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School of Economics and Management

Performing Service Work Without a Shield

A qualitative case study on employees' experiences
of interactive service works

Degree project in Managing People, Knowledge and Change

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ABSTRACT

- Title:** Practicing service work without a shield
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- Keywords:** Interactive Service Work, Customer Satisfaction, Emotional Labor, Peer-Based Control
- Thesis purpose:** The purpose of this study is to examine how employees experience work within an interactive service organization that lacks formal hierarchical positions. Since interactive service works often is preformed within rationalized and highly controlled work environments, we find it highly relevant to in-depth analyze how employees experience a more autonomous context.
- Methodology:** The thesis departs from an interpretive qualitative perspective.
- Theoretical perspective:** The theoretical background concerns literature on interactive service work and different forms of organizational control mechanisms, such as bureaucratic-, peer-based- and concertive control. The theories are intertwined, presenting different aspects that affect the work conditions for service workers.
- Empirical foundation:** The research is based on a qualitative case study and conducted on Peppes pizza-chain in Norway, on one of the ninety restaurants. The empirical data was collected from in-depth semi-structured interviews with employees.
- Conclusion:** Employees' experiences of working in an interactive service work with no hierarchical positions suggest a multidimensional reality. The findings pointed out how employees in such context experience high job satisfaction, but at the same time felt stress, frustration and irritation when there are no formalized rules or authority to lean on or hide behind.

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“So when you are listening to somebody, completely, attentively, then you are listening not only to the words, but also to the feeling of what is being conveyed, to the whole of it, not part of it.”

(Jiddu Krishnamurti)

In the light of this inspirational quote which provided guidance throughout the process of the thesis, we would like to express a genuine and wholehearted thank to:

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INTERACTIVE SERVICE WORK- AN INTRODUCTION

Saturday evening. The restaurant starts to fill up with customers arriving from the after ski. Clinks from glasses, stories from the slopes and distant laughter mix with a smell of freshly baked pizza and ice-cold beer. Michelle waits a table where five men in their early fifties had a bit too much to drink. She starts to get anxious. Michelle knows that it is up to her to decide how much they are allowed to drink. But how much is too much?

After serving them their pizzas, Michelle is extremely frustrated. One of the men was being rude and obnoxious to her when she stated that he wasn't allowed any more drinks. After engaging in a long, loud and tiresome discussion with him and his friends, she caved in and gave him a beer.

Michelle seeks advice from Laura, a close colleague. The two waitresses walk into the kitchen where the customers are unable to see them. Laura can see that Michelle is close to tears: "It is not only about his drunkenness... Actually, he wasn't as drunk as I thought... It's the way he looks at me, talks down to me and constantly put his hands on me. I don't know what to do. Actually, I'm ignoring all of my customers now due to his presence. But I can't really kick him out, he hasn't done anything that bad... Oh I don't know what to do, help me! What would you do?"

Laura feels bad for Michelle and tries to comfort her. At the same time, she does not want to get too involved in the situation. Laura gives her a long hug and says: "Darling, you are the one who has been talking to him, you are the one who knows the situation best. It is really hard for me telling you what to do. I trust you and your judgment and support you in any decision. The company is not acting too loud, they are not disturbing

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the other customers, they're probably fine! Don't let him ruin your whole night! Just ignore him."

*The customer stayed in the restaurant for almost two hours. Michelle spent most of the time hiding in the kitchen in order to escape his presence. She ended her shift an hour earlier, stating she had a bad headache.
(Recapture of an event at Peppes Pizza 17/3-2014)*

The service sector stands for approximately three quarters of the jobs in the advanced economies (Ritzer 2011). Even though the sector employs a huge amount of people, the work conditions are often described as poor (Fleming & Sturdy 2011; Ogbonna & Harris 2002; Ritzer 2011; Taylor & Bain 1999). In interactive service organizations such as call-centers and fast-food restaurants employees are often victims of low salaries, poor work hours and an extensive degree of control and surveillance (Korczynski & Macdonald 2009; Leidner 1993; Ritzer 2011). Ritzer (2011) discusses McDonaldization as a metaphorical way of understanding developments in the service sector. The concept is commonly referred to in interactive service works and becomes manifested when an organization adapts to the same principles as a fast-food restaurant in order to achieve efficiency, calculability, predictability and control. The author illustrates how fast-food restaurants tend to control service workers by making them behave, look and think more unified and predictable:

*"All employees must wear uniforms and follow dress codes for things such as makeup, hair length, and jewelry. Training programs are designed to indoctrinate the worker into a 'corporate culture', such as the McDonald's attitude and way of doing things. Highly detailed manuals spell out, among other things, 'how often the bathroom must be cleaned to the temperature of grease used to fry potatoes... and what color nail polish to wear'
(Ritzer 2011: 106).*

The concept seeks to design repetitive work tasks and predictable performances in order to ensure that the same service is provided at every visit and to all customers (Ritzer 2011). Hence, employees are often looked upon as machines performing low-skilled and repetitive work activities.

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However, many scholars are critical to the high degree of rationalization and control in interactive service work (Grönroos 2008; Korczynski & McDonald 2009; Ritzer 2011; Taylor & Bain 1999) and acknowledge its negative outcomes towards employees. Ritzer (2011) recognizes how a high degree of control and efficiency tend to neglect the human aspect of work. Grönroos (2008) argues a high degree of rules, regulation and surveillance in interactive service work leads to decreased job satisfaction and low commitment among employees. Taylor and Bain (1999) claim that the notion of constant supervision leads to employees' resistance and low performance. Therefore, these scholars argue that an organization must have elements of autonomous decision-making in order to create an attractive and pleasant work environment for its employees. Grönroos (2008) defines autonomous decision-making within interactive service work as:

“To provide employees, for example front staff, the authority to make their own decisions and to act according to personal instincts and preferences in problematic situations” (p.382).

From here, when using the terms *autonomous decision-making* or *autonomy* in our thesis, we are referring to the same definition as the author.

Even though many authors claim the need for improved autonomy within the interactive service sector, there are few qualitative studies conducted in regards to the employee experience of such setting. Fleming and Sturdy (2011) conducted a study within a call-center where employees experienced a greater amount of freedom during work. Even though the call-center had elements of McDonaldization, the organization facilitated a more enjoyable work environment, where employees were encouraged to be themselves and to simply have fun during working hours. However, the authors argue that the fun work environment was implemented in order to *distract* employees from the actual rules, regulations and surveillance. Therefore, we find it highly relevant to examine how employees experience a context in interactive service work that is actually characterized by less surveillance, fewer hierarchical levels and greater freedom. Many authors in interactive service work are concerned with how the principles of McDonaldization negatively impacts employees. However, when we looked at previous literature in the field promoting such setting (Fleming & Sturdy 2011; Grönroos 2008; Korczynski & Macdonald 2011; Ogbonna & Harris 2002; Ritzer 2011; Taylor & Bain 1999) there were few studies related to the actual employee

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experience. Therefore, we want to extend the literature on how employees experience working within interactive service organizations.

In order to extend the literature in the field, we will examine a unique context within the service sector. As previously mentioned, interactive service works are often looked upon as highly controlled workplaces where emphasis is put on efficiency and predictability. However, our object of study is organized differently since there are no formal positions, more or less equal responsibilities among employees and few formalized rules on how to perform. Another fact that makes the object even more interesting to study, is that the restaurant has one of the highest nationwide scores on service quality when measured by mystery shoppers (Mystery shopper survey 2013/2014).

Purpose

The purpose of this study is to examine how employees experience work within an interactive service organization that lacks formal hierarchical positions. Since interactive service works often is performed within rationalized and highly controlled work environments, we find it relevant to in-depth analyze how employees experience a more autonomous context. In order to concretize the purpose we have outlined the following research question:

- How do employees experience a low degree of formal hierarchy and surveillance in an interactive service organization?

Outlining the structure of the thesis

The outline of the thesis' structure aims to guide the reader and to clarify the different sections that will be presented. First, we will present the methodology. This part will provide the reader with a description of how the study departs from an interpretive approach by describing the ontological and epistemological standpoints of the thesis. Further, we will present information about how we collected the empirical material and discuss the process of analyzing the collected data. In this section, we will also consider trustworthiness of the study by discussing credibility and reflexivity.

Second, we will present the literature review and the theory we have chosen to analyze the empirical material with. In the literature review, we will motivate our choices of theory and position ourselves within the existing concepts. The theoretical framework departs from two

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main sections; key concepts of interactive service works and different forms of organizational control mechanisms.

Third, we will present the findings from the empirical material. Therefore, this section will include the participants' experiences of working within a restaurant. After presenting the empirical material, we will apply the theoretical framework to analyze the material in a discussion section. In the discussion section, we will compare our findings to existing literature and further add our own analytical insights. The study aims to contribute to new interesting findings within the field of interactive service works.

Lastly, we will present a short summary of the study's conclusions and relate them back to the research question. The aim is to discuss our findings in a broader sense and the practical implications they might cause. Finally, we will present limitations of the study and give suggestions of interesting future research that are still quite unexplored within the field.

APPROACHING THE FIELDWORK- METHODOLOGY

In the following section, we will present our methodology of the study. First, we will discuss the paradigm from which the study departs, considering ontological and epistemological foundation. Next, we will motivate our choice of qualitative research method and present information about the process of collecting the empirical material. The description will include information about the interview design, participants and the implementation of the interviews conducted. Lastly, we will end the section with a discussion of how credibility and reflexivity have influenced our study.

A research study begins with your being curious about something, and that ‘something’ is usually related to your work, your family, your community, or yourself.” (Merriam 2002:11)

Methodological starting points

Methodology constitutes a set of techniques that is used to collect empirical material of particular situations. When discussing methodology, authors clarify how it is understood and underpinned by different ontological and epistemological concerns (Alvesson & Sköldbberg 2008; Creswell 2003; Burell & Morgan 1979) Ontology seeks to explain the nature of reality, its being and existence. It includes questions and considerations about how the world is experienced and therefore understood (Alvesson & Sköldbberg 2008). Our ontological standpoint is that reality is socially constructed by interactions between individuals. Therefore, we believe that there is no objective reality that exists separately from its context. We believe that there are multiple realities, what is acknowledged as a reality for one might not be the true for another since it is constructed in the mind of the individual.

The other mentioned concern is of epistemological character. Epistemology relates to the nature of knowledge and aims to describe how we are able to acquire knowledge (Burell & Morgan 1979; Bryman 2002). Our epistemological standpoint is highly interrelated with our ontological understanding. From a social constructivist world-view, it is essential to discover and explore the hidden meanings and understandings through interactions with individuals. We therefore believe knowledge is gained from studying social interactions and meaning

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creations rather than examine hard, measurable facts (see Alvesson & Sköldbberg 2008; Burrell & Morgan 1979). Our interpretative approach enabled us to gain deeper understanding of our participants' experiences and behavior. The related approaches have influenced the entire process of study, from how we choose our subject, formulated the interview questions, conducted the interviews and analyzed the material.

We acknowledge that individuals' experiences of interactive service work are socially constructed. For instance, the experiences are highly influenced by previous work experiences as well as differentiated cultural and social contexts. We agree with Nealon & Giroux (2012) when they argue that the meaning of peoples' actions and thoughts get lost without a historical, social or cultural context. Therefore, when people act, feel and think, the contexts surrounding them are influential and decisive. From this standpoint, we recognize how our thesis is highly contextualized. Therefore, we do not aim to generalize the findings of our study but rather provide insights and explanations of how individuals can experience interactive service works.

Qualitative research method

“In conducting a basic qualitative study, you seek to discover and understand a phenomenon, a process, the perspectives and worldviews of the people involved, or a combination of these.” (Merriam 2002: 6)

When conducting qualitative research, the empirical material can be gathered from interviews, observations or document analysis (ibid.). In this study, the aim was to acquire fruitful descriptions of the participants' *experiences* within an organizational context. Therefore, we choose semi-structured in-depth interviews as our research method in order to capture individuals' thoughts and experiences of interactive service work. Qualitative interviews proceed from the interviewees' perspective and contribute to a deeper understanding about their personal experiences and beliefs (Bryman 2002). Semi-structured interviews were chosen since they do not follow a restricted set of questions but rather allows the interviewer to pick up on interesting themes and comments during the interview. In this way, it enhanced flexibility and adjustments and allowed us to discuss issues and problems of higher relevance (see Kvale & Brinkmann 2009). It gave us the opportunity to be open-

mindful for new interesting insights and themes when we discussed employees' experiences in regards to the lack of hierarchical positions and low degree of surveillance.

Collecting the empirical material

Since we proceeded from our empirical material and findings in order to choose our theoretical frames of references, our method has elements of inductive research. However, we do acknowledge that we had a good pre-understanding of the organization and the participants. Our pre-understanding is based upon previous work experience within the company for many years. Also, conducting research within a well-known field provided us with theoretical frame of references and assumptions before the empirical material was gathered. Therefore, we entered the study with rather clear pre-understandings, making our research more abductive in nature. We interpreted the empirical material as well as decided what theories to use parallel during the whole process. Alvesson & Sköldbberg (2008) describe this approach as a constant altering and interaction between theory and analysis.

After deciding on our object of study and research question, we started to search literature on service work in order to gain a deeper understanding about the research field. Since we had a clear picture of the workplace and its working conditions beforehand, we knew that there were elements of empowerment within the organization. Therefore, we searched for articles including 'empowerment' and 'interactive service work'. We did this in order to facilitate a rich discussion during the interviews and enhance our opportunity to recognize important issues that been previously discussed within the field. However, while conducting our interviews and gathering the empirical material, our pre-understanding of autonomous working conditions and empowerment within the restaurant changed. When looking at the organization in a more analytical and research-oriented way, the theoretical framework appeared less useful. Since we both have been working in the restaurant, this observation surprised us. This altering and adjustment between theory and empirical material strengthens our abductive approach and helped us look beyond some of our biases and assumptions.

Participants

To increase the credibility of the study, we undertook a purposeful sample strategy when we selected the participants for the interviews (see Krefting 1991). A purposeful sample strategy refers to how researchers strategically include participants with better insights and understandings of the research area (Creswell 2003). The interviewees were therefore chosen

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based on recent working activity and time spent in the organization. We wanted to explore how both recent recruits and more senior employees experienced working conditions within the restaurant.

The process of accessing the organization and approaching the employees went relatively smoothly since we both have been working within the organization. We contacted the participants via Facebook in regards to the interviews and created a Facebook group where a description of our project was presented and 13 employees were invited. Thereafter, we held 11 interviews during a 14-days period where the majorities of the interviews were conducted in Norway during a visit and two of them were conducted in Malmö. Our participants had an average age of 23. The full-time personnel are mainly under the age average, spanning from 19-26 years while the returning former full-time employees spans from 24-29 years. Since our study looks at employees' experiences of their present work conditions, we found anonymity to be highly important in order to make the participants feel secured enough to share their private thoughts and experiences with us (see Kvale & Brinkmann 2009). In order to reassure the participants' confidentiality, we have used fictive names in the thesis. Below, there is a brief presentation of our interviewees in order to provide clarity for the reader. The following names will portray the participants of the study:

Name:	Position:	Length of employment:
Mary	Waitress and chef	More than five years
Susan	Chef	Less than one year
Michelle	Waitress	More than five years
Laura	Waitress and chef	More than five years
Dean	Chef	Less than one year
Megan	Waitress	Less than one year
Sarah	Waitress	Two years
Olivia	Waitress	Three years
Nathalie	Waitress	Four years
Hannah	Waitress and chef	More than five years
Barbara	Waitress	Less than one year

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We have also conducted an interview with David, the owner of the restaurant. The empirical material from the interview was viewed upon as background information to reach deeper insights of the context.

Conducting the interviews

We decided to conduct all interviews face-to-face to increase credibility of the study. Bryman (2002) explains how face-to-face interviews enable the researcher to take notice of body language and physical reactions, which describes the context more in-depth. All interviews lasted for 44-75 minutes and took place either at the restaurant of study or at a public café. Since we had both Swedish and Danish participants, we had to decide upon what language to use during the interviews. We decided to carry out the interviews with Swedish participants in Swedish since we believed that communication in a native spoken language would contribute to answers with more richness and fruitful descriptions. The two Danish participants were instead encouraged to communicate in English since we did not feel enough confident to understand their native spoken language.

Kvale and Brinkmann (2009) explain that an interview is best practiced when the interviewers facilitate room for interpretations during the interaction. Aiming for this, we took on different roles during the interviews in order to discover different aspects and dimensions. The first role led the interview and was in charge of the interview guide to reassure the questions of high relevance for the study were discussed. The other person undertook more of an observing role during the interview. The second role prioritized to take field notes during the process to strengthen the credibility of the study (see Krefting 1991). Such initiative allowed us to capture the participants' body language as well as voice tone within the context. Field notes should according to Creswell (2003) be seen as a valuable source to collect material from when conducting interviews in qualitative research. We wrote down our field notes on a piece of paper, which included reflexive thoughts, feelings, and upcoming questions and insights. After each interview, we made room for discussions and reflections over the interview's content and the field notes made. Kvale and Brinkmann (2009) support ending an interview with a discussion since it creates space for interesting thoughts and angles. We could thereby reflect upon our thoughts and emotions as well as how we interpreted the interviews differently.

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After the first two interviews we made smaller readjustments in the interview guide and rephrased questions that were experienced difficult to answer. For instance, we noticed that a few of our questions were too broad or vague formalized to facilitate descriptive answers. This adapting approach allowed us to reach rich and fruitful responses from the interviewees (see Roulston 2010). Ryen (2004) states that the volume of the qualitative research should be viewed upon as a question of judgment from the researchers, where not only the number of interviews should be considered but also the qualitative and richness within its contents. After 11 interviews were conducted, we regarded how the variety of nuanced and rich descriptions had brought us a solid empirical ground. We experienced that the answers provided by the interviewees included similar descriptions and issues and therefore decided to begin the in-depth analysis of the material.

Analyzing the empirical material

We recorded and transcribed all interviews to conduct a more careful analyze of the material. When the empirical material was collected we slowly begun to interpret and analyze our data. The first reading of the material was done individually in order to not influence each other's interpretations and thoughts. Afterwards, we compared our thoughts and notes of the empirical material to explore similarities and differences of our interpretations. The aim was to grasp a general understanding and minimize the risk of marginalize interesting aspects and themes. In order to discover interesting themes, we put great emphasis on both our transcribed material and field notes. We analyzed the material through thematic analysis, more specific what Bryman refers to as 'the framework approach' (Bryman 2002: 578). Consequently, we constructed a matrix where interesting and frequent themes and subthemes were displayed. For instance, we looked for similarities and differences in the experiences of the staff, what metaphors were being used in order to describe the workplace and interesting repetitions. We always proceeded from our research question, namely "how employees experience a low degree of formal hierarchy and surveillance in an interactive service organization" in order to stay focused on the topic and avoid vaguely connected themes.

The process of analyzing the empirical material included several readings, where we highlighted sentences and words connected to the research question. On the side of the highlighted transcript, we made code notes to clarify what we found the response indicated as well as could be related to. For instance, we highlighted responses indicating both positive and negative aspects of working at the restaurant but separated them with different

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highlighted colors and comments on the side. When reading through our comments, we made notes on a piece of paper in order to identify patterns, topics and interesting findings that we could categorize into themes. Based on our coding, we found several themes to be relevant for our study, for example the notion of autonomy, power of customer, fellowship and emotional exhaustion. However, through a deeper interpretation we recognized how some of them signified similarities and acted more as sub-theme to each other. Therefore, we decided to narrow the themes down even further which finally ended up in three related themes.

Trustworthiness

During the process of collection and analyzing the empirical material we viewed ourselves as participants of an ongoing journey, where themes, new thoughts and reflections occurred during the trip. Our aim throughout the process was to be as open minded as possibly to find interesting angles and by careful readings and discussions take a reflexive stand. This strengthens our abductive approach where both empirical material as well as theory constitute the foundation of our research and was interpreted simultaneously during the whole process. During our journey, the aim was to constantly consider and strengthen the trustworthiness of the study.

Thick descriptions

Qualitative research is dependent upon contextual contingencies and seeks to explain the unique meaning and significance of the described social reality. Therefore, qualitative researchers are encouraged to provide the readers with thick descriptions of details included in the study's environment (Merriam 2002). Such thick descriptions can be seen as a database, providing the reader with transparency and an enhanced ability to determine whether or not the results can be fairly applicable to a different context (Bryman 2002). In order to reach a detailed and transparent study, it has been our aim to provide the reader with such generous narratives throughout the thesis. Contextual contingencies, such as the high influence of seasonal changes at the restaurant and descriptive stories from employees have been considered as essential in order to enable the reader to visualize the environment and to grasp the emotions of the employees.

Reflexivity

When conducting qualitative research, the researchers are constantly being co-producers of the interpretations and the outcome of the study (Creswell 2003). Alvesson and Sköldböck (2008) therefore underpin the importance of taking a reflexive stand to increase awareness of

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how both biases and assumptions may affect the results. Reflexivity concerns the relationship between us as researchers, our object of study and the participants involved. We recognized how reflexivity became central in our study, for example when we frequently made room for discussions and interpretations throughout the research process. We found the time for reflexivity to be valuable in order to reduce possible short cuts and misinterpretations.

Since we were already well familiar with both the context and with some of the participants, reflexivity had to be an integral part of our study. For example, we discussed how the participants in the interviews might not express their genuine thoughts but rather framed their answers to portray themselves in more favorable light when knowing the interviewer. This is something Alvesson (2003) acknowledge and points out how individuals often tend to give out good impressions of themselves or the organization they identify themselves. We experienced such notion when conducting the interviews and writing field. For instance, when the majority of the participants compared their work effort towards peers within the restaurant, they seemed to portray themselves in a favorable light. Many employees described how peers put in less effort than themselves; being lazy, irresponsible and not being able to follow the rules and norms of the restaurant. However, not once was it stated how they could contribute to such activities. It became quite striking that the interviewee never was the source of irresponsible behavior. Since it was described how everybody performed their work tasks rather impeccable, it made us wonder whom the interviewees actually were referring to? We experienced there was a notion of weak self-perception as well as an undertone of irritation among the participants. We took these reflections into consideration when we analyzed the empirical material. From our interpretation, the shared view on how peers executed work sometimes less efficient seemed rather to mirror the behaviors of all participants' involved.

Communication and language barriers

Furthermore, we are aware of that communication barriers might have influenced the interviews. For instance, we experienced the Danish participants to contribute with less descriptiveness in their answers in comparison to the Swedish participants. When reflecting upon this we found it evident that they had to communicate in a second language in which they might feel less confident or experienced in. To overcome the sometimes short and less descriptive answers, we tried to rephrase the questions or use other vocabularies to collect much more fruitful, personal and rich responses (see Krefting 1991). Still, we found the purposeful sampled strategy for choosing the participants for our research as valuable. It

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provided our study with a trustworthy framing of the existing workplace contingencies. We also recognized how the close relationship with some of the participants strengthened our data collection in terms of credibility issues. Not only did we know that the participants are reliable and trustworthy sources of information, but we also recognized how the participants that we knew well felt more willing to share more personal experiences than the other participants (see Ryen 2004)

Another difficulty was that we sometimes experienced that quotations from Swedish participants' were complicated to translate perfectly into English. As Alvesson and Sköldböck (2008) argue, how language is used is an important aspect to consider when conducting and transcribe interviews. We reflected upon how meanings and underlying thoughts might unintentionally become transformed or lost during the translation of quotes. For example, we sometimes experienced it difficult to find an English word that reproduce the exact meaning of the Swedish. However, as former employees of the restaurant we have a great understanding of the vocabulary and jargon used among the workforce, which hopefully enabled us to come as close as possible in our translations.

The methodological section has presented a careful description of the methodology that we have used to conduct the research. First, we discussed the paradigm from which the study departs, including ontological and epistemological foundations. Next, we presented in-depth interviews as our choice of qualitative method and presented descriptive information about the process of collecting the empirical material. We used a semi-structured interview guide and held 11 interviews with employees. From purposeful sample strategy we picked participants with most recent work activity at the restaurant. We also discussed the process of analyzing the material and how we step by step discovered our themes. Lastly, we described how reflexivity was a central part of our research.

SERVICE WORKS AND CONTROL- A LITERATURE REVIEW

In the following chapter, we will present the theoretical background that the study will be based on. The first section will present a literature review on interactive service work by exploring the main characteristics of the industry. Further, we will discuss different forms of control mechanisms that can be adopted by organizations. First we will present literature on bureaucracy, as a common form of control in interactive service work. Second, we will explore the concept of social control by concentrating on both peer-based control and concertive control.

What is interactive service work?

The service sector stands for approximately three quarters of the jobs in the advanced economies (Ritzer 2011). A typical characteristic of low-paid service works, which this thesis will focus upon, is its interactive nature. Leidner (1993) defines interactive service works as “jobs that require workers to interact directly with customers or clients” (Leidner 1993: 1). The author describes how interactive service jobs have components that are both interactive and non-interactive. In a context of a restaurant, interactive work is best portrayed when a waitress engages in table service, takes orders and collects payments and non-interactive work involves around placing orders and collecting items. As previously mentioned, interactive service works tend to facilitate quite poor work conditions for employees, where few career opportunities and low salaries are offered. The work environments are often highly controlled, where work tasks are repetitive and standardized to achieve a high degree of efficiency and predictable results (Frenkel, Korczynski, Shire & Tam 1999; Ritzer 2011).

Interactive service works have certain characteristics that make predictions of service performances difficult to determine beforehand (Korczynski & Macdonald 2009). First, production and consumption occurs simultaneously when a customer purchase the service. Therefore, the interaction between customers and front staff becomes central for the service outcome. Secondly, when producing a service, it becomes problematic to reassure that the same service will be provided during every visit. A service is of an intangible nature and unable to be measured or produced in advance. Such characteristics make the service quality more troublesome to reassure (see also Grönroos 2008; Lovelock & Wirtz 2011). Further, we

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will discuss how these characteristics also reflect the work conditions of employees within an interactive service work.

The emotional aspect of work

As previous described, the interaction between customers and front staff is central for the service outcome. The attitudes, looks and communication skills of a service worker therefore highly influence the overall service experience. To increase customer satisfaction, service workers are encouraged to display certain feelings desired by the organization when performing their work tasks (Korczynski & Macdonald 2009; Leidner 1991). For example, a waitress is not only responsible for providing customers with technical skills, but is also expected to be emotionally involved in order to create a pleasant dining experience for the guests at the restaurant (Hampson & Junor 2005). Consequently, when a waitress interacts with guests he or she should display a smiley face. In other words, employees get paid to perform and act after employers' and customers desired requirements and preferences.

According to Korczynski and Evans (2013), interactive service workers often face a large number of abusive customers. The authors suggest that there is a common assumption that the job performed does not require any valued skills and the service worker therefore has maintained a rather low status in society. Hence, customers often feel more entitled to point out mistakes and act rude towards service workers than towards high-skilled professionals. Hochschild (1983) recognized the high degree of emotional work in interactive service work and coined the term *Emotional labor*. The author means that emotional labor can occur when jobs:

“(1) Require face-to-face or voice-to-voice contact with the public, (2) Require the worker to produce an emotional state in another person and (3) Allow the employer through training and supervision to exercise a degree of control over the emotional activities of employees”. (Hochschild 1983: 147).

In order to please customers and managers, employees are expected to display emotions such as happiness and friendliness and neglect their negative feelings and thoughts (Hochschild 1983; Leidner 1991). However, many authors point out downsides of expressing organizational desired emotions towards customers (Hochschild 1983; Leidner 1991; Morris

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& Feldman 1996; Zapf & Holz 2006). Emotional work can affect service workers negatively since they often have to suppress their genuine feelings in order to satisfy customer and the goals of the organization. Even when customers are perceived as rude or abusive, employees are expected to hide their frustration and anger to create a desirable service meeting. According to authors, suppressing negative feelings at work is connected to stress, job dissatisfaction and emotional exhaustion (Hochschild 1983; Morris & Feldman 1996; Zapf & Holz 2006).

Balancing two conflicting demands

Korczynski (2011) elaborates upon another problematic aspect when performing interactive service work. Customers have a variety of differentiated demands that service workers are expected to please and meet to achieve customer satisfaction (Grönroos 2008; Korczynski 2011; Tomar & Dihman 2012). Korczynski (2011) coined the idea of a customer-oriented bureaucracy to describe how a service organization has components of both bureaucracy and customer-orientation. A customer-oriented bureaucracy is based on dual logics where there are characteristics of both efficiency and customer orientation. Korczynski and Macdonald (2009) define the dual logic as following:

”Work is organized to be competitively efficient, to appeal to the utilitarian sense of the customer. In addition, work is organized to enchant the sensibility of the customer sovereignty” (Korczynski & Macdonald 2009: 80).

One on hand, service work competes on the basis of deliver high service quality. In order to increase customer loyalty, services should be convenient for customers and designed to accommodate to vary customers demands (Grönroos 2008; Korczynski 2011; Lovelock & Wirtz 2011). The citation above suggests that the customer is supposed to have a sense of being supreme and in charge over the service meeting. Since a service is organized in a way that makes the customer experience sovereignty, the service worker should act upon customer demand in order to keep him or her happy (Korczynski 2011; Korczynski & Mcdonald 2009).

On the other hand, interactive service work often competes on the basis of price and efficiency. The work procedures are often characterized by a high degree of rationalization, standardization and regulation in order to achieve cost savings and to maximize efficiency

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(Korczynski 2011; Ritzer 2011). The service experience is created for the customer to be carefully guided and manipulated to follow the managerial requirements that follows efficiency and cost-saving logics (Tomar & Dhiman 2012). From this perspective, a strong customer focus is seen as a costly activity due to the expense of time and money customers require.

Due to the dual-logics described, service workers are in a problematic position to manage the different demands of management and customers. Employees are expected to stay efficient and at the same time deliver high service quality to customers (Korczynski 2011). Schlesinger and Heskett (1991) argue that the more standardized a service is, the more crucial and influential the personal interaction with customers become. Leidner (1991) describes how interactive service work includes delivering social skills, timing and efficiency in order to meet sales goals and to create a positive impression towards customers. Therefore, service workers are constantly meeting situations where the tension between customer and management demand become confusing, exhausting and contradicting. To conclude, service workers are not only facing a great amount of emotional work but are also in a position where they have to prioritize and balance the conflicting demands of customers and management (Korczynski 2011).

Bureaucratic control in service work

In order to make employees act according to organizational goals and contribute to its profitability, organizations adapt to different control mechanisms. According to O'Reilly (1989), little would get done by or in organizations if some control systems were not directing and coordinating activities. The author defines a control system as:

"The knowledge that someone who knows and cares is paying close attention to what we do and can tell us when deviations are occurring"
(O'Reilly 1989: 11).

As previously described, the most common control mechanism in interactive service work is of bureaucratic nature. Organizations adapting to bureaucratic control mechanisms operate according to hierarchical positions and surveillance, explicit directions and evaluations in order to control their employees (Ouchi 1979; Ouchi 1980). Ritzer (2011) coined the concept

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McDonaldization, as a metaphorical way of understanding developments in the service sector.

The author underpins its strong impact on society and states that:

”The principles of the fast-food restaurant are coming to dominate more and more sectors of American society as well as the rest of the world”.

(Ritzer, 1993, p. 1)

The concept can be recognized in many interactive service organizations, often exemplified in call-centers and in the fast-food industry (Leidner 1991). To achieve efficiency and measurable results, organizations try to make employees behave, look and think more predictable. Employees are therefore encouraged to wear uniforms and to follow manuals and predesigned scripts when interacting with customers. Additionally, work tasks are often designed to be highly standardized and repetitive so the work procedures are simplified and quickly performed, without a large numbers of costly mistakes (Ritzer 2011).

Moving towards other forms of control

The developments in interactive service work captured in the concept of McDonaldization have become widely criticized, mainly since it is claimed to neglect the human aspect of work (Ritzer 2011). Employees are viewed upon as easy to replace and often treated more as machines, performing low- skilled and repetitive work tasks (Taylor & Bain 1999). When organizations attempt to control the work and behavior of employees through supervision, regulation, and standardization, authors argue job satisfaction often decrease (Grönroos 2008; Korczynski & McDonald 2009; Korczynski 2011; Leidner 1993). In order to improve employee work conditions as well as service quality, Grönroos (2008) promotes a more flat organizational structure. A flat structured organization has fewer hierarchical levels and a decentralized decision-making process so that front staff closest to the customers is able to make the final decisions in interactive service work. Grönroos (ibid.) argues that such structure contributes to higher service quality since differentiated customer expectations and demands often require employees to act fast and outside predesigned scripts (see also Korczynski 2011). Other authors support this fact and highlight how a more flat structure enhances employee creativity, knowledge sharing and enables problems to be solved quicker (Leopold & Harris 2009; Ulrich 1997; Newell, Robetson, Scarbrough & Swan 2009). Employees within a flat structured organization often perceive themselves as more skilled and supported than in an organization that is highly controlled (Ritzer 2011). Alvesson (2004) and

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discuss the importance of autonomy, but relate it to knowledge intensive work. Daft (2001) supports this fact and argues that the more skills a job requires, the higher degree of autonomy is needed to efficiently execute the work. Svingsstedt (2005) conducted a study on an interactive service organization, which was reorganized towards a flatter structure. When employees were delegated with more demanding work tasks, some experienced that it increased pressure, stress and led to less quality time to interact with customers. Such findings indicate that not all individuals are comfortable with greater responsibilities in an interactive service work (Svingsstedt 2005).

Social control

In order to overcome the disadvantages of bureaucratic control mechanisms, Ouchi (1980) describes how an organization can socialize employees into the corporate culture. Social control has its roots in social psychology and describes how human desires of belongingness and attachments makes employees conform to group or organizational rules, standards and norms (O'Reilly & Chatman 1996; Stewart, Courtright & Barrick 2012). Different approaches, descriptions and forms of social control can be seen through previous research. Ouchi (1979; 1980) refers to one type of social control mechanism as 'clan control', while Fleming and Sturdy (2011) describes the same notion as 'normative control' and Frenkel, Korczynski, Donoghue and Shire (1995) as 'info-normative control'. The terms are often discussed in relation to a flat structure and aim to explain the same phenomena; how an organization enables to socialize employees by sharing values, believes, norms, stories and makes them identify with these in order to enhance employees' organizational commitment. O'Reilly (1989) suggests that such social control systems can be much more finely tuned than formal control systems and explain its benefits as such:

“When we care about those with whom we work and have a common set of expectations, we are "under control" whenever we are in their presence. If we want to be accepted, we try to live up to their expectations. In this sense, social control systems can operate more extensively than most formal systems.” (O'Reilly 1989:12)

Ouchi (1980) explains how organizations that lack bureaucratic control mechanisms are not to be considered as loose or unorganized. In fact, social control systems may be more directive and persuasive than more explicit control mechanisms. Many authors argue that social control

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contributes to higher job satisfaction, employee commitment and organizational loyalty than a more bureaucratic form of control does (Alvesson 2004; Grönroos 2008; Ouchi 1980). Alvesson (2004) suggests that it therefore becomes a strategic tool that is hard for competitors to imitate and reproduce. This type of control mechanisms are typically adapted in technologically advanced or closely integrated industries, where there is a high level of skills, teamwork, and knowledge sharing. It is described how social control enables creative thinking and rapid adjustments to external shifting demands (see Alvesson 2004; Ouchi 1979; Ouchi 1980; Rennstam 2007; Stewart et. al 2012). Such control systems make employees highly intertwined, where daily communication and configuration of goals become crucial (Barker 1993).

Peer-based control

All types of control are formed from knowing that someone is observing our behavior and decides whether or not it is appropriate or not (Stewart et al. 2012). The authors describe how peers can become that 'someone' who is responsible for monitoring and influencing the work performed. Using the term peer control, they refer to how peers' shared norms and believes at the workplace turn into a control mechanism. Barker (1993) elaborates on this form of control and refers to the term *concertive control* when he describes how social rules and norms can be the foundation of the control mechanism. Concertive control aims to describe how members within a flattened organization together create shared value-based rules and norms to act upon instead of following formalized and standardized rules. The control is based on normative, value-laden principles where the control rises from the identification with organizational values and is socialized by peers. Employees are encouraged to form their own-shared set of rules when performing every-day work. Since the organizational values are recreated and rewritten with peers' shared meanings, it is described how it gets more finely tuned and personally intertwined (Barker 1993; Larson & Tompkins 2005; Sewell 1998). Peers therefore become responsible for the operation of daily work, monitoring as well as rewarding and punishing each other in accordance to the values of the organization (Larson & Tompkins 2005). There are many different terms used to describe how peers influence and control each other, but we have decided to use the term peer-based control when discussing the concepts within the study.

Stewart et al. (2012) conclude that peer-based control corresponds positively with both individual and group performance. It is also suggested that peer control is more beneficial

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when the employees feel that they are able to influence both operational and administrative activities. Such practices may for instance include controlling work pace, participation in the recruitment process, and responsibility over the training of new employees and the distribution of work tasks and roles (Wall, Kemp, Jackson & Clegg 1986). Due to the high degree of self-determination, direct supervision and surveillance become less important (Barker 1993). In more autonomous contexts, peers often feel that it is their task and responsibility to monitor and influence each other's behavior. This enables a reinforcement of favorable team behavior as well as discourages behavior that is damaging to performance. The peers become the control mechanism that inform and endorse the new recruits of desirable norms and rules. However, since the rules are based upon core values or corporate statements, the organization still manage to reinforce its interests. Therefore, it is described how peer-based and concertive control does not stand alone, but is often influenced by bureaucratic or social forms of control and incitements (Barker 1993; Rennstam 2007).

When practicing peer-based control, communication and feedback among colleagues are described as central. Rennstam (2007) coined the term *peer-reviewing*, which describes how feedback from peers act like a form of control to guide and support employees in their daily work. The author argues that a great amount of control takes place horizontally rather than vertically. The feedback from peers can derive from formal review meetings as well as from informal chats between peers. It is described how peers constitute an important aspect of daily decision-makings, consulting and job satisfaction. Peer-based control as a blurring of managerial and subordinate boundary has become described as vital within knowledge intensive work (see Barker 1993; Sewell 1996; Wall et al. 1986), however, it is still less apparent within studies of interactive service work.

The importance of peers and fun while working

Research within the interactive service sector underpins the importance of peers and their essential part in contributing to a fun work environment. The mundane and boring work tasks can become more enjoyable with the help of social interaction, relations and a playful work environment (Fleming & Sturdy 2011; Kinnie, Hutchinson & Purcell 2000; Roy 1959). According to Jehn and Shah (1997), workgroups with a voluntary friendship performs significantly better than acquaintance groups when it comes to decision-making and motor tasks due to a much higher degree of commitment and collaboration within the group. Karau

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and Hart (1998) support this finding and suggest that cohesive groups reduce or eliminate the risk of individuals putting in less work effort during group work tasks.

Many organizations therefore aim to enhance the feeling of belongingness and peer interaction in order to gain group commitment and collaboration. This type of organizational atmosphere becomes a strategic tool that can distinguish the organization from its competitors. Kinnie et al. (2000) describes how a call-center, which is often framed as a prison-like, mentally exhausting workplace (Arkin 1998; Lloyd & Payne 2009) can manage to integrate a fun working atmosphere. With some help of creative HR practices that facilitated employee interaction and a playful working-spirit, high employee commitment followed. Fleming and Sturdy (2011) also describe how a call-center adapts similar strategy, but the authors take on a more critical approach. The article describes how the organization encourages employees to simply have 'fun' and 'be themselves' during work hours. In this way, the focus on the dull and standardized work tasks decreases while the fun-loving atmosphere increases job satisfaction. The authors claim that the strategy is used to distract call-center workers from the more bureaucratic form of surveillance as time-logs, speed of calls, electronic monitoring and achievement targets. The study therefore indicates the importance of peers and how social belongingness becomes important when creating a corporate culture within the interactive service sector.

Roy's (1959) article "Banana time: Job satisfaction and interaction" describes how peers challenge boring and mundane industrial work by social interaction, relationships and non-work related breaks in order to ease up the day. It is described how the mundane work tasks become manageable and even enjoyable by the help of games, social interaction and fooling around with peers. The author also describes the sudden interruption of social interplay when a badly made joke sets an end to the playful atmosphere, causing nearly two weeks of unbearable silence and bitterness. As a result, the mundane work tasks returned as the central focus, leg and back pain suddenly appeared and the hours at work slowly dragged by. This suggests how important the peer relationship can be in order to cope with everyday mundane work tasks. It explains how conflicts in the workplace can ruin job satisfaction and the willingness to appear at work.

Critical views upon social and peer-based control

Targeting employees' emotions with social control mechanisms also include a more problematic aspect. The use of such strategy can develop mixed emotions and issues among the employees. One negative consequence of social forms of control is that it can enhance cynicism and mental distancing among employees (Fleming & Sturdy 2011). Not all of the employees 'buy-in to' the reinforced atmosphere of the workplace, leaving them feeling left out or cynical. Kinnie et al. (2000) highlight another dilemma, namely increased stress levels and employees' experiences of tighter control after the workplace adapted to more normative forms of control. This is well aligned with Barker's (1993) findings on concertive control. The author suggest that employees feel more restrained and controlled when there is a lack of an authorized supervisor and peers instead act like the source of surveillance. For instance, one employee describes how he could talk to peers or be lazy when the manager weren't present, but now, the whole team is constantly observing and pushing each other.

The lack of hierarchal positions and clearly formalized rules are often described as fundamental aspects in flat organizations. However, some more critical scholars argue that the autonomy experienced is rather delusive (see Barker 1993; Fleming & Sturdy 2011). Firstly, studies have shown that informal roles and positions often become undertaken under such organizational circumstances (Barker 1993; Rennstam 2007). In order to become more effective and make sense out of the division of workload, peers often end up dividing work tasks and duties among themselves and reproduce a form of hierarchal setting within the group. Secondly, since the values of the organization constitute the fundamental frame of decision-making within the autonomous team, the autonomy is constrained. Therefore, peer-based control can be seen as a cheaper alternative for the organization to control its employees and how the organization rather enhances employee control than increases autonomy.

To conclude, we will present a short summary of the theoretical background. The literature review presents varies explanations of how employees can experience a work setting in an interactive service organization. First, we discussed the main characteristics of interactive service work and illustrated on what basis employees are performing their work. Employees in interactive service work are often highly controlled, faced by a high degree of emotional work and perform their job while considering the conflicting demands of management and customers. Due to the tension, employees are caught in between two powerful actors that both

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try to exercise control over the service worker. Next, we explained as an alternative how organizations could adopt to a flatter structure. A flat structure is often discussed in relation to other forms of control mechanisms that blur the managerial and subordinate boundary. The theoretical background show how there is many different factors that complicate and affect the work for employees within the service industry. The horizontal forms of control can therefore be looked upon as an effective way to ease the work and to increase employee autonomy and job satisfaction. However, increased autonomy seems to be more of an illusion since such type of control seems more persuasive than the former bureaucratic type of control.

SERVICE WORKERS' EXPERIENCES- EMPIRICAL FINDINGS

The following chapter will present our empirical material to illustrate the participants' experiences of an interactive service work. First, we will present a short presentation of the study object. Next, we will show that there is a mutual understanding of autonomous decision-making and lack of hierarchy within the restaurant. Lastly, we will present three contradicting experiences that became apparent to us due to such organizational structure: (1) A lack of managerial surveillance is great– but the manager should intervene more (2) Customers control the service meeting – but are hard to please, (3) Peers are mentors – but should not give negative feedback. Each contradiction will further end with a short summary.

The object of study

Peppes Pizza is Norway's largest pizza chain with more than 2500 employees. The restaurant chain mainly serves pizza, salads and hamburgers. There are 90 different Peppes Pizza restaurants countrywide, while we will concentrate only on one. Nearly half of the restaurants within the chain are managed with franchise agreements and our object of study is managed through such agreement. Normally, Peppes Pizza has several hierarchical positions within their restaurants including waitresses, shift leaders, assistant managers and a daily manager. However, in this particular restaurant, there are no specific titles or roles that are assigned to the waitresses or chefs at the restaurant. The waitresses are all able to report the daily cash reconciliation, entitled to manage the daily staffing plan, to close and open the restaurant and delete items on the customer recipes when dealing with customer complaints or other issues. The chefs are responsible for the ordering of goods and the condition of the kitchen. The owner mainly takes on an administrative role in the back office within the restaurant.

The restaurant is located in one of Norway's skiing resorts. The skiing resort has around 3000 inhabitants' year around and is therefore highly dependent upon its tourists. The turnover of the restaurant is highly influenced by the flows of tourists and often increases by 10 times when changing from low to high season. Therefore, the restaurant also has a shifting seasonal demand of employees. In order to manage the seasonal contingencies, the restaurant has approximately 10 employees year around and is dependent upon extra personnel during the holiday peaks. The extra personnel are often former full-time employees and friends of theirs

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who return during shorter periods of time. The recruitment process is influenced by personal recommendations. In fact, all of our interviewees were related or knew someone well that had worked at the restaurant before they got employed. Since the restaurant does not offer any fine dining and mostly serves semi-finished products, there is no demand of specific prior knowledge and skills.

A shared feeling of autonomy

As described above, the restaurant represents a rather unique interactive service organization. The majority of the interviewed employees describe how the restaurant, Peppes Pizza, has a lack of hierarchical positions and offers a great amount of responsibility and autonomous decision-making. Hannah, a waitress that has worked within the restaurant for more than five years, describes how she perceives the restaurant is organized:

“There is no hierarchy. Comparing to the last place that I worked, we had a restaurant manager, a headwaiter, an assistant restaurant manager, first waiters and second waiters and finally; runners. It was a hierarchy and you listen to the one above you, that’s how it works. Here at Peppes, everyone who comes up gets to learn the cash clearance, everybody have the same amount of responsibility and everyone knows how to open up and close the restaurant.” (Hannah 2014)

Mary, who has been working as a waitress at the restaurant for nine years, expresses a similar experience of the structure. She elaborates on Hannah’s comment and adds how the lack of formal positions affects her everyday work. The work tasks mostly contain interactive service work towards customers, but can differ from day to day. It is not unusual that she performs tasks that a restaurant manager or assistant would do:

“Well, [David] could put me on anything... anything from staffing plan to economical issues or to have responsibility regarding customers when they walk in.” (Mary 2014)

The citation suggests how Mary experience the work tasks go beyond what is normally expected of waitresses at a restaurant. When she discusses autonomous decision-making

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within the restaurant, she definitely feels that the employees at Peppes are able to make their own decisions:

“You have to make your own decisions. For instance, if a customer is too drunk, we will decide to not serve him anymore... and there is David really good, because he trusts us to 100 percent, he knows we will do the right thing.” (Mary 2014)

Mary's experience also relates to the recapture in the introduction of the thesis. Both descriptions illustrate how there is a high degree of autonomy in the customer interaction within the restaurant in order to accommodate to different situations and varies needs. These statements rather differ from how Ritzer (2011) portrays interactive service works, where he found that workers are often highly controlled and encouraged to act according to predesigned scripts when performing their daily work. Instead, the statements are in different ways indicating experiences of a workplace that has a great amount of freedom and a lack of hierarchical positions. Our empirical findings will further suggest that such organizational setting contributes to an appealing atmosphere, but also fuels a complex, ambiguous and confusing work environment. Consequently, we will present three contradictions supporting this suggestion:

- (1) A lack of managerial surveillance is great - but the manager should intervene more
- (2) The customers control the service meeting - but are hard to please
- (3) Peers are mentors - but should not give negative feedback

A lack of managerial surveillance is great...

The following paragraph will illustrate that the majority of the employees experience how some of the best aspects of work are great responsibility and the low degree of surveillance. For instance, Dean, a chef that has been employed for eight months, describes the feeling of not being under constant supervision during work hours:

“I like that we have this sort of freedom, because no one is watching you all the time. You have to, of course, do your job right, but you can do it with relaxed shoulders, you know?” (Dean 2014)

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Dean explains how the notion of freedom creates a relaxed and enjoyable atmosphere at work. The chef appreciates to set up his own routines and expresses how work becomes more pleasant when there are no managers present to nag, point out and comment on his work. Barbara, a waitress that also has been employed for eight months, expresses a similar experience when talking about the work conditions at Peppes. She describes the best aspect of work as such:

“It is very flexible and there is a great amount of freedom. All employees are responsible for the restaurant and are allowed to make their own decisions, you don't need to talk to the boss first“. (Barbara 2014)

Barbara's statement supports Dean's experience, that a greater amount of freedom and less supervision within the restaurant is highly appreciated. Many waitresses and chefs express how the feeling of being trusted, having more responsibilities and more diverse work-tasks are factors that contribute to an attractive work environment. However, Susan, a chef who has been working at the restaurant for one year, describes a more skeptical perception of autonomy. She expresses the feeling of autonomy as:

“When we are at work, we are the ones in charge, he's not there to boss around. We have the responsibility for things going as they should... Well, that is that there is pizza in the oven! (laughter)“. (Susan 2014)

Susan's experience points out another important aspect of autonomy within the restaurant. Even though Susan agrees upon the feeling of autonomy, she is at the same time expressing a notion of cynicism. The work performed involves around rather trivial work tasks and follow basic standard procedures. To reassure that there is “pizza in the oven” points to a responsibility that, according to the chef, ‘should not require surveillance and guidance anyway’. From our interpretation, this more cynical view might rather reflect the chefs' experiences of autonomy within the restaurant. Since the waitresses often describe the notion of autonomy during customer interaction, chefs might not share the same perception of its meaning within the restaurant.

... but the manager should intervene more

Even though Susan shows a tendency of cynicism, the majorities of the participants experience autonomous work and the lack of hierarchical positions as highly appreciated at their workplace. However, many of the participants also experience how the structure sometimes affects the work environment negatively. Employees describe from time to time issues as decreased productivity and feelings of frustration and anxiety. For instance, Megan, a waitress that has worked at the restaurant for 8 months, explains a downside of work that can be related to the lack of hierarchical positions within the company. She feels that it is hard for her to gain the courage to tell intoxicated customers that they had enough to drink and would rather have someone else to deal with these unpleasant situations. Megan expresses the concerns as such:

“It’s really difficult... when you have just finished school, it’s very difficult to say to a group old men that you cannot drink alcohol and they have to leave the restaurant/.../ they get really rude to us and then it is very difficult to be young and have to tell older people that they should act differently” (Megan 2014)

Megan describes how feelings of anxiety and insecurity can arise at work. The young waitress experiences how it is uncomfortable and sometimes becomes difficult to handle situations where she has to tell customers off. Our understanding is that the situation becomes even more problematic due to the age difference between the customers and her. The age difference seems to enhance the waitress’ feeling of customer sovereignty. Megan continues to explain how she would like the owner or a more authorized person to deal with such situations. Even though there are more experienced peers at work, she doesn’t perceive that there is anyone who feels compelled to deal with rude and intoxicated customers. The other waitresses also confirm to this experience. They express how it is considered as an unattractive work task since it often involves around arguments and abusive language towards staff. The feeling can also be recognized from the descriptive event in the introduction of the thesis. The waitress felt that a few guests’ behaviors caused so much anxiety that she felt like hiding in the kitchen for the rest of the night. From our understanding, it seems that when work includes less enjoyable duties such as to deal with abusive and angry customers, the feeling of autonomy becomes less appealing. The waitresses rather try to avoid such

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unpleasant situations since it often trigger negative emotions such as anxiety, insecurity and uncertainty on how to act.

Many waitresses and chefs also describe how the great amount of freedom and responsibility at work sometimes reduce work effort and productivity among employees. When Mary reflects upon her time within the company, she mentions how she perceives the work ethic at Peppes has changed. When she first started, it was important to always work efficiently and to follow the preferences and norms of the owner:

“When I was trained, I was taught that you don’t ‘hang around’ at work... especially not when customers can see you. You are supposed to be efficient and quick and when you close the restaurant, you close it properly before you do anything else. You don’t sit around in the kitchen eating dessert when you are about to close up. Nowadays, this happens every now and then... I don’t now, it might be because David isn’t that present anymore.”(Mary 2014)

When Mary talks about her experience, there is an undertone of irritation and frustration. The notion of a careless and lazy attitude among some of the employees seems to irritate her. According to Mary, peers find ways to minimize the work effort and engage in more enjoyable activities when the owner is absent. Olivia, another waitress at the restaurant, also expresses irritation and agrees to the experienced inefficiency described by Mary:

“Working with employees who are slacking rather than working gets really annoying... and in the end, it only affects the customers”.
(Olivia 2014)

Olivia explains how she experiences that not everyone takes the great responsibility at work seriously. She describes how it is not uncommon that employees from time to time have an indolent attitude towards work. Instead of preparing the daily closing of the restaurant, employees may sit around in the kitchen, talk to colleagues or take unnecessary breaks. Therefore, the low degree of surveillance at the restaurant is experienced to decrease work effort, which creates irritation among employees. However, during the interviews, no participant perceived himself or herself as being lazy or engaging in non work-related

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activities during their shifts. From our interpretation, it became quite striking that none of the employees described themselves as sometimes having a slack or lazy work-attitude. In the interviews, employees showed a tendency to put blame on peers and to disregard their own involvement in such activities.

Cherry-picking responsibilities

The interviews describe how the lack of hierarchical positions and surveillance were considered to be the best as well as the worst aspect of work. This concludes our first contradiction; *the lack of managerial surveillance is appealing - but the manager should intervene more*. The feeling of being trusted, having differentiated work tasks and being able to perform work without being constantly supervised were described as factors appealing for employees (see also Grönroos 2008). However, many of the employees only seemed to appreciate being responsible for the more “fun” part of the position. The more demanding aspects, such as supervision and confrontations with angry customers were not considered to be the job of the waitresses. Instead it was described how a manager should deal with such unpleasant situations. It therefore becomes apparent how the more demanding responsibilities become ignored or avoided when no one is obligated by a title to execute them. This indicates that not all individuals are comfortable to have a great amount of responsibility in an interactive service work. For some employees, greater responsibility rather seems to be connected to irritation, stress and anxiety.

Customers control the service meeting...

As described above, employees experience that the restaurant offers autonomy and express how it fuels both positive and negative outcomes. Our second contradiction will look at the autonomous decision-making in a different light. By taking customers into consideration, this contradiction will rather indicate that the customer controls a high degree of the practices previously described as autonomous. Happy, social and fun customers are commonly described as having a great influence on the mood of the employees. The interaction between employees and customers are the most common day-to-day shore. If the service meeting triggers positive emotions, it often seems to affect the workday in a positive direction. Barbara exemplifies this notion:

“I really enjoy the social aspect of working here, especially the fun customers. They can lift me and my mood up in an instance! When you

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start to talk to each other and they are genuinely interested in you, make jokes... it just makes you happy! Or when they explain how they really, really appreciated the food, that's so awesome" (Barbara 2014)

In order to keep the customers happy, many waitresses describe how their perception of autonomous decision-making applies when a customer is unsatisfied with the food or service. It is a common belief among the waitresses that it is their own responsibility to make sure that the customer leaves the restaurant satisfied. The customer interaction therefore looks differently depending on the customer's preferences. Michelle, a waitress that has been working within the restaurant for more than five years, describes how she experience autonomy when she is handling compensation towards unsatisfied customers:

"If they think that the food were bad or if they have been waiting for too long, of course I will compensate them. It is not the end of the world to reduce the price of a pizza. In order to gain a happy customer, it is worth it." (Michelle 2014)

Michelle's statement indicates that customer satisfaction is important in order to feel that she has done a good job. She explains that the compensation could include either an apology, reducing the price on the pizza or give away free coffee when the customer is dissatisfied with the visit. The compensation mostly depends on what the customer thinks is reasonable in order to restore satisfaction. The agreement could be interpreted as an act of bargaining, where both the customer and the waitress must accept each other's offers in order to enable mutual satisfaction. This indicates that customer satisfaction highly influences the actions of the waitress. In order to do a good job in the restaurant, it is commonly described how the employees must be able to 'please the customers'. At the same time, Michelle admits that her owner does not appreciate price reduction:

"I know he doesn't like that, but sometimes you have to do what you think is best for the restaurant and ignore his rules." (Michelle 2014)

Here, it becomes even more evident how the customer constitutes an influential actor within the restaurant. The quote describes how it sometimes becomes more crucial to please the customer rather than the owner in order to restore customer satisfaction. Many waitresses in

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our study indicate the same logic as Michelle, describing how the main focus is to make the customer leave happy, even though that may not always comply well with the rules and norms of the owner.

... but are hard to please

The previous paragraph indicated that customers' demands influence employees' behavior within the restaurant. However, when employees prioritize customers' satisfaction, some more problematic aspects also occur. For instance, Megan expresses how customers can be difficult to please when their preferences are outside of what the restaurant usually offers:

“Other problems might be when customers want something that is outside our routine at the restaurant, outside the menu/.../ I think personally that we should do as much we can for the customers if it doesn't make it any harder for us anyway.” (Megan 2014)

Megan admits that she believes customers' needs are important to fulfill, but at the same time acknowledge how it can be tricky when the service goes outside of what is expected in their daily routines. Personally she would like to satisfy even the more unique needs of customers, but the concept of Peppes seems to constrain her from doing that. She explains that due to Peppes' franchisee agreement, there are only a certain types of products offered at the restaurant.

Hannah, another waitress at the restaurant, describes a more emotional aspect of customer interaction. She explains how customers occasionally feel impossible to please. There is an undertone of frustration and a feeling of insufficiency when she talks about pleasing some guests at the restaurant:

“It tears you down... you are literally on your knees in order to satisfy your customers and still, they aren't satisfied. You try and you try, you really want the restaurant to perform good, you want your customers to enjoy the stay, you want them to walk away from here thinking “What a great evening we had on Peppes today”, I want to give the customers that but sometimes it is just impossible.” (Hannah 2014)

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The waitress describes how she stresses to please the customers in every aspect. It is her responsibility to make the customer leave the restaurant with a pleasant and enjoyable dining experience. For her, the job hasn't been performed properly if a customer leaves unhappy. Since some customers are described as impossible to please, Hannah expresses strong feelings of frustration and insufficiency as a common downside of her job. Laura, another waitress, describes a similar experience:

“Sometimes I just wish they knew how hard I’ve been working in order to bring them their stupid food. It is not like I have been standing somewhere being lazy, seriously, I run so the sweat drips from my back. And still you can receive complaints! Or “Oh my God, the food takes forever, is it never done at this place?” Then, I wish they knew how stressed out the chefs are back in the kitchen and how anxious they feel, maybe they hadn’t made those comments then!” (Laura 2014)

Laura's experience also relates to how unsatisfied customers cause feelings of frustration, stress and insufficiency. The customers are constantly observing the waitresses actions, comment on their behavior and demand compensations when they experience that they have been wrongly treated. From our understanding, it seems like customers takes on the role of a manager when demanding the waitresses how to act in order to please their needs.

‘The customer is always right?’

When taking a closer look at the practices the waitresses and chefs describes as autonomous decision-making, the practices do not seem that autonomous after all. There is an idea of responsibility, autonomy and freedom at the restaurant, but when the interviewees' talk about why they do what they do, customer satisfaction seems to highly influence their actions. The non-hierarchical work environment offered at the restaurant allows employees to meet and satisfy the different demands of customers more efficiently. However, the relatively standardized fast-food concept at Peppes also seemed to constrain the notion of autonomy where customers were described as sometimes impossible to please. The empirical material showed that the employees experienced that dissatisfied customers were closely connected to feelings of insufficiency, anxiety and frustration. Therefore, the empirical material describes the emotional effects of the second contradiction; *that customers control the service meeting – but are hard to please.*

Peers are mentors...

As discussed in the previous section, customers have a great influence on how waitresses and chefs perform their daily work. The next section will illustrate another influential actor within the restaurant. It will discuss how peers socialize new recruits into the organization and act as mentors by providing guidance and support.

Employees describe how they have a great influence on the recruitment process. For instance, all of the interviewees explain how they got employed at Peppes due to personal references. After the recruitment, peers conduct the mentoring and training and encourage that the right values, norms and rules are adapted and practiced by new recruits. Sarah, who had worked in the restaurant for nearly two years, describes how these practices still affects the way she performs work:

“If I am insecure I rather ask my colleges for help than my boss. I know they know the best way to solve different issues.” (Sarah 2014)

Here, it becomes apparent that not only customers' preferences influence the waitresses' behavior. The peers have taken on the role of mentors, socialized the new recruitment into the organization and continue to have that role throughout many years. Therefore, peers also become influential on the behavior and actions taken by the employees. Furthermore, David, the owner, is often absent and described as having a more friendly and caring role, fueling the fun and relaxed work environment. Employees describe how he often helps and supports the chefs and waitresses if the restaurant suddenly gets very busy.

Comparing to previous work experiences, many indicate that the atmosphere at the restaurant is special and unique and creates a feeling of belongingness. Hannah describes how she experiences the mentorship contributes to a pleasant atmosphere among the employees. She describes one of the best aspects of working within the restaurant as such:

“The best thing with work is... it's really that, when you come up here, I know everyone and it's a great friendship. I have never worked at a job before where I have had so much fun at work and where I felt this friendly atmosphere with my colleges.” (Hannah 2014)

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Hannah's statement describes how the fun and friendly peers are one of the most attractive aspects of work. The waitress explains how she never experienced a similar work atmosphere anywhere else, where 'fun' has been integrated and valued throughout the workplace. It is through our understanding that the fun atmosphere is considered as important and highly valued due to the rather dull and repetitive work tasks. Many of the employees describe the work tasks as rather boring and uses phrases as 'no rocket science', 'dulls the mind' and 'anyone can put a pizza on a table'. All of the employees also described their job as temporary, and did not see a future career path within the restaurant, or even the industry, due to these characteristics. Therefore, in order to enjoy work it seems crucial to uphold the caring and fun-loving atmosphere at work.

... but should not give negative feedback

So far, the fun and caring atmosphere has been described as enhancing work satisfaction among the employees. It is described how the owner reinforces the fun and friendly atmosphere by engaging in jokes, informal chats and gossip. However, his friendly behavior is not always viewed upon as favorable. All of the participants also agreed upon that David consciously stays away from arguments and disagreements, portraying him as 'afraid' and 'avoidant' towards conflicts. We will further indicate that David's behavior seems to trickle down into the organization and sometimes becomes an issue for their daily work.

Laura exemplifies this when she describes how the friendly atmosphere has turned to its extreme. She describes how a junior colleague and her started an argument not too long ago. When recalling the conflict, we took notice of how her friendly voice tone changed and became more intensified. It became clear to us that the event has had a deep emotional impact on Laura. She experienced that her fellow peer had served too much alcohol to a group of customers and told her peer straight out that such action is unacceptable in the restaurant. She describes how the event made her change how she handle conflicts with peers:

"I like to solve conflicts face-to-face. However, I do not like to do it if it is unnecessary! Nowadays, If I am annoyed by something I often chose to keep my mouth shut, because I do not want to put myself in that situation again; I was called the bitch and rumors began at work about how stupid I was. This is why I often decide that it is not worth it, to bring up the discussion." (Laura 2014)

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Laura describes how her fellow peer did not accept the negative critique. The last part of the comment shows how Laura experienced that her negative feedback contributed to a bad work atmosphere and how some peers started to talk behind her back. Her statement shows that mentoring peers can be troublesome for the waitresses. Many participants share a similar view, describing negative feedback and confrontations towards peers as 'not worth the effort' or 'unnecessary'. As we discussed earlier, the restaurant is considered to be a fun-loving, easy-going and social workplace where the peers are helpful and respectful towards each other. It became apparent to us how the employees avoid arguments and confrontations in order to not disturb the fun work environment. Instead of letting the steam off, employees describe how they become frustrated and annoyed by keeping opinions and arguments to themselves.

Michelle enhances this view and describes how it gets frustrating to deal with peer confrontations. Elaborating on previous statement made by Laura, Michelle adds how she thinks the owner should be responsible for handling arguments and corrections of less appropriate behaviors. She discusses how peers occasionally are more eager to chat and laugh rather than to perform their work tasks:

"I really had to put my foot down, telling everybody 'This is how it suppose to be here!' and undertake the manager role, even though I am not suppose to do that, I am just a waitress as anyone else. That can be extremely frustrating sometimes/.../Me as anybody in the group, If I would be telling people all the time when I think people is slacking I would be called "the bitch", because I do not have a higher position really, I do not have the authority to tell people what to do." (Michelle 2014)

Michelle's statement relates to the problematic issue of lacking an entitled authority. She experiences it would be more appropriate to undertake a more disciplinary role if she had the formal position to do so. From our interpretation, this logic does not only affect the mood among the employees, but it also seems to create learning gaps within the workforce. Throughout the interviews, it was frequently described how work could be executed differently, including the daily routines and work procedures. When waitresses and chefs

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don't feel compelled to correct and give feedback to each other, even mistakes can become ignored in the daily routines.

Nathalie confirms to Michelle statement and describes how negative feedback and criticism is viewed as offensive among peers. Nathalie describes a frustrating situation that occurred during her training week at Peppes. She remembers how one of her fellow peers often corrected her and could tell the owner that she was performing work incorrectly. What seemed to be the most annoying aspect for Nathalie was that the fellow peer only had been employed a couple of weeks before her:

“It didn't feel right really that she told me what to do since we came up there almost at the same time. If anyone else had told me... like someone who had been there for a longer period, it would have felt more okay. But she had put on this leadership style only after a few weeks and I noticed that it annoyed many of us! At Peppes, you don't do that really, so it turned out very wrong when she tried to teach me how things were being done”. (Nathalie 2014)

Although Nathalie's statement again points to how negative feedback is unwelcome, it also highlights another interesting aspect. She indicates that if the employee is not considered as senior enough, the feedback is even more unacceptable. The comment by Nathalie confirms to many of the other waitresses' experiences. Waitresses express how they often turn to the more senior staff for advice or to find support in difficult situations. Even though employees experience the degree of responsibilities are equally distributed among them, it through our understanding that some more hidden and informal roles become apparent within the restaurant.

‘Friends don't tell’

As discussed above, employees describe how the workplace triggers many positive emotions. The fun work environment, mentorship and the more personal relationship between peers seem to be essential factors in order to enjoy the everyday work, something Roy (1959) agrees upon. The author points to the importance of peers and a friendly atmosphere at work. This notion becomes highly apparent during our interviews, leading to positive, but also negative emotional outcomes for the employees. It is described how the best aspect of work,

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the belongingness and friendship of the peers also can become the most problematic issue. This concludes our third contradiction, that *peers are mentors - but should not give negative feedback*. Since the atmosphere of the restaurant is considered to be the most unique and desirable attribute of work, few of the employees are willing to destroy it. Due to the lack of authority, employees are afraid of giving negative feedback and get annoyed when receiving it from others. Since the owner is afraid of conflicts, it might be a contributing factor to the general fear of confrontations that apply within the restaurant. His avoidance of confrontations seems to become an unintended norm that trickles down into the organization. If the owner does not takes on conflicts and confrontations, then who feels compelled to?

DISCUSSION- A CASE ANALYSIS

In the following chapter, we will analyze the empirical findings and start a discussion to make sense of the findings in a broader view. The empirical findings will therefore be discussed in relation to previous literature in order to seek possible answers and explanations to the research question. First, the chapter will discuss the three different contradictions participants experience when working in an interactive service work. Last, the participants' experiences will be illustrated through a metaphor of a shield.

Autonomy - two sides of the coin

The empirical material indicates that there are contradicting experiences of working within an interactive service organization characterized by autonomy and a lack of hierarchical positions. Many of the employees within our study explain the feeling of autonomy as the 'best aspect of work'. It can be seen as fueling an enjoyable, relaxed and attractive work environment that increases job satisfaction among employees. Such positive experiences of autonomy support Grönroos' (2008) argument, of how a service organization should adopt a flat structure in order to become successful. The author means that it enhances employee commitment and satisfaction when feeling trusted by their managers, a statement also supported by Wall et al.'s (1986) findings upon autonomous workgroups.

However, our empirical material also suggests how employees in service organizations experience autonomy as demanding, difficult and exhausting. Korczynski & Evans (2013) explain how service workers face a great amount of abusive customers since their occupation has low power status in society. Working in a restaurant requires a high degree of interactive work, where the aim is to satisfy varies customer demands. Unpleasant situations are therefore not uncommon. For instance, autonomy is described as great in situations where the employees can accommodate to customers' different demands and perform their work in a more relaxed manner. On the contrary, when autonomy is closely aligned with unpleasant work tasks such as dealing with dissatisfied customers, autonomy is rather connected to emotional exhaustion and anxiety. It seems to us that no one in the workforce is eager to deal with such problems since it often involve arguments, threats and abusive language towards the staff. Kinnie et al. (2000) recognize how a work environment with less bureaucratic forms

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of control can increase stress among employees. The empirical material points in a similar direction since employees explain how demanding interactions are connected to negative emotions such as frustration, insecurity and stress.

The discussion of autonomy becomes interesting since it indicates that not all service organizations should be organized through a more flat structure, having elements of autonomous decision-making and few hierarchical levels. The finding supports what Svingsstedt (2005) argues, not all employees are comfortable with a high degree of responsibility within an interactive service work and rather associate responsibility with increased work effort, stress and anxiety. When a workplace, normally expect to be highly controlled, instead appears to be loosely coupled, higher expectations and workload are also often put on employees. Hochschild (1983) explains how demanding emotional work characterize interactive service work. When employees delay tasks in order to save themselves from getting emotionally hurt, it becomes an issue within the restaurant.

Employees describe how it is impossible to pass on unpleasant situations since there is no authorized person to deal with such issue. Therefore, *only* when discussing the more demanding aspects of autonomy, the need for an authorized person is described as great. The best aspect of work is consequently highly intertwined with the worst, most frustrating aspect of work. Hence, one of our main finding suggests that the lack of an authorized person to hide behind reinforce the emotional stress put on employees when dealing with unpleasant situations. We therefore imply that the concept of Mcdonaldization might not only influence employee job satisfaction negatively. When unpleasant situations occurred in the restaurant, employees described autonomy rather as a downside. Therefore, a highly controlled service organization could bring, apart from economical and rationalized benefits for the management (see Ritzer 2011), a more secure and less turbulent work environment for employees. Such work environment allows employees to let demanding works to be executed by more experienced and authorized peers and brings more clarity on how to act and perform at work. However, implementing hierarchical positions to the restaurant would also sabotage the best aspect of the workplace. A question to rise is then; what is most valued, 'tight support' or 'great autonomy'?

Customers – breaking and making the day

When taking a closer look at the practices the waitresses and chefs describe as autonomous decision-making, the practices do not seem autonomous after all. There is an idea of responsibility, autonomy and freedom at the restaurant, but when the interviewees' talk about why they do what they do, customers seem to have a great influence on many actions.

Our study describes how happy and satisfied customers within the restaurant positively reflect the mood and work experience of some employees. The employees experience the ability to act outside predesigned scripts and manuals when interacting with customers as mainly favorable. The autonomous work environment and non-hierarchical positions offered at the restaurant enables employees to meet and satisfy the different demands of customers more efficiently. Since employees do not need to ask an authority for advice before reciprocating a customer for mistakes, their work can be performed much quicker and more customer-oriented. Such empowered practices are supported by Grönroos (2008). The author means autonomous decision-making among front-staff is essential in order to achieve high service quality and customer satisfaction.

Korczynski (2011) discusses the tensions involved in interactive service works, where employees must confront the conflicting demands of customers and management. In other words, employees need to consider how to satisfy customer and at the same time meet efficiency goals from management. Since the restaurant in our study has a low degree of surveillance and bureaucratic control, the demands of management seems to become less important among employees. Although there are some constraining elements within the restaurant, they are rather connected to the relatively standardized concept of the franchise agreement. The rules and norms of the owner are often neglected when it comes to satisfying the customers' demands. For instance, even though the owner dislike discounts, employees commonly give out complementary food or delete items on the bill to turn a dissatisfied customers into a happy customer. Therefore, from our understanding the empirical material suggests how an autonomous work environment in a service organization rather unbalances the tension described by Korczynski (*ibid.*). The primary prioritization is to fulfill the demands of customers rather than to follow the guidelines given by the owner.

This notion strikes us as fairly strange since customers often are viewed upon as rude and obnoxious. Why do the waitresses put in a whole-hearted effort in order to keep them

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satisfied? One reason might be for the economical winning of the restaurant, that the waitresses desire great results and to be proud of their personal accomplishment. Another reason for the strong customer focus can be explained through the economical benefits it can bring. Even though tipping only constitutes a small part of the monthly pay, it can still be seen as an engine to perform well. Therefore, customers become even more powerful when they can offer economical rewards for desirable behaviors. If pleasing customers will benefit the restaurant's reputation as well as the waitresses' individual pay, it becomes rather clear why cost efficient thinking becomes marginalized when the employees execute their work.

Our empirical findings also points out some downsides of strong customer focus. Customers are described as sometimes impossible to please, a fact that causes frustration, stress and irritation among employees. Such emotions are commonly felt in interactive service work according to Hochschild (1983) and Leidner (1991), since the jobs involves around a high degree of emotional labor. Even though employees experience they have worked hard, paid guests a lot of attention and expressed only positive emotions, some customers are still eager to bring up complaints. Service workers are therefore often looked upon as servants and less powerful (Korczynski 2011; Korczynski & Evans 2013). Our empirical findings supports such fact, since pleasing customers are highly prioritized even though they are perceived as rude or misbehaved. Employees describe how they are responsible for how much energy and effort they want to put in to satisfy the needs of customers.

A concern to rise is then; does it become more stressful and emotional exhausting when performing customer interactions in an organization where the tension between management and customer demand is relatively blurred out? Higher control, such as described in the concept of mcdonalization, creates security, strict guidelines and certainty for employees (Ritzer 2011). Korczynski (2011) means this work as a disadvantage for employees' job satisfaction since the tensions confuses employees. Based on our empirical findings, we argue that clear standardized rules and guidelines also contribute to a more stabile and secure work environment for employees.

Peers – friends or enemies?

From the empirical material, employees are describing their work environment as fun and friendly due to the great relationship between employees. A notion that becomes evident during the interviewees is that the workplace triggers positive emotions, offers something

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special and represents belongingness. In Fleming and Sturdy's (2011) article, the employees were *told* to have fun and *forced* into group activities, which created cynicism and resistance among some employees. In our study, fun and belongingness is rather perceived as a natural element within the work environment, which keeps up the spirit and motivation to perform work. Fleming and Sturdy's (ibid.) and Roy's (1959) studies indicate that good friendship with peers and the possibility to have fun at work increase job satisfaction and tend to make employees neglect the other more boring and mundane work necessary to perform. Roy (1959) argues that boring and mundane work tasks are easier to mentally manage when there is room for interactions, playfulness and jokes among peers. Our findings support the importance of peers in interactive service organizations. Except from increasing the fun work environment, the employees also seek support and comfort in their peers when dealing with rude and obnoxious customers. It seems that peers become an essential relief from the customer frustration where support, help and guidance are offered.

However, in order to maintain the fun and caring atmosphere, peers tend to avoid confrontations and arguments among each other. When the role of peers and the owner rather become friends, it seems to become harder for employees to genuinely express frustration, anger or irritation. The good relationship seems to disable confrontations since fun and friendship have become such an important element within the workplace. To 'let off the steam' is normally considered an important practice when dealing with interactive service work and its emotional context (Hochschild 1983). In our study, such practice seems to become ignored and the employees often describe how they choose not to bring up the discussion. In the end, it could be argued that such practice rather build up frustration inside and can become more harmful to the employees in the long run.

During the training, it is described how peers act as mentors, are highly involved in the recruitment process and teach the new recruits how to perform work in a correct manner. Therefore, our study indicates that concertive control is apparent within the restaurant. However, Barker (1993) argues that when concertive control applies in an organization, the 'iron cage become more tightened'. The author claims that peers act as constant supervisors and develop group pressure within the team in order to perform work more efficiently. Here, our empirical findings differ from Barker's (1993) argument. Even though there are elements of concertive control at Peppes, the control doesn't seem to generate the same outcome within the restaurant. After the training period is over, it becomes silly to constantly correct and

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comment on peers' work. The constant learning and feedback process as Rennstam (2007) describes as 'peer reviewing' therefore gets undermined and more or less absent. Instead, negative feedback and reprimands turns into an insult rather than an engine for improvements. When staff meetings and feedback are considered as unnecessary or insulting, it becomes rather difficult to share understandings of organizational practices and goals. Due to the lack of communication and feedback, difficulties emerge regarding the implementation of strong norms, rules and ideas that imbue the organization. Therefore, the empirical material suggests that peer-based control within such setting does not tighten the 'iron cage' but rather expands it walls. Employees do not experience peers as ruthless supervisors, but rather as great friends. No one is obligated by title to supervise and bring forward complaints. Therefore, it could be argued that information, advices and discipline get lost along the way when peer-based control is implemented within less complex work environments.

A potential reason for the loose application of peer-based control and lack of feedback could be that the work is not viewed upon as knowledge demanding. Interactive service work is often considered to be mundane and repetitive and there is an underlying assumption of that anyone can manage the work required (see Korczynski & Evans 2013). Additionally, none of the interviewees considered themselves as having a future within the industry. If employees do not want to advance within a company or an industry, what really drives them to perform a good job? In our study, the opportunity to advance is also reduced due to the flat structure of the restaurant. It could be argued that the lack of future achievements contributes to a rather effortless and less ambitious work atmosphere where friendship and fun becomes more important than executing good work. Under conditions as such, is it still possible to practice peer-based control? When the eager to climb the carrier ladder and the love for the occupation itself goes missing, will employees still perform their work tasks? Is the notion of peer-based control indeed better suited for knowledge intensive work after all?

This discussion part has outlined the main findings of the empirical material. To summarize the findings, we will present the metaphor of a shield to illustrate the multidimensional outcomes of an interactive service organization that lack hierarchical positions. The metaphor will describe how employees experience such context as fueling a variety of contradicting feelings. At one hand, the organization creates a fun and enjoyable work environment. On the other hand, emotions of confusion, anxiety and frustration seem to increase among the employees.

The absence of a shield

“A shield is a type of personal armor, meant to intercept attacks, either by stopping projectiles or redirecting a hit” (Wikipedia 2014)

Barker (1993) describes the notion of bureaucratic control as an ‘iron cage’. The author uses the metaphor in order to illustrate how employees constantly feel supervised, trapped and forced by management to engage in work. Since our thesis proceeds from an organizational context where the lack of hierarchical positions causes confusion and ambiguity, we would like to portray the notion of bureaucracy in a different light. We consider the iron cage to provide a rather one-dimensional and narrow view of bureaucratic control, only highlighting the negative aspects of the concept.

When analyzing and carefully examining our empirical material, the lack of hierarchical positions and formal rules fueled a notion of employee vulnerability. The restaurant was often described as a threatening environment where mainly customers, sometimes even peers, become sources of stress, irritation, tears and frustration. Therefore, we would like to illustrate bureaucratic control as a shield. A shield establishes a distance between its carrier and the ones he/she meet. It aims to protect its carrier from attacks and redirect hits. However, a shield can also be experienced as clumsy and unnecessary to carry in more peaceful environments.

Therefore, having a shield in interactive service work can lead to both positive and negative outcomes. Firstly, in threatening situations, the shield protects the waitress from angry and abusive customers. Formalized rules and routines support and reinforce decision-making in the customer meeting. Having hierarchical positions within an organization supports the waitresses and enables them to seek protection behind an authorized person when more uncomfortable and intimidating situations occur. For that reason, hierarchical positions and formalized rules protect the waitress from getting hurt and offer a more comforting and safe work environment. On the other hand, the shield can become awkward and heavy-handed when carried around in more peaceful environments. When trying to efficiently meet customer demands, formal rules and decision-making can slow the process down and contribute to inflexibility. Asking for permission, authorized help or finding formalized guidelines increase the distance between the customer and the service worker, hindering the

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worker to tailor the customer service. Therefore, the shield can also constrain the waitress and make he/she perform less efficiently.

Bureaucratic control does not only act as a shield during the customer interaction, but may also create gaps within the workforce. Formalized rules, assigned duties and responsibilities distance peers from each other. Titles and formalized positions become shields to hide behind, not only from rude customers, but also when internal conflicts occur. The hierarchical ladder therefore contributes to a more clarified, formal and distant work environment. On the other hand, while upholding the shield, it becomes hard to see and enjoy the person behind it. When the work title becomes a shield, close relationships, common feelings of belongingness and a fun work environment seem to become less reachable. The titles encourage a more professional behavior and establish imaginary boundaries that are controlling the interaction among the employees.

To determine whether or not there is a need for a shield in interactive service organizations has not been the purpose of this thesis. The shield can constrain as well as facilitate the worker; it may act as a clumsy obstacle or save the carrier from getting hurt. This comes to illustrate another important aspect that our thesis brought to our attention. What someone describes as vital and necessary, another refers to as problematic and annoying. Different approaches to manage an organization will always be experienced through different glasses and fuel contradictions. The goal of this thesis was to illustrate a fair description of how interactive service work can be experienced in a more unusual setting.

CONTRADICTING EXPERIENCES- CONCLUSIONS

The previous section presented an analysis of our empirical material and ended with a metaphor of a shield to symbolize our findings. Next, we will connect our empirical findings to the research question in order to present our findings of the study. Lastly, we will discuss the limitations of the study and suggest interesting fields of study for the future.

The purpose of this study has been to examine how employees experience work within an interactive service organization that lacks formal hierarchical positions. Since interactive service works often is performed within rationalized and highly controlled work environments, we found it relevant to in-depth analyze how employees experience a more autonomous context. Our study departed from the following research question:

- *How do employees experience low degree of formal hierarchy and surveillance in an interactive service organization?*

We adopted an interpretive perspective in order to provide an in-depth understanding of employees' experiences and illustrate the different meanings such organizational context can fuel. The goal of the thesis has been to seek insights concerning the experiences and feelings of employees when lacking clear and formalized positions within an interactive service organization. In order to clarify and to contribute with a more nuanced interpretation of bureaucratic control to the research field, we illustrated the metaphor of a shield. As described above, the shield portrays the presence of contradictions, multiple meanings and ambiguous outcomes in interactive service work. Many previous researchers (Grönroos 2008; Ritzer 2011; Leidner 1991; Barker 1993; Taylor & Bain 1999) describe bureaucratic control systems in a critical light, mainly focusing upon the negative outcomes of the tight control it exercise upon employees. We wanted to illustrate that the reality is not always as one-dimensional and simple as it first might appear. Our aim was not to resolve whether or not a flat-structured interactive service organization constitutes a best practice, but rather to provide thick empirical descriptions of employees' emotional implications when facing such organizational setting.

Main findings

Further, we will present the two main findings that our research has pointed towards. These findings are our interpretations, based on the in-depth analysis of our empirical material, and suggest the complex and ambiguous nature of employees' experiences within an interactive service work.

The first finding suggests that when lacking the authority of managers within an interactive service organization, the influence of customers' increase. When the tension between customers' and managements' demands fade, the influence of customers becomes stronger. In our study, there are clear indications of how customers influence and regulate the actions, behaviors and emotions of the employees. The employees perceive themselves as autonomous, but when they describe *why* they do as they do, customers always seem to manipulate the action. However, since the employees still perceive and describe themselves as autonomous, the influence is not considered as a controlling instrument.

The second main finding comprises an elaboration of the first, but relates to its emotional outcomes. When working in an interactive service organization lacking hierarchical positions and formalized rules, employees appear to become exposed to a high degree of emotional work. The lack of formal rules, positions, authorities and responsibilities within an organization contributes to confusion, stress and frustration among the employees. There is no shield to hide behind. On the other hand, the flat structure also creates a strong feeling of belongingness, friendship and fun atmospheres among peers at work. When decreasing the hierarchical distance, peer feel more eager to engage and personally connect with their colleagues. Therefore, the absence of titles and positions to hide behind seem to increase every emotional aspect of work, negative as positive. This more contradictive finding has been central to our thesis, from how we presented and outlined our empirical material to illustrating the shield as our metaphorical contribution.

Limitations and implications for further research

We acknowledge that our study has its limitations. Due to the limited time scope, we had to narrow the study down and decide which angle we thought was most interesting to proceed from. To elaborate within a smaller scope we therefore had to neglect some data less relevant for our research question. However, we do acknowledge there were opportunities for us as researchers to look at the material from a different angles or perspectives, but due to the short

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time frame we had to leave such directions to be considered for future research. We also find it important to underpin how the results are contextualized to our study object. The results reflect participants' experiences of working at a specific restaurant in Norway. The restaurant is operating on a franchise-agreement, located in a ski resort, characterized by seasonal- and part-time workers of both Danish and Swedish nationalities. Therefore, we aimed to provide the reader with thick descriptions of the study object. However, when presenting the metaphor of a shield we believe our findings can become more interesting and applicable even for other settings. Our goal was to contribute with new insights and understandings of how a specific organizational setting can be experienced by individuals and to further explore the potential implications of such experiences in a broader sense.

Before starting our journey, we recognized how the literature within the field of interactive service work mainly concerned how different forms of organizational settings affect job satisfaction (Grönroos 2008; Svingstedt 2005; Barker 1993). Recent literature on interactive service works advocated how front staff should be authorized, have greater freedom and autonomy to increase job satisfaction and to meet various customer demands more efficiently (Ritzer 2011; Grönroos 2008; Leidner 1991). The authors seemed critical to the more bureaucratic form of control that characterizes many fast-food restaurants. Our study indicates that the reality is not as simple as implied by previous researchers, since increased autonomy also contributes to stress, frustration and anxiety. In our study, we only looked at one unique setting. An interesting direction for future research would therefore be to conduct a comparative study between two interactive service organizations, one with a high degree of autonomy and the other with high degree of formal regulations, surveillance and positions in order to recognize and compare employees' experiences. Such research would possibly contribute to interesting findings, related to our own findings in the thesis.

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Appendix

Interview guide

1. Tell us about how you started at Peppes Pizza!
2. How long have you been working here for?
3. What do you think takes to become a good waitress/chef?
4. Do you think it is a hard job? Motivate!
5. What are the best aspects of your work?
6. What are the worst aspects of your work?
7. If you were able to change anything at Peppes, what would that be?
8. Describe your boss!
9. If you were the manager, what would you do differently?
10. Would you say that you have a great amount of responsibility and autonomy at work?
Why?
11. What could be the negative aspects with such practice?
12. What situations can normally be troublesome at work? Exemplify!
13. Can you imagine yourself working in the industry in the future?
14. Can you please describe an internal conflict that has occurred within the restaurant?
15. How do you experience that conflicts get solved among the employees?
16. Please describe the cooperation between chefs and waitresses at Peppes!
17. Are there any informal roles within the restaurant?
18. Do you know anyone that have been dismissed or decided to leave? Why?
19. Which values and norms are most important to follow and acknowledge at the
restaurant? According to you AND according to your manger?
20. Is it anything you do differently when your manager is not around?