity (Alvesson, 2004). For example, people who perceive themselves as knowledge workers can as a result prioritize several values and motivators at work such as specialization, knowledge development and autonomy (Alvesson, 2004). This is not because of hedonistic or instrumental fulfilment, but a result of the identity the knowledge worker needs and wants to uphold (Alvesson, 2004). Additionally, dependent on the character of the products created, there are also diverse types of knowledge intensive organizations. Løwendahl (2005) has diversified between knowledge intensive firms consequently:

Type of KIF	Strategic focus	Priority	Examples
Output-based	Adapting solutions	Job security	Large management consultancy firms
Client-based	Client relation	Autonomy	Law and accountancy firms
Problem-Solving	Creative problem solving	Learning, Innovation	Advertising agencies and software development firms

Table 1: Types of knowledge intensive firms

In ToTech employees are challenged to creatively solve problems, as is characteristic for a software development firm. Apart from the several types that diversify between knowledge workers, there is another, more paramount aspect we need to take into account to better understand knowledge workers and their behaviour: identity. All people need a stable sense of self, however, the ambiguous and volatile character of knowledge work complicates maintaining that stability (Alvesson, 2004). Therefore, identity is more important to knowledge intensive workers than to people with common, non-knowledge intensive, work (Alvesson, 2004). Some fundamental factors that can stabilize and support the identity for example, are immediate feedback from customers and a stable work environment. Indeed, these aspects can benefit people working in common jobs, however only have little benefit for knowledge intensive workers, who, for example, in their work, identify not only with the organization, but also with several other social circles such as the one of their profession (Alvesson, 2004). Because of the importance of work identity to knowledge workers in combination with the ambiguities that characterize the majority of knowledge work, yet another subtheme is of importance in the context of this research: work identity (Alvesson, 2004). In many other common jobs people predominantly view their job as a way of providing income and work identity is only of small importance to the self (Alvesson, 2004). However, in knowledge intensive firms there is a vague line between the outer limits of the self and work, and sometimes even the organization (Alvesson, 2004). Because the identity of knowledge workers is dependent on a multitude of aspects, the knowledge worker has a lot at stake in terms of work and organization (Alvesson, 2004).

5. Story of ToTech

In order to guide the reader through the sense-making of the interviewees, we will discuss the events regarding the planned redundancy in chronological order, emphasizing aspects that influenced why people acted the way they did. Both during the open part of the interview as well as in the more structured part of the interview, the topic of motivation in the context of job insecurity was voiced directly, indirectly and from various angles.

Figure 3 shows the structure of this chapter, the story of ToTech, and simultaneously represents the sequence of the change process of ToTech.

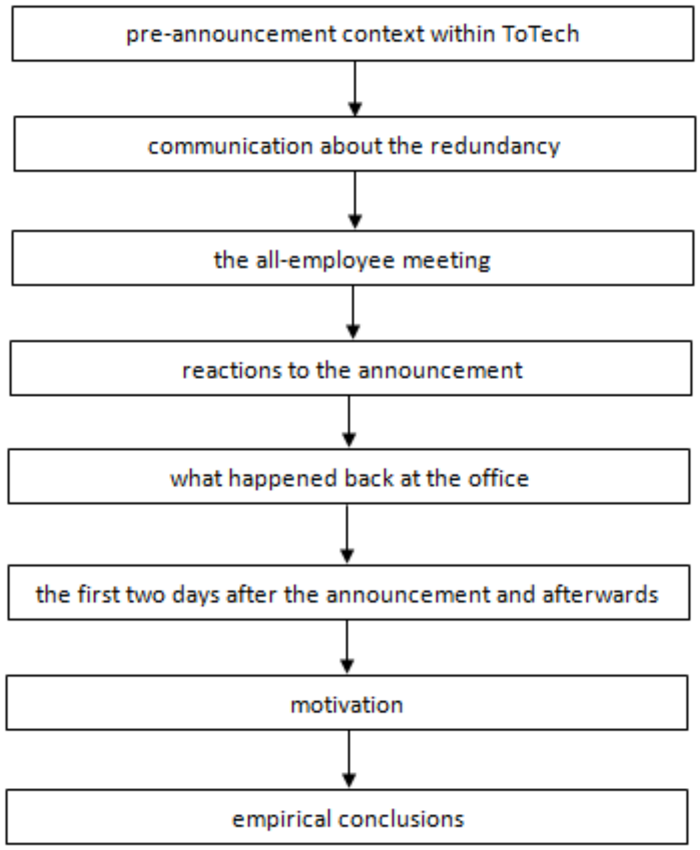

Figure 3: Structure of the story and change process

The context of ToTech during the months before the new CEO announced that new redundancies could be expected will be discussed first. Communication between employees concerning that particular message followed and will be analysed accordingly. Following, the all-employee meeting where the actual number of the redundancies was announced took place on March 9 and will be described from the perspective of the employees. Afterwards we will present how the interviewees expressed how they and colleagues reacted to the announcement during the meeting and how they resumed their work on the days afterwards. Subsequently, it will be described what happened at the office during the first days after the all-employee meeting and how employees got back to being motivated in the job threatening situation. Finally, what conclusions we can draw based on the empirical findings will be outlined.

5.1 The pre-announcement context

As the background of the organization described in chapter 4, ToTech has been through several tumultuous years with quite a few reorganizations as a consequence. We will sketch the environment employees were in before the all-employee meeting during the winter of 2015. Employees described their working environment as almost being in a constant state of redundancies. The only unfamiliar state the organization seemed to have, is one that did not include redundancies, as Erik Alberyd from the Quality & Customer Services department explains:

> *"Either there are rumours about an upcoming redundancy, or we have a redundancy or we are waiting for more detailed information. We have been in this situation so many times before."*

Moreover, people were expecting a redundancy as consequence of the large amount of rumours that have been going round the past year, specifies Johan Svensson from the Companion Products department:

> *"Everyone has been knowing for some time now that things will happen. There have been lots of rumours. Everything from closing down the Gothenburg site to not being affected at all, or only being affected in Australia."*

Indeed, the organization had been through many reorganizations that brought redundancies with them, and uncertainty about the future was looming. Surprisingly, the interviewees working for ToTech appeared rather used to going through redundancies. When talking about the redundancy, they seemed familiar with the process as can be deduced from the following quote of Linnea Johansson from the HR department, who is actually benchmarking the process of this redundancy to others:

"I have been waiting for this e-mail for a long time. It was always in the air that something was coming."

We noticed that besides interviewees talking about the redundancy like any other every day subject, working in an organization that kept struggling to turn things around also seemed to have taken its toll on how employees regarded their organization in terms of disdain. While employees at ToTech, especially those who had worked there during the best years, mentioned how they felt about working for this organization in particular, they appeared to do so in a rather melancholic way. The employees' sense of pride towards the company seemed to have faded throughout the past couple of years:

"I have been thinking about this quite a lot. Of course it affects the motivation. Earlier, you were quite proud to work for ToTech. It is a big company, well-known. The brand is very well-known, I mean you have James Bond, and well, there are lots of things. I think it is still a good brand. But I am not, being in Gothenburg and working for ToTech, so proud about it anymore since everybody knows there will be cut outs."

(Johan Svensson)

The pre-announcement context provides us insight into how employees at ToTech interpret the environment they were in when they heard about upcoming redundancies, yet before hearing the actual number of the redundancies. In the statement we can see how the social relations of this individual have influenced his or her motivation to work for ToTech, which seemed partly interactively motivated since his or her environment changed perception of the organization's image. This information could help us to make sense of why people reacted in the way they did, as will be described in the following paragraph.

5.2 Communication about the redundancy

Before the employees of ToTech were informed about the exact number of the redundancies, they had already received information about an upcoming reorganization multiple times. During the fall of 2014 the new CEO, Henk Timmerman, who had replaced the former CEO John Smit, informed ToTech's employees by e-mail that the reorganization would need to be more substantial than originally expected. Then in February 2015, employees of the Gothenburg site received an e-mail from Henk Timmerman, informing them that a redundancy could be expected shortly and would be twice as big as originally expected. Employees seemed unsurprised and rather (mentally) prepared for the upcoming redundancy, as Johan Svensson described:

> *"I am not that worried for myself. Am I worried? If I am laid off, is that a problem for me? No, I have been here before. I have changed my career once. Maybe it will be good for me to do something else. This might be an opportunity."*

One interviewee even indicated to have some bets with colleagues about the exact number of the redundancies:

> *"I actually have a bet with one of my employees. He says 600 and I think it will be 800. We have betted a coffee. So, let's see."*
> (Linnea Johansson)

Linnea Johansson actually bet on when they would receive the message as well, and was one of many interviewees who explained to use some sort of humour as a reaction to or as a way of coping with the job insecurity. At this point in time employees knew that redundancies could be expected, however, specific information was lacking. As the expressions by Johan and Linnea seemed to indicate, at this stage feelings and reactions were not that strong and employees rather seemed to wait for more specific information that finally was announced at the all-employee meeting a few weeks later.

5.3 The all-employee meeting

Several weeks later, all employees of ToTech were invited to come to an all-employee meeting in a city nearby where the entire workforce of approximately 2.000 employees could be seated. During this meeting Henk Timmerman, the new CEO, informed the audience that shortly half of the workforce, 1.000 employees, will be made redundant. Most employees seemed to expect the all-employee meeting to concern the upcoming redundancies that had previously been announced by Henk Timmerman, however, Andreas Magnusson from the Software department was sitting beside a person who was expecting something very different. He describes the experience of the big gathering as follows:

> *"I went late to work that day so I did not go to the all-employee meeting with anyone I knew. I just sat down beside someone who said that he knew that this was not about the redundancy, but about the launch of a new phone or something (laughs)."*

Whether this person was joking or not is unclear, but the shock of the news that 1.000 employees would be made redundant during the upcoming reorganization appeared to be at least as big for this individual as for everyone else. In the meeting hall the news was received with complete silence and employees seemed shocked:

> *"That was the first time when people were like 'oooh!' (shock), it was completely quiet in the audience."*
> (Sebastian Schmiedel, Software)

Simon Danielsson from the Software department mentioned that even the newspapers brought up this silence in particular:

> *"It has also been written in the papers that when the CEO said "one thousand people", it was like.. it was really silent, it felt like it was <u>very,</u> very silent in the hall where we were sitting, that we would be.. ehm."*

Moreover, the silence lingered throughout the meeting, until after the employees left the meeting hall, explains Mio Henriksson from the Software department:

> *"Leaving the all-employee meeting, everyone was <u>quiet,</u> there was no air."*

The silence even remained until all employees got in the busses that brought them back to the ToTech office. Some people remained silent, while others started talking about work-related topics. Every individual reacted differently, but the general feeling was that people were in some sort of vacuum, that they paused, taking in the news. Even when interviewees described to talk about work-related topics on the way to the office, they gave us the impression that this was because of self-protection and the urge to hide some sense of vulnerability, trying to ignore the severity of the announcement. In the following paragraph we will go into the reactions to the announcement more in depth.

5.4 Reactions to the announcement

During the interviews people were also asked to describe their reactions and how they perceived the reactions of others at the all-employee meeting. For example, they described how the shock to the news endured for at least another day:

"It was quite a shock when we were at that meeting in Stockholm. Everything just stopped here. Also the day after I was still in shock."
(Joel Björklund, Quality & Customer Services)

In addition, something seemed to have changed in the atmosphere. Many described the atmosphere after the announcement as 'strange' and the previous silence still had aftereffects, as Erik Alberyd describes how the day of the meeting continued:

"It was a very, very strange atmosphere at the office afterwards. People did not speak as much and it was more quiet than usual."

Interestingly, interviewees indicated not being surprised about the redundancy itself, but rather about the actual number. Interviewees explained us that this is 'not the first time' that they experienced such a process at ToTech. Notwithstanding their seemingly accustomedness to working in a company that has regularly laid off large amounts of employees throughout several years, they *were* shocked about the volume of this particular redundancy:

"I was really surprised because I did not think that it would be such a large amount of people that will have to leave the company. That is why for me it was a complete shock when I heard the news."
(Josefine Löfgrön, Finance)

When asked about the reaction to the number of redundancies, Sebastian Schmiedel also indicated that it was the high number in particular that evoked the reaction of complete silence:

"What were the initial reactions, to the figure?"

"When they said the figure? Dead silence."

These reactions gave us the impression as if the volume of this particular redundancy made people take it more serious than maybe has been the case previously.

"I was not surprised, but I was surprised that so many will be made redundant. Then I thought 'O.K. this is really serious'."

(Andres Magnusson)

Indeed, the volume of the actual number appeared to have triggered some to feel that, maybe for the first time, also *their* department could be affected, as Josefine Löfgrön from the Finance department and Fredrik Berglund from the Applications Software department indicate:

"If they would have said one thousand people globally, I will not be that worried. But one thousand people just in Gothenburg means that it nearly has to affect every department. That is why I got very worried, because then it could also affect Finance, while other times that has not been the case."

(Josefine Löfgrön)

"When we got the information that one thousand people will be made redundant, we realized that even Software has to be affected."

(Fredrik Berglund)

Maybe for the first time, people seem to feel as if everybody could be at risk in this reorganization, as Joel Björklund explains:

"I have never felt this before. <u>Everyone</u> is at risk. We absolutely do not know who will be the one thousand people that will leave us, maybe I am one of those one thousand people".

Based on the previous quotes we could conclude that employees of ToTech feel that they are in a state of uncertainty that we could define as job insecurity, since nobody is secure about their job as there is no information available of which functions and departments will be affected. The lack of a future plan, which made employees feel as if 'this was the end', was another aspect that seemed to have increased uncertainty and was frequently mentioned regarding the announcement at the all-employee meeting:

"People talk a little bit more about private life, that has also to do with that some people are seeing the end of the story."
(Joel Björklund)

In addition, interviewees were wondering why there was no plan communicated to get ToTech back on its feet again, especially since this was the case during previous redundancy announcements. Fredrik Berglund and Erik Alberyd explain:

"The feeling is a bit like, ehm, 'what are we doing wrong?', 'why does the CEO not talk about what we should do to turn this around'?"
(Fredrik Berglund)

"What I was missing from the announcement was a communicated strategy on how we will become successful again."
(Erik Alberyd)

The previous quotes exemplify how interviewees made sense of the redundancy announcement, namely that this is expected to be an ending in one way or another. Erik Alberyd, for example, indicated that because the future strategy was not communicated, he felt less hopeful, as if there was no possibility to "turn around" the organization and start moving forward again. Interviewees also pointed out that this gave them the feeling as if there will be fewer career opportunities within the company compared with before. As a result, we as researchers, got the idea that employees are more task- than ToTech oriented. This signifies that it seems as if people enjoy working at ToTech not necessarily because it is ToTech, but enjoy working at ToTech because that provides them the possibility to do interesting work.

Furthermore, we got the impression that without a clear future perspective, some felt like they were losing out on the possibility to grow, or take interesting future steps in their career. As a result, some people indicated that they started looking for career opportunities outside of ToTech and some people, who found a new career opportunity outside of ToTech, quit immediately:

"You mentioned that there are already people that quit, or are quitting. How does that make you feel?"

"That is another confirmation that the boat is sinking."

(Joel Björklund)

Many others, however, indicated that they were not capable to perform their tasks anymore because projects were put on hold, or they could not plan their projects because they lacked a clear direction from higher management. Therefore, people appeared to become either frustrated or worried and this influenced their motivation negatively. We asked interviewees if they were still motivated to work for ToTech. Johan Svensson answered the following:

"That is a very good question. That depends on what will happen now. If I see that their strategy could actually lead forward, I will be motivated to work for ToTech."

In the context of the above, it could be expected that the atmosphere at ToTech was rather negative. Nevertheless, employees still described it as 'quite good' and 'more or less the same as before', which could indicate a relatively small decrease in motivation in a situation that is radically changing.

The next paragraph will further go into what happened when the employees got back to the office.

5.5 What happened back at the office

Back at the office most employees had one or several additional meetings with their separate departments or teams concerning the announcement of the all-employee meeting that morning. During the meetings people got more department specific information and had the possibility to ask questions to their manager, who, according to the interviewees, could not give them any additional information. Many suspected that the managers would have received a Q&A sheet that morning with exactly the same information in it as had been communicated during the all-employee meeting. One surprising anecdote of the communication among employees during one meeting was mentioned by Josefine Löfgrön who appeared to feel as if being one of the few in the department who took the redundancy announcement seriously:

"My colleagues were talking as if it will affect others, but not us. They said, 'maybe we will have more parking places' and I mean we?! What about we?! We will be affected!"

(Josefine Löfgrön)

Other employees indicated that they decided to skip these additional meetings, because they believed the meetings to be a waste of time and preferred to continue with their work, often because they had 'interesting things to do' (Mats Schön, Software). One employee who only attended the all-employee meeting that morning described it as follows, when asked about his experiences:

"Well, I thought it was a pretty lousy meeting actually. I think they communicated three or four months ago that there would be some kind of redundancy and that they will lay off thousand employees in Australia. Apart from that, we got the notification that at least thousand more will go but we did not get any specific information. We expected to get more information during the all-employee meeting, but the only information we got is that those thousand employees will be made redundant in Gothenburg. They waited two months to make that statement. I think it was kind of crappy. Why did they wait so long to say that?"

(Mats Schön)

Mats Schön, together with a lot of other interviewees, gave us the impression to be rather dissatisfied about the information that was communicated during the all-employee meeting. Furthermore, the feedback of others who did actually attend follow-up meetings that day, was that all information that was communicated was 'information about no information':

"They even had a meeting, saying only that one sentence 'No new information has been given', during 40 minutes and a lot of slides. All the people are quite annoyed, and have no information. Information about no information, so to say."
(Andreas Magnusson)

In addition, other employees, who also attended multiple meetings that day, expressed feelings of dissatisfaction about the communication concerning the planned redundancy in terms of getting 'no answers', 'being tired of waiting' and 'just wanting to know'. Other expressions about being in a state of not knowing and waiting were that people became frustrated, felt powerless, unsure and sometimes also expressed their bitterness towards the Singapore office in Malaysia because supposedly more information would be available there. Likewise, whatever happened to the people here in Gothenburg, the Singapore office was presumed not to be affected. The way in which employees reacted to the announcement could help us understand how employees experienced and behaved the first two days after the announcement, which will be discussed in the following paragraph.

5.6 The first two days after the announcement and afterwards

The first two days after the announcement the environment of the company was described as if being paused. People started to take longer coffee breaks and seemed distracted from their work tasks. People felt a need to discuss, share their thoughts and talk about personal subjects more than work. Some argue that as a result of missing new information people started to speculate about what might happen in the future, people made sense of their situation in different ways and rumours started to go around. Likewise, in conversations the question 'have you heard anything about...?' was never skipped. The severity of this tendency, however, decreased after the two-day dip as, some argued, people had no new information to talk about. After the first two days following the all-employee meeting, however, all interviewees described how business at ToTech started to evolve back to 'business as usual'. E-mails started to come in again, people started asking the same amount of questions and after this short dip business seemed to be back to usual:

"I do not think anyone really worked the afternoon after the meeting, that is usually what happens. You just talk. That is probably a good thing, you need to talk about what is going on. Tuesday was probably

> *not a good day for work either. But then, I started to see e-mails on Wednesday and Thursday again. Things went back more or less to normal. People started to ask the usual questions and mail about the usual things."*
> (Johan Svensson)

But *was* business back to the usual, actually? Indeed, people remained productive, kept coming to work and seemed eager to fulfil their tasks. However, something *did* change in the atmosphere, since people had to deal with job insecurity. This sometimes led to people denying that they might be at risk, as one interviewee told us:

> *"It is a really strange situation. But ehm, more or less it is business as usual. You deny for yourself that you are at risk, nothing has happened, I just work as usual."*
> (Joel Björklund)

Other employees appeared to perceive the current situation as a chance to show the best of them, indicating they believe that that might influence the situation or decision. As Fredrik Berglund argues:

> *"If you know that you will be fired, you either think 'Oh, well, hell, I do not care anymore', or you do as I and think 'now it is the most important time to show what I can do'. Some will be ambitious and some will not, I guess."*

Finally, what we noticed was that when asking about motivation, people described themselves, or their own team, as being more motivated than they perceived 'others' to be. Fredrik Berglund for example indicates that while other people seem to work less hard, the people in his close surroundings keep working as usual:

> *"I have heard in the teams that I work with that people are saying 'we can have a longer break, because we do not know if we will have our job next week.' But among the closest people I work with I have not seen such reactions."*

Oskar Andersson from the Application Software department does not mention his team, but describes why he suspects that he is less worried than some of the people around him:

> *"Maybe I am in a good position and others are not. The guy next to me, I think he is very worried."*

We were surprised about these findings, but, as discussed in the literature chapter, it is a human tendency to perceive one's self, or people close to the self as better than the rest. According to the 'causal attribution theory' (Van Vuuren & Klandermans, 1994) people attribute positive feelings and events to oneself while negative feelings and events are assigned to others, which is also the case for the knowledge workers at ToTech, as is apparent from our findings.

5.7 Motivation

The interviewees at ToTech were interviewed during a two-week time frame approximately two weeks after the all-employee meeting. After the open part of the interview we guided the conversation towards topics that related more directly towards motivation. Several reactions to the question "*how would you describe your current motivation to work for ToTech?"* will be analysed below. We had the impression that Johan Svensson, for example, indicates that even though he has experienced a drop in motivation as a result of the redundancy, he still wants to do a good job, which possibly could be a result of the culture in his particular team or department:

> *"My current motivation to work for ToTech is not very good I would say. My motivation for the people I work with is still high. It is not the same thing, but it is close. The group I work in, we still want to do a good job."*

Likewise, Mats Schön seemed to point out to still be motivated after the redundancy announcement, however, he seemed to express that this was predominantly the result of having an interesting assignment:

> *"Yes I am motivated. Even after this lay-off announcement. I like my assignment but I mean they can of course put me on some assignment I do not want to do. I would not be happy about that."*

Interestingly, the majority of interviewees did not directly relate their motivation to their job-threatening situation. We purposely did not mention words concerning the redundancy during the second part of the interview, but the lack of expressions concerning their job-threatening situation surprised us. Moreover, interviewees indicated to still be fairly motivated. For example, Simon Danielsson seemed to have entirely forgotten the context of job insecurity in relation to his motivation:

"I have been very motivated I think. Maybe things are not always as challenging as I would like, but still."

As we just presented, we did many interesting findings regarding the sense making of the pre-announcement context, reactions to the initial announcement and, finally, the announcement of the actual number and how that was expressed in terms feeling motivated. The following paragraph will elaborate more on the most interesting findings.

5.8 Empirical conclusion

Before gathering the empirical material, we expected negativity, a depressed atmosphere and unmotivated employees that expressed themselves through strong, emotional reactions. Based on the bad news the employees received, we were prepared for a negative and/or depressing atmosphere during the interviews. However, when entering the coffee lounge of the ToTech office several days after the all-employee meeting, the atmosphere seemed unchanged after the announcement of the actual number. Comparable to several weeks earlier, people were laughing, catching up over a cup of coffee and seemed as busy as before. As described in the analysis of the empirical material we derived from the interviews, we unexpectedly found out that even though employees were worried, shocked, and felt uncertain about their future within ToTech, employees described the current situation as business as usual within only two days. Essentially, what we were missing was a lasting lack of motivation.

The surprising result that employees regained motivation even though they were in a radical job-threatening situation forms our empirical mystery. In the following section we aim to understand this empirical mystery by testing our findings of the empirical material to various theories. First, we will try to explain our findings by using the intrinsic and extrinsic motivation theories and uncover why these motivation theories do not suffice in explaining our findings. As a result, we will afterwards discuss our findings in-depth according to the interactive motivation theory, testing if this can explain why perceived motivation returned so swiftly and can solve our mystery.

6. Discussion

In researching how knowledge workers make sense of job insecurity and how this context of ToTech influences the motivation of knowledge workers, we did several findings. We discovered that knowledge workers make sense of job insecurity through the organizational culture, norms, morals and identity of their context. In addition, we uncovered that not the context of downsizing, but rather the social context has influence on the employees' motivation. Employees still feel motivated in their current context and other than people being less interested in going the extra mile, little has changed. After the all-employee meeting, where the actual number of the redundancies was announced, there *only* seemed a two-day drop of motivation. As our empirical findings show, it is difficult to investigate motivation since while everybody indicates to gain motivation back after a short dip, some simultaneously lose the urge to go the extra mile for the organization. While this is an interesting finding, the limited timeframe of this research does not enable us to investigate this more deeply but it would be interesting for further research. During these two days people felt the urge to discuss their situation with colleagues, seemingly to make sense of their uncertain situation. Subsequently, business seemed back to usual and employees explained to be motivated again after this two-day drop of motivation; employees felt the need to continue with their work as they had, according to them, interesting and important tasks to do.

In this chapter we will try to understand the empirical mystery, and thus why employees got back to being motivated even though they were in job insecurity. We will structure our discussion by means of the motivation triangle where we will first eliminate intrinsic and extrinsic motivation theories, as these theories did not provide an answer to our empirical problem. The discussion continues as the third theory of the motivation triangle, interactive motivation theory, will be discussed according to the socially determined dimensions of that theory; norms, morals, identity and culture. These four dimensions are interrelated and reflect the connection between the employee and others in the work environment (Wallgren & Johansson, 2011). The social dimensions of a situation determine how employees are interactively motivated. As norms, morals and identity are dependent on culture, we will first discuss the culture of ToTech and subsequently determine its effects on sense-making and finally the influence on motivation.

6.1 Intrinsic and Extrinsic motivation

By analysing our empirical findings we discovered that intrinsic and extrinsic motivation theories did not explain our mystery as of why ToTech's employees became motivated again after only two days, even though they find themselves in a radical job-threatening situation. According to the intrinsic and extrinsic motivation theories, it would be logical that motivation decreases as a result of the lacking job security and should stay low as long as job insecurity endures. These theories perceive motivation as explainable and machine-like as the output (motivation) is influenced by the input (job insecurity). Our empirical findings did not correspond with the intrinsic and extrinsic motivation theories since our findings then should have shown that motivation indeed would have remained low, as long as job insecurity is low. Instead, our research showed that what is missing from these existing theories, is how people make sense of the world around them, their context, and how these social-contextual aspects influence their motivation. Interactive motivation thus helped us to better understand the empirical findings of this case. Since intrinsic and extrinsic motivation theories do not consider the meaning and complexity of context, we decided to use a theory that does take that into account: interactive motivation. As such, we used the third theoretical element of the motivation triangle to explain why employees got back to being motivated even though they find themselves in a radical job-threatening situation.

6.2 Interactive motivation

6.2.1 Culture

The organizational culture of ToTech is characterized by having a lot of interesting things to do. Employees find it both rewarding and necessary to have interesting and important tasks assigned to them. In addition, employees seem to work hard and be busy. Therefore, the norms, morals and identity of the employees of ToTech are dependent on being perceived as hard working and having a lot of interesting tasks to do. This explains why some interviewees prioritized working over attending meetings concerning the redundancy.

Another cultural aspect that contributes to the organizational culture is that knowledge workers have both a higher loyalty to the team than to the organization and a higher desire for prestige than non-knowledge workers. Especially the aspiration for a prestigious image seems to be of importance in this organizational context, since the many redundancies throughout the years have strongly decreased the once luster image of ToTech. As a result, the importance to adhere to the norms of one's team or department has increased. This explains why people expressed no motivation to work for ToTech, yet were motivated to work in their specific team or on their interesting assignment.

6.2.2 Norms

The reorganization of ToTech results in a decreasing workload for the organization and consequently for the different departments and functions, yet this was not acknowledged by the employees during the interviews. Feelings of having less to do and being less busy contrast with the norms of the organization, therefore, it can be explained that not a single interviewee indicated to have a decreased workload. One's urge to feel 'normal' within the team or department seems to result in a certain denial of being affected by the reorganization. The explains why the employees pointed at other teams or departments that, according to them, had less to do. It can be questioned, however, to what extent we can legitimize these expressions if all employees state that their own workload did not decrease while those of others did. There is a small chance that indeed none of the employees interviewed experienced a decrease in workload, however, more explanations are possible. First of all, these expressions reminded us of the 'causal attribution theory' (Van Vuuren & Klandermans, 1994) that argues that employees are tended to attribute positive feelings and events to oneself while negative feelings and events are attributed to out-groups. Congruent with this theory, it seems that the interviewees themselves deny the increased insecurity, however, they do recognize the drop in workload of out-groups. For example, interviewees indicated that they themselves and their teams remained busy, despite that they saw the workload of other colleagues and teams decrease. Another possible explanation is that people do not recognize their decrease in workload as a result of illusory superiority. A decreasing workload does not fit with illusory superiority – always perceiving oneself better than the rest – and also clashes with the organizational norms. Moreover, employees show how important their job actually is by staying busy and as such confirm the perception of their self. By denying the personal decrease in workload, employees were, yes indeed, still able to adhere to the organizational norms, but especially to the team or departmental norms, whilst being affected by the result of the reorganization.

Normative isomorphism explains why employees started working again rather soon after the all-employee meeting. Having a lot to do is perceived as 'normal', and therefore employees started working again quickly after the all-employee meeting. Another aspect could have triggered employees to continue work, namely the desire to – as a knowledge worker – have a prestigious image. Being perceived as 'not having a lot to do', thus not adhering to the organizational norms, can be harmful for the individual's image and thus identity. This also motivated the knowledge workers of ToTech to continue to work. The consequences of job insecurity on identity will be further discussed after we have analysed the effects on morals.

6.2.3 Morals

At ToTech the functional exchange relationship between employee and organization consists of ToTech providing interesting tasks where employees can learn from and innovate with. In exchange for these interesting tasks, employees are willing to go the extra mile and deliver extra 'shiny' solutions. As a result of the upcoming redundancies, employees experience their interesting tasks to be at risk. Essentially, employees expect the 'quid pro quo' contract to be broken shortly. Mats Schön for example, expressed to be motivated because he liked his assignment, but that he knew that ' they', the management, could put him on an assignment he did not want to do, seemingly implicating that with this end of the deal not being met, his motivation would decrease.

Because of the lingering expectation that the exchange relationship could be broken, motivation decreases. Nevertheless, employees still do their work. What essentially is happening is that the motivation to deliver the extra shiny solution has disappeared. From the employee point of view the exchange relationship is out of balance and, therefore, reacts by 'giving back' less. This motivated people to no longer give the extra mile. Interestingly, when asked about what motivation means for them, the interviewees answered by giving different expressions that all seemed contained the same meaning, namely ' delivering the extra mile'. When the interviewees were asked about being motivated to work at ToTech or not, all interviewees responded positively, but added that in the current context they were no longer willing to deliver the extra mile they previously had associated with being motivated. The expressions of the interviewees did not make sense. While claiming to be motivated, interviewees seemed not to be motivated any more in the way they had defined motivation. This raises the question of what motivation actually means. Does motivation mean that an employee fulfils his or her regular tasks? Or does it mean that the employee delivers the extra mile? While this is an interesting topic for another research, we will now stick to the loss of the extra mile in the context of ToTech.

6.2.4 Identity

Since identity is of inherent importance to knowledge workers and identity is connected to the immediate context(s) of the individual, these two aspects – identity and context – contribute to how knowledge workers make sense of their environment, which in this case is a radical redundancy process. As the findings suggest, the employees of ToTech are familiar with redundancy announcements. However, this particular announcement was taken more seriously because of its volume as can be deduced by the shock and silence people reacted to the news with. Moreover, not only the volume, of the lay-off but also the lack of a future perspective worried many. People had the urge to express their feelings and worries concerning the future of ToTech and had the possibility to do so during several meetings and coffee breaks. The general feeling among employees was that information was lacking in the internal communication of ToTech and, as a result, they gathered information via their immediate social circles that include family and friends, but mainly colleagues. Based on their individual context and the information gathered from the people around them, employees made sense of their new organizational context.

Besides knowledge intensive work, employees at ToTech now also had to deal with high job insecurity, which contributed to the ambiguity of being a knowledge worker and thus called for identity work. Unfortunately, employees' identity could not be strengthened by the organization's image. Because of the many redundancies, for example Johan Svensson expressed that ToTech was no longer perceived as a prestigious organization in his social context and, therefore, he also was not as proud to work for ToTech as he was before. Working at ToTech used to be something to be proud of, but this was no longer the case, as was confirmed by the non-organizational social environment of the employees. As a result, interviewees indicated that they did not want to identify with the organization itself and thus had to do identity work within their department or team. While adhering to the norms and reciprocity determined by the organizational culture in order to maintain a 'normal' identity, employees identified themselves with their team or department by emphasizing the importance of the tasks and the existence of their specific team or department for the organization's success.

In response to the lacking prestige of organizational image, employees focused on adhering to the norms and reciprocity that are congruent with the organizational culture in order to act to be perceived as normal. Employees thus denied the added ambiguity of having no more prestigious image, besides working in radical job insecurity, by acting 'extra normal' and resumed work as *if* 'business was back to usual'. This resulted in that employees quickly resumed their work, however, they delivered no more extra mile.

In addition, employees diversify themselves within teams by for example expressing how busy they were in comparison with other team members and within departments how important their team was for the continuous success of that department. Since illusory superiority is a human tendency, it does raise the question if the 'busyness' and 'importance' expressed by the interviewees can be considered as reliable. While this is an interesting topic for another research, we will for now stick to how this influences employee motivation in the context of radical job insecurity.

Another explanation for how quickly employees returned to work is that, since we are dealing with knowledge workers, people are highly task oriented. Actively going back to work was not motivated by aiming to help the organization survive, but rather by the belief of people that they had important and interesting tasks to do. The employees at ToTech are software development knowledge workers and do identity work by the tasks they perform. The majority of employees at ToTech is engineer and prioritizes learning and innovation, while aiming to solve interesting problems. The importance of the problem solved attributes to their status and therefore also their identity. The desire to be and feel important results in people going back to work quickly, 'because people are dependent on me', or at least that is what they want to believe.

6.3 The mystery

After analysing ToTech's story, we arrived at our mystery, namely that employees regained motivation after a short dip even though they find themselves in a job-threatening situation. We aimed at exploring why employees got back to being motivated after only a two-day dip despite their situation of job insecurity and by doing so, we discovered that intrinsic and extrinsic motivation theories did not provide adequate answers to our empirical mystery. We need to look beyond what is immediately visible on the surface and acknowledge meaning making and complexity in order to understand how knowledge workers make sense of job insecurity. Our findings show that by means of the interactively determined dimensions culture, norms, morals and identity, knowledge workers make sense of job insecurity. Therefore, the restricted awareness knowledge workers have of their reality as a result of their social context, frames their sense-making. As a consequence, our discussion showed how motivation is a result of the complex meaning making of the context of ToTech's knowledge workers, and thus that job insecurity is a minor aspect in knowledge workers' context that influences motivation.

7. Conclusions

7.1 A brief recap – wrapping it up

This qualitative research explored the phenomenon of employee motivation from an interpretive perspective. A thorough understanding was aimed for in doing fifteen in-depth, semi-structured interviews with fifteen employees of a multinational mobile phone manufacturing company, ToTech, which we distinguish as a knowledge intensive firm. The aim of this research was to investigate how knowledge workers make sense of their job-threatening situation in terms of motivation and to develop a theoretical understanding on motivation from a more conceptual point of view. In order to arrive at this purpose, we developed two research questions *'How do knowledge workers make sense of job insecurity?'* and *'How does job insecurity in the context of radical change influence the motivation of knowledge workers?'* which we tried to answer by means of starting the interviews with a 'storytelling' approach and then, as the interviews continued, steered questions towards motivation. We followed inductive reasoning as our research is empirically led rather than testing existing theories on our empirical findings. We tried to stay as open as possible to our data by starting to collect data before reading in and examining the theory. Acknowledging our pre-assumptions enabled us to understand where they came from and how experiences and pre-acquired knowledge influenced the framing of our world. This understanding endowed a liberation of this framing and thus allowed us to be relatively 'open'. The collected data made it possible to assess and analyse motivation from an in-depth perspective and to understand the meaning employees make of their context in terms of motivation.

Throughout our research a reflexive approach was used in order to improve our qualitative research and increase the credibility and understanding of our findings. By taking a step back from our research by asking questions such as *What are our interviewees actually telling us?* and *What is the meaning and understanding behind the interviewees' expressions?,* we strived to gain different insights, credible interpretations and an adequate understanding of the empirical material. In addition, we moved away from the assumption that there is one domineering thought or truth as we are conducting an interpretive, qualitative research. Therefore, we closely focused on the the participants, and the social context. During the process of interpreting and reinterpreting our findings, we bumped into differences in interpretations, what does not inevitably meant that we needed to derogate our interpretations. By acknowledging those differences, we ensured to remain reflexive and critical towards our findings.

The concept of motivation is widely explored and different theories have been developed. These existing theories are valuable in terms of pointing out several important aspects of motivation. However, the simplified nature of these theories and the fact that they do not necessarily take culture and social context into consideration, illuminate several shortcomings. Since human beings are social creatures, it is crucial to take also the social aspect of the context into account (Alvesson, 2004). What is missing from the existing theories is how people make sense of the world around them, their context, and how these social-contextual aspects influence their motivation. Therefore, we elaborated in our research on interactive motivation, a theoretical element of the 'motivation triangle theory' (Alvesson & Kärreman, 2012), to discuss an alternative way to understand motivation and apply this relatively new approach to motivation in a social and organizational context.

7.2 Interactive motivation – the importance of meaning and complexity

In contrast to the mainstream theories that exist around motivation, we have looked beyond what is immediately visible on the surface. As a result, this research presents two major, intertwining aspects of the motivation phenomenon – complexity and meaning – that contribute to the phenomenon's ambiguity. The majority of research so far has focused on intrinsic and extrinsic motivation theories and is mainly focused on the functionality of motivation. Intrinsic and extrinsic motivation theories, however, do not take the context into account. Consequently, the result of human sense-making, which is based on the individual's identity and the multiple social circles the individual is active in, is ignored. This study underlines the importance of recognizing the identity- and context-led meaning-making process and elucidates its impact and complexity on motivation.

In the context of ToTech's story, it has been shown how a certain context is highly dependent on the interactively determined dimensions of culture, norms, morals and identity. Our findings showed that these four aspects influence how knowledge workers make sense of job insecurity. In ToTech's case the multi-dimensional sense making process of the context had a buffering effect on the initial decrease in motivation, as job insecurity is only one minor aspect in the context of knowledge workers that influences motivation. This aspect in the context could have the opposite effect in an organization with for example an entirely different culture. Becoming aware of that job insecurity is 'only' one of many factors in the context of ToTech's story it can be questioned how much influence the change of one single aspect can have on phenomena such as motivation. If the world consists of how individuals make meaning of their reality through their particular context, consisting of how not only they, but also the people in their close environment, interpret the different aspects in the environment, do we not then construct our own reality? And, if that is the case indeed, how much influence can one have on phenomena, such as motivation, by changing certain factors in the environment other than the social context, such as job insecurity? Especially since by constructing reality, we restrict our own awareness of reality. Or, in particular, how functional can phenomena such as motivation be, if they are dependent on the subjective meaning individuals and their social context lend to them, and thus the magic formula of 'motivation' is the result of an individual's personal context and meaning making as of, and hence different for every individual? From a conceptual point of view we can theoretically understand motivation as a result of the complex meaning making of the individuals.

7.3 Learning points

Our findings have several learning points, implications, regarding motivation. Below we will elaborate on what the underlined importance of meaning and complexity imply in theory:

- We have discovered that 'meaning' is important to how knowledge workers make sense of their world;
- Our research has taught us that reality is complex and therefore also the meaning making process of phenomena such as motivation;
- Knowledge workers attribute high importance to their social context in order to determine what motivates them;
- The interactive aspects culture, norms, morals and identity influence knowledge workers' motivation;
- The meaning-making process of phenomena such as motivation is therefore multidimensional, complex, for knowledge workers;
- Because of the interactive meaning-making process of knowledge workers, there is no magic formula that generates motivation.

If, indeed, motivation is dependent on the two intertwining aspects meaning and complexity, what does motivation depend on, actually? Everything? And if so, does it then actually not depend at all? Moreover, if context is so important for how we make sense of the world, how do we know what our context exists of entirely if restricted awareness frames our reality?

It is possible to elaborate on context and what it, according to our findings, includes and perhaps what it should include. Instead, we wonder about whether it is more valuable to complicate or simplify our world. Theories help us frame reality and simplify our world, create understanding. However, do we complicate or simplify our world by only taking more and more into account when aiming to make sense of it? Or does it suffice to be aware that 'things aren't as simple as they are' and, keeping this in mind, maintain basing our actions on simplified theories in an attempt to structure reality in a way we can comprehend?

As our findings suggest, there is much more going on than can immediately be perceived in our context. Perchance it, therefore, also is a valuable lesson to remember that probably more is going on than the eye beholds, no matter how we look at our reality. In addition, as the complexity of our context and the way we make meaning of it, determine what we see, we might have to remember that this can also work vice versa, namely that what we see also determines how we look. For example, the context of the employees (what they see) determines how they interpret the different factors in their environment (how they look) such as job insecurity. In our research interviewees could for example have reacted very differently if this was the first redundancy the organization would have been going through. This leads us to think that the whole lot depends on context and makes us wonder if *we* can influence context, or that context influences *us*? Or does it work both ways and is everything connected, or is nothing connected at all? In practice, we suggest that it is a practical lesson to not forget that we influence continuously, not only concerning motivation, but also in society in general.

7.4 Contribution

This research contributes to motivation theory in several different ways. First of all, the 'motivation triangle theory' only has been developed in Swedish academic literature and merely has been used in English written reports and articles a few times, such as in the thesis writing from a psychology scholar from the University of Gothenburg (Wallgren, 2011). Making a broader readership familiar with this theory is important because in the contemporary context we need contemporary theories to explain what is going on. In addition to that, except for this research, the interactive theory so far has not been put into a real life context yet. By doing so, we provide new insights to motivation theory. Implicitly, by applying the interactive motivation aspect of the motivation triangle to a social and organizational context, we also contribute by testing the validity and usability of interactive motivation theory in the context of this research, even though this theory consequently is not valid and usable in general. Additionally, we add to motivation research since (quantitative) research on motivation tends to leave out meaning making, like is the case in the research by Van Vuuren and Klandermans (1994). This qualitative research contributes by illustrating the meaning making of employees in terms of whether they feel motivated or not and why, in a context of downsizing. Our main contribution is even though intrinsic and extrinsic motivation theories explain many aspects concerning motivation, the application of interactive motivation theory enables a fuller account of what happens in this case study and a richer understanding of motivation. As a result, we also contribute to existing job insecurity theory, as we have exemplified how context and meaning making can buffer the demotivating effects that normally result from job insecurity. Moreover, since identity is of relatively high importance to knowledge workers, job insecurity is presumed to have different effects on knowledge workers than on people with a common, non-knowledge intensive, occupation.

A final note is that when conducting a case study, one should question whether that case study can represent and be generalized to other organizations (Yin, 2013). Our findings are not aimed at complete generalization, but rather to serve as inspiration and insights for other organizations facing similar situations. It could help other organizations to understand complexities of employees' interpretation and motivation in a downsizing situation. Referring to Stake (1978, cited in Gomm, Hammersley & Foster, 2000), this can be called 'naturalistic generalization'. Readers of our case study report must determine themselves whether our findings are applicable to other cases, or not (Gomm *et al.*, 2000).

7.5 Limitations

The limitations of this research project will be outlined in the following section. It is important to be aware of the limitations of a research in order to point out where the research falls short. First of all, we did a relatively small research since we interviewed fifteen employees on an entire workforce of two thousand employees, which might provoke limitations, as we cannot be sure of how well our results presented the entire workforce. Notwithstanding this uncertainty, when analysing meaning, quantity is no priority (Alvesson & Sköldberg, 2009). In addition to that, the research was held during a rather short time frame of two weeks and thus only analyses the sense making for that particular time frame, but leaves out the long-term implications of the job insecurity. Finally, in this research we only researched whether people *felt* motivated or not, and what aspects influenced their motivation. What we did not investigate is what effects their perceived motivation actually had on, for example, their actual performance, which might be of a lot more interest to an organization than whether people just 'feel' motivated or not.

Ultimately, another aspect that we would like to point out is a limitation of not only this research, but of research in general. We did several interesting findings and got closer to answering certain questions by conducting this research. However, our conclusions should not be taken for 'true'. While we have come a step closer to answering the question we asked in the beginning of this research, this merely is a step in the right direction. The extrinsic and intrinsic motivation theories developed half a century ago also were a step in the correct direction, and seemed valid in the context in which they have been developed The Greek philosopher Heraclites taught:

πάντα ῥεῖ και ουδὲν μενεῖ

This expression means 'everything changes and nothing stays (the same)'. As the context of our reality keeps changing and definitions are being redefined, so do theories. The theories we use to frame and make sense of our reality should thus change accordingly. However, if all these aspects change, would we ever come a step closer to uncovering magic formulas and actually change very little – if anything – in this ever-changing world of ours?

7.6 Recommendations for future research

As a result of our research findings we have come across several topics that ask for more in-depth research. This research project has only focused on a small aspect of motivation, namely whether employees feel motivated in the specific context and what makes them *feel* motivated. However, what has not been uncovered in this research is what motivation actually means and if, in a context of job insecurity, feeling motivated leads to an employee fulfilling his or her tasks or not, or to a certain extent. For example, it would be interesting to further investigate the conflicting expressions of employees to be motivated again after a short dip, while also losing the urge to go the extra mile. Finally, putting the 'motivation triangle theory' in other, various contexts would contribute to testing its universal validity and usefulness.

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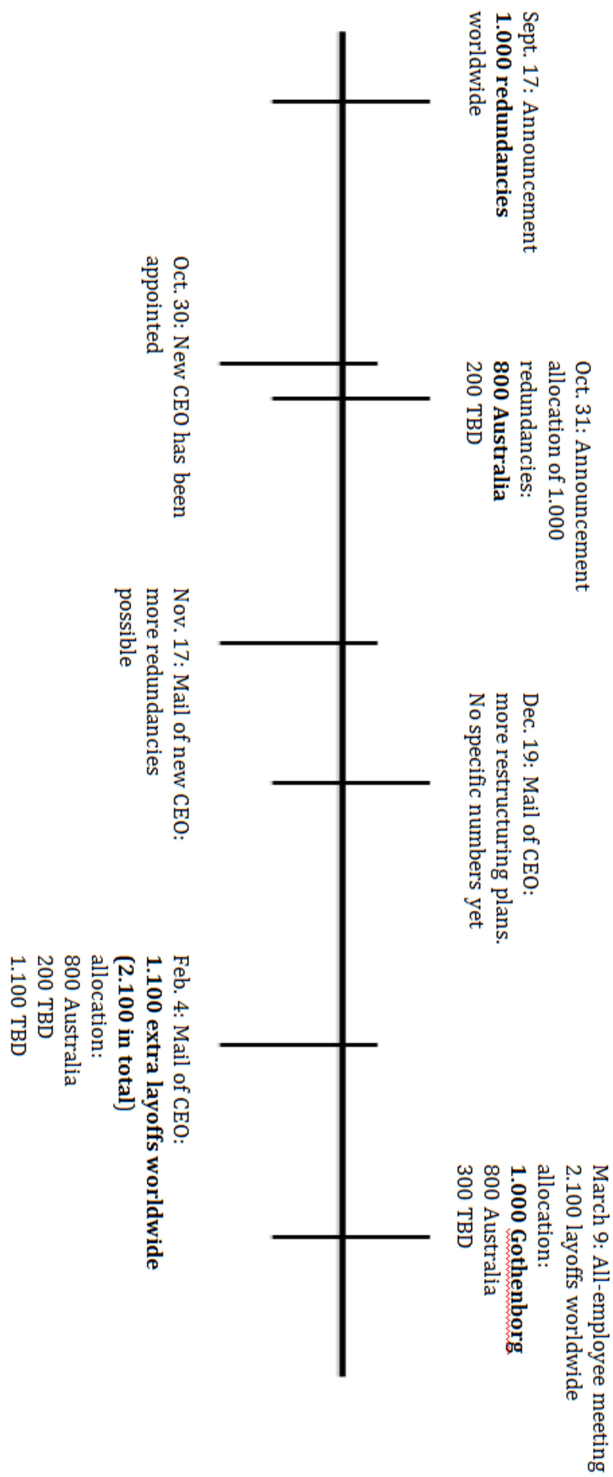
Appendix I – Timeline of ToTech's communication concerning the redundancy



Appendix II – Our Sample

	Name	Age category	Department
1	Linnea Johansson	20-30	HR
2	Stina Nyman	50-60	HR
3	Johan Svensson	40-50	Companion Product
4	Fredrik Berglund	30-40	Application Software
5	Sebastian Schmiedel	40-50	Software
6	Josefine Löfgrön	50-60	Finance
7	Oskar Andersson	40-50	Application Software
8	Erik Alberyd	30-40	Quality & Customer Services
9	Joel Björklund	50-60	Quality & Customer Services
10	Mats Schön	30-40	Software
11	Mio Henriksson	40-50	Software
12	Simon Danielsson	40-50	Software
13	Elias Wahlström	40-50	Software
14	Andreas Magnusson	20-30	Software
15	Hanna Wendel	30-40	Quality & Customer Services