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Master Thesis

The 30-hour Workweek -
A Promising Alternative for Knowledge Workers?

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ABSTRACT

Long working hours and burnout as well as other stress-related symptoms are common concerns amongst knowledge workers. An obvious solution might be to reduce working hours, for example, to a 30-hour workweek. Hence, this explorative study is interested in exploring the effects of the 30-hour workweek on knowledge workers. Object of study is a digital marketing agency; eleven semi-structured interviews were conducted. With a qualitative abductive approach, we aim to understand how the concept of the 30-hour workweek affects knowledge workers as well as key aspects of knowledge work such as autonomy, communication, creativity, motivation and commitment, and subjective quality assessment. Our findings suggest that the 30-hour workweek is a promising concept for knowledge workers and that it helps to counteract some modern challenges related to knowledge work such as work intensification, empty labour and psychological contract building. In addition, an attempt is made to draw the business case for the 30-hour workweek. Having used an interpretive approach, this study further places this concept in a wider economic and societal context in order to paint a rich picture of the 30-hour workweek.

Keywords: alternative working time concepts, empty labour, knowledge intensive firm, knowledge work, knowledge worker, overtime, presenteeism, psychological contract, reduced working hours, work intensification, work-life balance, work-life integration, 30-hour workweek

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1. Introduction

“Knowledge-worker productivity is the biggest of the 21st-century management challenges.” (Drucker, 1999, p.92)

When looking at current research about knowledge work and practices in the field, the trend to aim at increased work-life integration becomes obvious. Twenge et al. (2010) explain that leading companies have in-house gyms, “Google offers onsite laundry and massages; eBay set aside two rooms for meditation” (p.1118); all of these offers contribute to an increased amount of hours spent at work. Lines between work and life become thinner or disappear entirely (Ritlop, 2016). On the other hand, we face a trend of increasing demand for work-life balance (Jones, 2003; White et al., 2003). Also, rising burnout, depression and stress rates are a widely known problem in the Western employment world (DAK, 2016; Maslach, Schaufeli, Leiter, 2001; Vizard, 2015). This poses the question how sustainable the current way of conducting knowledge work is and what alternatives to the contemporary approach on knowledge work can be found.

As Drucker (1999) states: “The most valuable asset of a 21st-century institution [...] will be its knowledge workers and their productivity” (p.79). Therefore, it seems crucial to find ways to bind the knowledge worker to the organisation and to guarantee his/her wellbeing and productivity. Also, the increased use of technology requires an adaption of “the face and composition of our workplaces” (Allvin et al., 2011, p.ix). Moreover, in the light of the changing demands from younger generations towards their employers, such as increased importance of work-life balance (Hurrelmann & Albrecht, 2015), alternative solutions should be found. In addition, a growing number of people is advocating a culture shift towards more sustainability and an increased Slow Movement lifestyle (The World Institute of Slowness, 2016). Terms like de-growth, sufficiency and post-capitalistic society are often mentioned in this context. One possible solution for all these matters could be introducing the 30-hour workweek, a concept where working hours are reduced to 30 hours per week while keeping salaries at the former level. At this point it is important to clarify that the 30-hour workweek is no equivalent to part-time work. The concept includes that employees are paid the same salary, as they would receive under a 40-hour workweek. Also, in

the following thesis the terms 30-hour workweek and 6-hour working day are used equally. A few companies such as Toyota (Sweden), Brath (Sweden), Makava (Austria), Agent Marketing (UK) and Svartedalens Retirement House (Sweden) have already introduced or tested this concept partly successfully across different sectors (Alderman, 2016). In our thesis, we will explore the effects of the 30-hour workweek on knowledge workers.

Research Purpose

The topic of our thesis has not yet directly been discussed in research literature. In manufacturing, there have been studies made on the correlation of reduced working hours and productivity, as well as on the effects on employee wellbeing, health and work-life balance. Manufacturing work, however, clearly differentiates from knowledge work as the underlying principle of producing a certain, measurable output in a set amount of time does not hold for knowledge work (Newell et al., 2009). While extensive research on knowledge work and the ideal working conditions for this kind of work has been conducted (e.g. Alvesson, 2004; Newell et al., 2009), research in the field of knowledge work in combination with reduced working hours (e.g. 30-hour workweek) is scarce. The purpose of our thesis is to explore the effects of the 30-hour workweek on knowledge workers. By painting a rich picture of the 30-hour workweek we intend to assess its feasibility for knowledge work and look behind common beliefs associated to it. This way we aim to contribute to the understanding of current socio-economic trends in Western societies and shed light on matters that are inappropriately ignored in the working life of our so-called knowledge society.

Research Question

Our explorative study aims to understand the effects of introducing the 30-hour workweek for knowledge workers, and how reduced working hours affect some of the key aspects of knowledge work. For the purpose of our research we have selected the ones that seemed most suitable for our company of study and are commonly named by scholars researching in the field of knowledge work. The selected characteristics of knowledge work are autonomy, communication, creativity, subjective quality assessment and motivation and commitment (Alvesson, 2004; Newell et al., 2009). Further, we aim to review the 30-hour workweek in terms of implications for knowledge workers personally. Our basic interest is to find out how the 30-hour workweek influences

knowledge workers. Since we conducted our interviews at DigiWars a digital marketing agency, our questions refer to the business field of digital marketing. We therefore pose the following research question:

- *How does the 30-hour workweek influence knowledge workers?*

The following sub-questions have evolved throughout the research process and helped us investigate the concept of the 30-hour workweek more comprehensively:

- *How do knowledge workers in a digital marketing agency experience the 30-hour workweek?*
- *What are perceived benefits related to the 30-hour workweek for knowledge workers in a digital marketing agency?*
- *What perceived tensions could knowledge workers experience with the 30-hour workweek in a digital marketing agency?*

Our goal is not to find definite answers for these questions but to explore different perceptions and viewpoints on the topic.

Relevance

The 30-hour workweek is a topic of high interest for different reasons. Firstly, our society has become a “knowledge society” (Alvesson, 2013; Nonaka, 1994), since more and more jobs are in or related to knowledge-based sectors. As a consequence, alternative working time models will increase in relevance in order to meet changing needs. Another often-discussed topic is the problem of increased stress-related work absenteeism and how this can be reduced in order to prevent knowledge and monetary losses (DAK, 2016). Thirdly, already Keynes (1933) stated that in the 21st century a 15-hour workweek would be sufficient due to technological progress. Hence, it is interesting to explore why 40- or more hour workweeks are still the standard.

The topic of our thesis is relevant not only for marketing agencies and their employees, but also

aims to provide valuable input for other knowledge-intensive firms and their knowledge workers. Moreover, our thesis intends to be rewarding for scholars, unions and governmental institutions concerned with employee health and future economic concepts. Personally, we are interested to explore this topic to see whether the 30-hour workweek is a future, more sustainable concept for productive, happy and healthy knowledge workers. We further hope to encourage curiosity and interest for alternative working-hour models and to inspire the reader to find new ways of questioning our current capitalist model.

Research Limitations

We are aware of the uncertainty of empirical material, especially as our findings are based on a mono-method due to having interviews as the only source of primary data. Furthermore, we cannot make any claims about long-term effects on knowledge workers as the 30-hour workweek was introduced only a year ago in the company of study. Another limitation of this study is the fact that we could not interview the people who decided to leave DigiWars within this year. Following this, we are not claiming to reveal the only truth, nor a complete analysis. The interviews rather helped us explore the topic of the 30-hour workweek and functioned as examples to how knowledge workers experience this new concept. In that, we experienced that the answers of the interviewees stretched our imagination and showed us new meanings, opened-up unexplored ideas from our side and helped us challenge our interpretations from pre-existing understanding and secondary data.

Outline of the Thesis

After having introduced topic and purpose, research questions and relevance of our study, chapter 2 will illustrate the theoretical background by describing various aspects regarding working hours and concepts that are related to the 30-hour workweek and knowledge work. In chapter 3 we will describe our methodological approach and research design, and introduce the case of DigiWars. This will be followed by the presentation of our empirical material in chapter 4. Chapter 5 will address the discussion of our thesis, where we will explore the empirical data in more depth by relating it to existing literature and concepts. In this, we aim to assess the feasibility of the 30-hour workweek for knowledge work, discuss if there is a business case for it, and further pose the

question if the 30-hour workweek is an alternative to the capitalistic mindset. In chapter 6 we will conclude the thesis with an outlook and give suggestions for further research.

2. Literature Review

Currently concepts like the 30-hour workweek seem to be of high interest. In mass media as well as in academic literature we face a trend of researching on and experimenting with alternative working models and working time concepts. Not only in Sweden alternatives to the strict nine-to-five office working day are considered. Related research can also be found in other European countries such as Austria where the University of Vienna established a research project on alternative working hours (ORF, 2017). Also in North America, scholars are researching about alternative designs of workdays and workweeks. Research on organisations and individuals who are pushing back against the current culture of extreme busyness and constant overwork seems to be a ‘hot topic’, which increasingly gains relevance. In the following parts of the literature review, we want to examine the ideas that lie behind a 30-hour workweek as well as the concepts, which are related to it. Thus, we will start off by giving a broader overview on the history of working hours and other well-established working hour models. We will further look into underlying socio-economic assumptions regarding working hours. Secondly, we will explore how employees’ health is related to long working hours before describing different theories around work-life balance. As a last point, we will provide a theoretical background on knowledge work and will highlight characteristics of knowledge work as well as related challenges.

Working Hours in the Western World

In the following chapter we will explore the history of working hours of the last centuries and take a closer look at current working hour trends. This section further aims to put working hours and the 30-hour workweek into a wider socio-economic setting in order to set the scene for our explorative study.

The History of Working Hours

For a long period in history factory managers had the free choice how long they want their workers to work per day due to the absence of labour regulations. With the start of the Industrial Revolution, from the second half of the 18th century onwards, factories aimed for running their machines as long as possible in order to maximise profits. In these times working hours of twelve hours per

day and more were the norm depending on the type of industry (Hopkins, 1982). However, especially in the UK factory owners faced growing pressure by workers' movements and strikes, protesting against the miserable working conditions and exploitation of the workers. As a result, the 'Ten-hour Day Act' was implemented in the UK in 1847, being one of the first restrictive regulations of this kind. The act restricted the working hours for women and young workers, aged 13 to 18, to ten hours per day in the textile sector (Crowcroft & Cannon, 2015). In the meantime in the United States, more and more unions were founded to fight for workers' rights and called for an eight-hours day. In the following decades the unions' power of some industrial sectors was growing strong enough to introduce an eight-hour day and better working conditions. However, an overall legislation for restricting working hours was yet to come (Commons, 1918).

In 1914 Henry Ford promoted the eight-hour movement by reducing the working hours of his factory workers to eight hours a day, five days a week, while increasing their salaries. He believed that too long working days affect the workers' productivity in a negative way. By that he accomplished to boost profit margins rapidly, which made other factory owners follow his example (Weir, 2013). Nevertheless, it was not until 1938 that the 'Fair Labor Standards Act' introduced a general restriction to the 40-hour week with regulated payment for overtime in the United States (Howard, 2000). Since then, official working hours have not changed much, making the nine to five working day the standard in the Western World. For knowledge workers, however, the amount of actual working hours - as opposed to the 40 contracted hours - has started to rise in America in the 1980s, and all-in contracts have become increasingly popular and common (Pang, 2016). "Since then, this split has spread to other parts of the world: today, well-off, well-educated people in Western Europe, Australia, and South Korea are also more likely to be overworked, while more poor people struggle to find stable jobs and face chronic underemployment." (Pang, 2016, p.25) As a countermeasure, European countries like France have started to set a cap to increased working hours by formally regulating them.

The French 35-hours Workweek

In 2000 the French socialist party implemented the 35-hour workweek and reduced weekly working hours from 39 to 35. Every hour above 35 should from then on be counted as overtime

and remunerated higher. Furthermore, the upper weekly limit of working hours was lowered from 48 to 44, being the absolute weekly maximum (Lehndorff, 2014). The goal of this measure was firstly to reduce unemployment, reaching an improved division of labour to avoid that some people work very long hours while others remain unemployed. The other aim of the policy was to increase workers' leisure time and therefore improve their overall welfare. Back then the 35-hour workweek enjoyed high popularity (Estevao & Sa, 2008). However, more than 15 years later negative voices claim: "France's famous 35-hour workweek is in its death throes" (Bershidsky, 2015). In fact, the average weekly working hours in France have not been experiencing a strong decrease since the implementation of the policy, being relatively stable at around 41 hours over the last ten years. Even without introducing the 35-hour workweek, countries like Denmark and Norway have lower average working hours than France (Eurostat, 2016a; OECD Stats, 2017).

Other Alternative Working Hour Models

In the following section we will take a closer look on well-established alternatives to the traditional 40-hour workweek. In a part-time employment, for example, the employee works for "part of the usual working day or week" (Oxford Dictionary, 2017c) and also receives only part of the full-time salary. A part-time arrangement usually comes with decreased responsibility and employees are given fewer projects or clients. When looking at the statistics of part-time employment, it becomes obvious that women are much more likely to work in part-time jobs than men. Furthermore, the total amount of part-time contracts is significantly higher in wealthy countries, and the discrepancy between men and women is rather small in former communist countries (Eurostat, 2016b). Along with fewer responsibilities at work, part-time employees usually do not have the same career opportunities as their full-time counterparts. The fact that most people who work part-time are women plays a part in contributing to the gender pay gap and the inequality in career chances between men and women (Higgins, Duxbury & Johnson, 2000).

Job-sharing is a special form of part-time work, in which two or more employees share the work as well as the salary of one full-time job. It is usually the employees' responsibility how they separate the tasks, and often they have flexibility in coordinating the working hours. One crucial factor for the success of a job-sharing arrangement is the tight and gapless cooperation and

communication between the employees sharing the job. Job-sharing is usually performed by employees in middle and higher management positions. It is a way to work part-time in a job, which is usually designed for full-time. As women work in part-time contracts much more frequently, this might be a way for them to reach high positions in a business (Watton & Stables, 2016).

Also, flexitime is an alternative. It is a “system of working a set number of hours with the starting and finishing times chosen within agreed limits by the employee“ (Oxford Dictionary, 2017a) and is one of the most common alternative working hour models. A flexitime contract usually involves core periods where the employee has to be present and can either be performed within a part-time or full-time working arrangement. Flexitime has the advantage that employees are more flexible in coordinating their working time with rush hours, family duties, and other private responsibilities (Skinner & Chapman, 2013; Ralston, 1989).

Working from home alternatives are defined as “arrangements in which employees work in their own homes, rather than in an office” (Cambridge Dictionary, 2017). A related working arrangement is telework where employees are allowed to regularly work off-side but are obliged to stay electronically connected to the office. Both of these working hour models increase the flexibility of work immensely, merging it with private life almost inextricably (Bentley & Yoong, 2000; Shamir & Salomon, 1985). This way of working is considered to be a helpful alternative for employees with home duties like caring for children or elderly relatives. However, the most common issues with working from home and telework are the risk of distraction and a blurred line between work and life, which may result in the inability to switch off from work.

Working Hours and Capitalism

As mentioned in the introduction, Keynes (1933) predicted that in the 21st century a 15-hour workweek would be sufficient to meet all material needs and thus people could enjoy more leisure time. He suggested that the constant increase in productivity would make long working hours obsolete. Although new technologies in communication, production and transportation did indeed increase efficiency of production, the promise of reduced working hours did not become true. Instead, increased efficiency led to increased productivity at unchanged working hours. ‘Better,

faster, more' seems to be the credo which prevents the reduction of workload and in turn lowering working hours. The aim is to maximize profits through increased efficiency based on the grand narrative of endless economic growth through increasing productivity. This concept of endless economic growth, in theory, assures stable levels of investments into technical and technological progress, which in turn can facilitate a higher output per working hour and leads to further growth (Mattauch, 2015).

On the one hand, continual economic growth does contribute to high levels of education, better health care, advanced technologies and a higher quality of living. On the other hand, however, it contributes to the exploitation of resources and has led to rationalisations and modernisations resulting in unemployment and the centralisation of specific expert professions. This was already suggested by Russell in 1932 in his famous work 'In Praise of Idleness' where he foresees that "those whose work was demanded were made to work long hours, and the rest were left to starve as unemployed". Apart from individual factors, the culture of long working hours today is closely tight to cultural norms and the understanding that more work is always better (Burke & Cooper, 2008). It further derives from pressures towards the employees to cultivate the image of the ideal committed employee (Sang et al., 2015). Acker (1990) claims that in increasingly abstract jobs and hierarchies, commitment is demonstrated with long working hours. Along with the trend of long working hours, presenteeism has become a common norm. Johns (2010) assesses the term presenteeism from different definitions. For this thesis, however, we will focus on the definition of presenteeism as "the practice of being present at one's place of work for more hours than is required, especially as a manifestation of insecurity about one's job" (Oxford Dictionary, 2017d). This also includes attending work while being ill (Johns, 2010). The creation of a concept around the belief that working long hours demonstrates hard work and commitment manifests how widespread this behaviour is in the current economic climate. Pang (2016) explains that "in some other professions there are clear measures of productivity: the number of customers helped, patients treated, dollars made, cars repaired. But for those of us who work in teams on complicated, open-ended projects, long hours are an expression of our identity and proof of our seriousness" (p.17).

The image of the ideal worker conceived by Acker (1990) has contributed to this phenomenon. He

explains that the ideal worker is assumed to be disembodied and willing to neglect responsibilities towards other aspects of life such as social or domestic responsibilities (Williams, 2001). Examples from the world of academia are studies by Bailyn (2003) and Acker and Armenti (2004). These show that normative expectations force knowledge workers to prioritise work over other realms of life in order to be successful. It is also not unusual that companies decide over their employees' work locations and schedules (Chermark, 2015). Additionally, pressure for long working hours increased with globalisation and resulted in a more and more competitive labour market as well as extended working hours through working across different time zones (Burke & Cooper, 2008). Acker (1990) further argues that structures of organisations are not gender-neutral. The ideal worker is portrayed as a universal and disembodied male, which marginalises women and amplifies gender segregation in organisations. This image has produced "an acute time crunch, especially for women" (Gornick & Meyers, 2009, p.831), who more often than men combine strong commitments to family with work (Alvesson, 2004). Gornick and Meyers (2009) describe that as a result working mothers "pay the "mommy tax" at work while continuing to shoulder the [...] burden of housework at home; and threats to children's healthy development from the shortage of stable, high-quality childcare arrangements. Social policy has not kept up with social change. Indeed, many workplace arrangements and social policies are still based on the old male-breadwinner/female-homemaker model that lost its relevance decades ago" (p.831). In order to reduce this intense pressure for women and to foster role equality, alternative concepts of working hours need to be considered.

Common consequences of the psychological and physical pressures related to long working hours are burn-out and other health issues as outlined later in the literature review. Those are claimed to indicate the limits of the industrial capitalistic ideals. As a result, more and more theories like Herman Daly's (1973) 'Steady-State Economy' and Tim Jackson's (2009) 'Prosperity without growth' evolved, disclosing inter alia social limits to growth. Also, concepts such as degrowth and sufficiency as well as the idea of a post-growth society find increasing popularity. Degrowth, for example, aims at the downscaling of production capacity and promotes well-being through non-consumptive options such as sharing or producing at home, and at the same time increasing time devoted to family and community as well as nature, culture and creative activities (D'Alisa,

Demaria & Kallis, 2014; Sekulova et al., 2013). Also, sufficiency gets increased attention. This is an economic, political and social movement towards sustainability and is seen as a key to a post-growth society. Contrary to the growth assumption, sufficiency promotes the principle that there can be enough or even too much of something (Princen 2003, Princen 2005). Following the strategy of sufficiency means reducing the use of resources by producing and consuming sustainably. This aims at reducing negative ecological and social effects in the countries with the highest living standards. The sufficiency strategy includes the economic side, for example finding the ideal company size instead of aiming at constant growth. On the societal side, it indicates that happiness can be enhanced through other forms than material accumulation. Hence, sufficiency is closely linked to work-life balance and finding new frames for quality of life (Linz, 2004; Mattauch, 2015; Princen, 2005).

In terms of working hours several future-oriented ideas exist. In the degrowth setting, salaries would be consistent and the time loss would be financed by increased productivity. Other considerations are the introduction of a four-day week, job-sharing as well as shortening the years of working by introducing earlier retirement ages. Those options, however, only seem to be promising for higher-educated, higher-paid professionals (D'Alisa, Demaria & Kallis, 2014). Paech (2012) suggests a more general concept of distributing the 40 working hours equally to a monetary and non-monetary part of life. Through the non-monetary part of life local communities, a healthier lifestyle, production at home and voluntary work could be promoted; leading to a post-growth society. In becoming a post-growth society, companies are not at the centre of the discussion. However, they are an influential agent as they are strongly driven by growth attempts. Especially small and medium size companies are claimed to have an influence in establishing those “alternative norms” (Mattauch, 2015).

Working Hours and Productivity

In research literature, the relation of working hours and performance has been explored, however, mainly for manufacturing work. Pencavel (2014), for instance, found that fewer working hours result in higher efficiency. He showed that above a certain threshold of working hours, productivity of munitions workers sank. Also, experiments of implementing a 30-hour workweek in the shop

floor of manufacturing companies in Sweden were successful as efficiency and productivity increased (Matharu, 2016). For the knowledge-intensive sector, however, this proof is still missing. Nevertheless, there are authors who show that more rest and breaks - consequently less working hours - increase concentration and focus at work. In his book 'Rest - Why you get more done if you do less', Pang (2016) suggests "that long hours don't guarantee higher productivity" (p.16), rather quite the opposite. He argues that more rest can actually improve creativity and productivity. In the following section, we will look at health and concentration levels in relation to working hours.

Working Hours and Human Nature

In mass media we find many voices criticising the 8-hours working day as an ineffective approach to work because staying focused for that long contradicts with human nature (Bradberry, 2016; Haden, 2015). It is also often mentioned that long working hours are a cause for mental and psychological health issues (Sonnetag & Bayer, 2005). In the following section, we will first look into the relation of working hours and health and will then present different concepts of how to balance work and life.

Concentration and Health

It is well known that regular breaks help to maintain a focused working style and prevent drops in the quality of the work. This has thoroughly been studied in academic research (e.g. Helton & Russell, 2015; Henning et al., 1997; Fritz, Lam & Spreitzer, 2011; Ross, Russell & Helton, 2014). An example for regulated break and work times fostering concentration are focus sprints such as the 'pomodoro method'. The goal of such techniques is to make the distinction between work and free time clearer and "to perceive time as a value [...], instead of an enemy [...]" (Gobbo & Vaccari, 2008, p.181). These agile time management methods have demonstrated to help employees keep a sustainable pace and increase velocity, for example, in programming (Gobbo & Vaccari, 2008). Furthermore, frequent breaks for rest are said to influence employees' well-being and mood significantly (Blasche et al., 2017; Sonnetag & Bayer, 2005). Geurts and Sonnetag (2006) further conclude "that the chronic situation of sustained physiological activation [at work] and incomplete recovery is an important pathway to chronic health impairment." (p.482). Sonnetag

and Bayer (2005) especially point out that also the ability to switch off after work is related to having enough time in the evening hours to recover and detach from work. This psychological detachment has positive effects on staff mood and reduces fatigue.

Moreover, numerous studies were conducted on the impact of long working hours on employees' physical and mental health. Research showed that reduced working hours positively influence employees' health and wellbeing. In manufacturing work excessive working hours are one of the biggest risks for physical health, causing work related accidents (Lee & Lee, 2016). However, in a more knowledge-intensive working environment it is mainly the workers' mental health, which can be affected negatively through long working hours. Various studies show that less working hours lead to improved mental health, fewer sick leaves and a decreased risk for various stress-related diseases such as back problems, strokes and heart attacks (Hulst, 2003; Sparks et al., 1997; Żołnierczyk-Zreda, Bedyńska & Warszewska-Makuch, 2015). However, evidence for a simple correlation between the amount of working hours and overall health is rather weak because of its strong interconnectedness with factors like personality, work characteristics, demographic variables and so on (Hulst, 2003). Nevertheless, employees' mental health and especially job burnout have been topics of high interest in mass media as well as academic research in the past few years. Particularly knowledge-intensive sectors have been facing alarmingly high numbers of job burnouts because knowledge workers are increasingly affected by stress and anxiety at their workplaces (Aghaz & Sheikh, 2016). The British Health and Safety Executive (HSE, 2016) states: "By occupation, jobs that are common across public service industries (such as healthcare workers; teaching professionals; business, media and public service professionals) show higher levels of stress as compared to all jobs." (p.2) Main factors of work-related stress are workload, tight deadlines, organisational change, too high extents of pressure or responsibility and lack of managerial support. The relevance of mental health at the workplace becomes obvious when looking at the related number of sick days. In 2015/16, 45 per cent of sick days were related to stress at work (HSE, 2016). Some authors argue that work intensification has led to the overwhelming character of today's work. Later in this chapter we will take a closer look at the concept of work intensification.

Work-Life Balance

Work-life balance commonly refers to “the division of one's time and focus between working and family or leisure activities” (Oxford Dictionary, 2017f). Like most definitions of this concept, life and work are treated as two separated spheres despite the fact that work can equally be regarded as a part of life, just like family or leisure time. Nevertheless, to keep a balance between the two is most widely said to be important. Ruskin (1871 cited in Allvin et al., 2011) confirms this when emphasising that one reason for employees’ happiness is the condition that “they must not do too much of it [work]” (preface p.x). In general, reasonable working hours allow a better compatibility of work and life because of the reduced time spent at work. Hereby lower levels of ‘work-life conflict’ and higher levels of ‘quality of life’ can be achieved (Greenhaus, Collins & Shaw, 2003; MacInnes, 2005; White et al., 2003). Work-life balance for employees has further been found to contribute to job satisfaction, stress reduction and health improvements (Chimote & Srivastava, 2013). In recent times, however, we have been facing a trend of blurred lines between work and private life. Several authors state that this is accompanied by diminished work-life balance and can strongly affect employees’ wellbeing, health and commitment to work (Clark, 2000; Sarker et al. 2012).

Work-Life Integration

In today’s business world we find the tendency towards boundary-less work or work-life integration, which is enforced by companies asking their employees for long working hours and constant availability. Also, concepts like flexible working hours and working from home contribute to the growing integration of work and life. As a result, work and life become blended. Moods, skills and attitudes get transported from one domain to the other, which is called work-life spillover (Edwards & Rothbard, 2000). This comes along with certain risks. As mentioned above, less separation of work and private life bears the threat of not being able to switch off or differentiate between the different domains of life anymore. This might, in further consequence, lead to increased stress levels, exhaustion and burnout. Along with the trend of work-life integration, companies like Google and Co. try to meet every possible need of employees by providing food, sleeping possibilities, leisure activities and much more, ultimately aiming for increased identification with work and increased time spent at work. An employee survey at

Google, however, revealed that many employees would wish for a stronger segregation of work and life (Brock, 2014).

Work-Life Separation

In academic literature we find attempts that counteract the trend of boundary-less work such as the border theory and boundary theory. Clark (2000) recommends in her ‘work/family border theory’ that the domains family and work are separated by physical, psychological and temporal borders. The strength of these borders depends on the individual and on how much the borders are allowed to be permeable and flexible. While the border theory focuses on “how individuals manage and negotiate the work and family sphere and borders between them in order to attain balance” (Clark, 2000, p.751), the ‘boundary theory’ on the other hand concentrates on “how individuals engage in daily role transitions as part of their organizational life” (Ashforth et al., 2000, p.472). Both theories suggest that the individual should handle the degree of separation of the different domains thoughtfully in order to gain a balance between work and life. Despite many companies currently aiming for increased work-life integration, younger generations of employees experience a renewed awareness of the importance of leisure and family time (Sturges and Guest, 2004). A study by Wey-Smola and Sutton (2002), for example, reveals “an increasing desire among American workers to balance work and personal goals” (p.363). Also, the generations Y and Z were found to stronger demand work-life balance and wish for an increased separation between work and life (Hurrelmann & Albrecht, 2015).

In the following section we will shift our focus to the knowledge worker as this thesis aims to understand the effects of the 30-hour workweek on knowledge workers. We will describe common characteristics of knowledge work and summarize contemporary working conditions for knowledge workers. We will also give an overview of knowledge-intensive firms and their engagement in long working hours.

Knowledge Workers and Knowledge-intensive Firms

Already in 1994 Nonaka stated that the Western world is becoming more and more knowledge intensive (Nonaka, 1994). In recent times this is more appropriate than ever before. Therefore, it

is crucial to gain an improved understanding about ideal working conditions for knowledge workers.

Definitions from the Knowledge-intensive Setting

Knowledge work is a broad term and thus difficult to define precisely. Frenkel et al. (1995) describe this ambiguous concept as “characterized by an emphasis on theoretical knowledge, creativity and use of analytical and social skills” (p.773). This includes various work fields in which “knowledge is simultaneously an input, medium and output for their work” (Newell et al. 2002, p.14, in Alvesson, 2004, p.22), meaning that knowledge workers create new knowledge or apply knowledge in new ways. These work fields are, for example, engineering, advertising, academia, consulting and law (Alvesson, 2004). Knowledge workers are “professionals and others with discipline-based or more esoteric expertise and skills” (Newell, 2009, p.25). According to Alvesson (2004) knowledge-intensive firms can be described “as organizations that offer to the market the use of fairly sophisticated knowledge or knowledge-based products” (p.17). Due to the intangibility of these products it is difficult to measure output and productivity of knowledge work precisely. Thus, it is suggested that knowledge-intensive firms are “characterized by a high level of ambiguity” (Alvesson, 2004, p.237). Furthermore, knowledge-intensive firms usually work with flat hierarchies where informal and horizontal communication is practiced. According to Lovendahl (2005), various types of knowledge-intensive firms exist, one of them being the problem-solving knowledge-intensive firm. As an advertising agency, the company our study focuses on falls under this category. The key feature of such types of companies is creative problem solving. Therefore, they highly rely on creativity, inspiration and learning. In the following section, we will depict marketing agencies as knowledge-intensive firms more thoroughly.

Knowledge Work in Marketing Agencies

According to Alvesson (1994), marketing agencies are “characterized by work that is hard to specify and a product that is difficult to evaluate” (p.542). Slater (1989, in Alvesson 1994, p.543) calls the products of marketing agencies “nebulous” and “somewhat disreputable” (p.122). Even if these adjectives might be too critical towards the output of agencies, their work is, in fact, uncertain and ambiguous regarding quality and results (Alvesson, 1994). Despite - or perhaps

because of - all those uncertainties related to agencies they often get romanticised in movies and series like “Mad Man”, where the glamorous advertising world of the 60s is contingent on alcohol, cigars, sexism and fraud (Sweeney, 2015). The more recent image of marketing agencies is loaded with attributions as well. Agencies are known for very long working hours, constant time pressure and uncertain career opportunities (Farmer, 2015). Despite this they are a popular employer among young professionals, who base their desire to work on passion rather than the urge for a steady income or job security (Vizard, 2015).

Knowledge Workers and Productivity

As mentioned above, knowledge work and its output are difficult to assess. Thus, knowledge workers’ efficiency and productivity are characterized by ambiguity as well. According to Drucker (1999), guaranteeing the knowledge workers’ productivity is one of the biggest challenges of the 21st century. He defined six factors that encourage knowledge worker productivity: task clarity, autonomy, innovation, continuous learning, a focus on quality rather than quantity and treating the knowledge worker “as an asset rather than a cost” (p.84). Drucker especially emphasizes the importance of assessing the output of knowledge workers over quality rather than quantity and describes “quality as the essence of the output” (p.84). In academic literature, numerous other models exist which aim to describe knowledge worker productivity (e.g. Amabile & Kramer, 2007; Davenport, 2002; Jewels & Ford, 2006). The high number of attempts to explain knowledge worker productivity might strengthen the argument that knowledge worker productivity is difficult to assess and somewhat ambiguous.

Characteristics of Knowledge Work

There are certain distinctive characteristics regarding knowledge work defined by various authors writing about the topic (Newell 2009; Alvesson, 2004; Drucker, 1999). For our study we have selected the ones, which seemed most suitable for our company of study, namely autonomy, communication, creativity, subjective quality assessment, and commitment and motivation, as those are closely related to the type of work conducted in a digital marketing agency. However, this list of knowledge work characteristics does not claim completeness, as the field includes various occupations and is too multi-layered to allow simple generalisations.

Knowledge work is typically characterised by a high extent of autonomy at work. According to Alvesson (2004), this is caused by the knowledge worker's high level of expertise, which makes him/her the most competent to decide how to organize the work and judge the importance of different tasks. Therefore, knowledge work demands loose control and a high extent of freedom by the management, making the employer more a facilitator or enabler than a controller. There are usually few or no restrictions regarding working procedures and working hours (Newell et al., 2009), allowing knowledge workers to spend time on experimenting and exploring. A high level of autonomy does not imply that knowledge workers usually work on their own. Knowledge workers are rather strongly interconnected with their colleagues in the working process and maintain close interaction and collaboration with them (Alvesson, 2004).

According to Alvesson (2004), "extensive communication for coordination and problem-solving" (p.21) is of high need within a knowledge-intensive firm. The complex tasks of knowledge workers make effective communication indispensable. As team collaborations and close relationships to clients are common within knowledge work, formal work-related communication is vital. In addition, sufficient space for informal chats between knowledge workers is important. Knowledge workers often receive suggestions and inspiration for their work in a rather informal working environment. According to Newell (2009), "knowledge work is best conducted in 'organic' and informal settings, [...] and where horizontal, as opposed to vertical, communication dominates" (p.63). Furthermore, many knowledge-intensive firms nowadays support their internal communication through certain information and communication technologies. This is a very helpful way to store and share information and give knowledge workers an easy way to communicate with others throughout the company.

Another important quality of knowledge workers is creativity (Alvesson, 2004). According to Amabile (1997), "creativity is simply the production of novel, appropriate ideas in any realm of human activity, from science, to the arts, to education, to business, to everyday life" (p.40). Following this definition, creativity in knowledge work does not only imply artistic creativity but rather the ability of problem-solving and dealing with uncertainties which are also understood as creative processes (Acsente, 2010). Creativity in knowledge work is accompanied by advanced, intellectual analysis and contrasts with routine work like purely administrative work (Alvesson,

2004). Moreover, knowledge work is typically done in teams bringing in different ideas. Differences in knowledge and conflicting ideas are said to trigger creativity immensely (Newell, 2009).

As mentioned above, the output or performance of knowledge work should be assessed through its quality rather than quantity (Drucker, 1999). However, due to the complex and intangible nature of the work, objective quality assessment is difficult. Moreover, tasks and problem solving in knowledge work are mostly unique and context-dependent, which does not allow high extents of standardisation of the work and its quality. Therefore, the use of professional judgement is a crucial ability of knowledge workers. The knowledge worker himself/herself is generally the most suitable to judge the quality of the work, being the most familiar to the problem and having the best insights (Alvesson, 2004). Knowledge work is also difficult to determine with respect to time measurement because how long the knowledge worker needs to complete a task depends on various factors and influences. Starbuck (1992) suggests that time monitoring may even inhibit the creative and problem solving processes because with strict time management knowledge workers tend to neglect to do further research and acquire new knowledge. Also, the quality of knowledge work is highly dependent on the motivation of the knowledge worker to achieve the best results.

Other crucial factors for knowledge work are employee commitment and motivation. To motivate knowledge workers to work towards company goals and to be highly committed to the company, the employer needs to meet a full range of the employees' expectations. This idea is called the psychological contract and will be described in more detail further on. A typical motivation factor for the knowledge worker is the work itself (Amar, 2004), whereas motivators like salary and other forms of monetary rewards are rarely considered to be the most effective ways to induce the knowledge worker to give his/her best. Motivators beyond salary include opportunities to develop the career, status and know-how as well as being engaged in work that is considered interesting (Newell et al., 2009). Motivation is especially important to ensure high performance and commitment of the knowledge workers. Regarding commitment, "knowledge workers often see their own profession as a strong source of identification" (Sveningsson & Alvesson, 2016, p.63) and are highly committed to the work, the employer and their team. Hence, strong commitment to the company and the work itself can lead to a blurred line between work and life, making long

working hours a common practice in knowledge intensive firms (Schawbel, 2014).

All these characteristics of knowledge workers show that managing them is a rather delicate issue. Knowledge workers need an inspiring and motivating work setting with loose control, sufficient room for communication and freedom in the organisation of tasks and working time to perform at their best. Hence, the question arises to what extent a 30-hour workweek framework is suitable for knowledge work. We will later aim to answer this on the basis of our empirical material.

Challenges in Today's Knowledge Work

The conventional difficulties in managing knowledge workers have been discussed throughout the previous paragraphs. Three more and more prevalent challenges in today's time are the prevention of knowledge workers from distraction due to new technological means, the increased intensity of work and the binding of the knowledge workers to the firms in an increasingly scarce talent market. Therefore, we will now address the concepts of empty labour, work intensification, and psychological contract building and how they are discussed in recent literature.

Nowadays employees face numerous distractions at the workplaces through cell phones, social media and the temptation of having access to information, news and online shops at all times. This kind of time waste at work is called cyber loafing; it has become increasingly common since more and more jobs are computer-aided (Glassman, Prosch & Shao, 2015). In general, today's employees are said to spend large amounts of their work time on private matters. Especially their access to the Internet tempts employees to a phenomenon, which Roland Paulsen (2014) defines as 'empty labour'. Simply put, empty labour can be understood as "everything you do at work that is not your work" (Paulsen, 2014, p.5). According to him, employees are found to be engaged between one and a half to three hours in non-work during work hours per day. These wasted working hours can cost the organisation large amounts of money, making it necessary for employers to understand when and why empty labour occurs (D'Abate, 2005). D'Abate (2005) sees the main reason for employees spending more and more time on private activities at work in the increasingly blurred boundaries between the realms of work life, home life and social life. According to Paulsen (2015), however, empty labour is mainly a product of meaningless work. Especially administrative work leads employees to spend their work time somehow differently

than working. Another important aspect is the lack of obligation and commitment to work, which leads to empty labour as a way to show resistance at work. Lastly, the fact that the capitalistic labour contract is mostly based on time rather than output, makes people focus on their mere presence at work rather than their accomplishments or performance.

In knowledge-intensive firms wasted work time is a particularly big issue. Firstly, wasted working hours cost considerably more in the knowledge-intensive sector than in less knowledge-based settings, because of often very high salaries in knowledge-intensive firms (Aghaz & Sheikh, 2016). Furthermore, empty labour is a behaviour that is especially easy to hide in knowledge work. Due to the difficulty of assessing the output of knowledge work, the knowledge worker can pretend to work without being 'caught' by a superior, making empty labour a crucial problem to solve (Paulson, 2014).

Another growing challenge in the knowledge-intensive setting is work intensification, which is defined as "the process of raising the expected workload of an employee by increasing the amount of tasks to be undertaken or shortening the time allowed to complete those tasks" (Oxford Reference, 2017). There are many reasons why work intensification can arise. Through technological progress the expected workload of employees has dramatically increased. Employees are expected to undertake more tasks at once, which leads to increased workload and time pressure. Other forms of pressure that cause work intensification are the increased focus on output measurement and performance management, for example in academia (Sang et al., 2015), as well as declining collegiality due to increased competitiveness (Broadbent, Troup & Strachan, 2013). Some also suggest that the growth of market competition and the ever-present drive for increased profits trigger the general tendency towards work intensification in contemporary organisations (Heery & Noon, 2008). This pressure to deliver and stay competitive and profitable is passed on to the employees, deluging them with increased responsibility that contributes to intensification of work (Newell et al., 2009) and causes more psychological distress. These changes lead many knowledge workers to barely be able to cope with work not to mention having a healthy work-life relationship. Nolan (2005) demonstrates how stress associated with work intensification can spill over into employees' personal lives, causing problems "in terms of stress, psychological health and family tensions" (p.2). Her work further suggests "that the achievement

of an equitable ‘work-life’ balance depends upon the willingness of organisations to offer clearly defined family-friendly policies and the active support of managers and colleagues.” (p.6) Throughout our thesis we aim to analyse if the 30-hour workweek is one of these benefits.

As mentioned above, the psychological contract is an important element in managing knowledge workers. This contract goes beyond the formal contract between an employer and the employee and has the knowledge workers’ perception as a base. It is the idea of an “unspoken but psychologically significant agreement which employees [knowledge workers] feel they have with their employing organization” (Newell et al. 2009, p.137). This process is perceived as an exchange leading to reciprocal obligations (Scholarios & Marks, 2004) and mutual trust (Guest, 2004). In that, the employees view the whole package and ponder if the employer meets their expectations beyond the monetary compensation. Important expectations amongst knowledge workers are interesting and challenging work tasks which allow them to develop their skill and status. Also, a fair reward system and the provision of career opportunities play a crucial role (Flood et al., 2001). Interestingly enough, the desire for good work-life balance is seldom addressed as a common expectation or motivator of knowledge workers in literature. The importance of this implicit contract was highlighted in recent studies, which demonstrated that employees are more likely to resign when employers break the psychological contract (Flood et al., 2001). Whereas, if an employer is able to meet the full list of expectations, the knowledge worker is said to be more motivated on the job and more committed to the company. As the loyalty of knowledge workers is claimed to be one of the knowledge-intensive firm’s most intangible assets, the significance becomes obvious (Bergeron, 2003). Of course, the psychological contract does not always secure motivation and commitment but it increases the probability of the knowledge workers’ perception of a fair employment relationship which in turn increases the likelihood of binding the knowledge worker long-term to the company. As this form of contract is dynamic and expectations might change, the employer is advised to regularly reassess the expectations, at best through open conversations (Sajeva, 2007).

Summary

The literature review has addressed a multitude of concepts, ideas and theories related to the 30-

hour workweek. It was shown that there has been a long history of the debate around working hours. Moreover, in order to put the 30-hour workweek into perspective we have introduced other well-established alternatives to the traditional 40-hour workweek. Furthermore, working hours were put into the context of productivity and the capitalistic economic environment. It could also be demonstrated that there are many links between working hours and employee health and wellbeing. In line with this, different theories around work-life balance were presented. As knowledge workers are the focus of our research, the literature review has defined related terms and explained crucial characteristics as well as challenge of knowledge work. All this background knowledge will play an important role when interpreting our empirical findings, and for understanding as well as evaluating our analysis of the 30-hour workweek in relation to these existing ideas and concepts in the discussion chapter. However, before turning to the empirical part of our thesis, the methodology and the research case will be depicted.

3. Methodology

Research approach and design

Our chosen research method is a qualitative, abductive approach as there is a lack of theory on the topic of the 30-hour workweek and its implications for knowledge work, knowledge workers and knowledge-intensive firms. As this thesis neither aims to test the relationship between two or more predefined variables, nor tries to falsify or verify observations, a deductive approach was ruled out. As we also do not intend to generate theory from our findings, an abductive approach was chosen over an inductive approach.

We rather seek to explore and understand the phenomenon in depth and expand on existing theory. The abductive approach is “fruitful if the researcher’s objective is to discover new things - other variables and other relationships” (Dubois & Gadde, 2002, p.559). In line with Dubois’ and Gadde’s (2002) statement, this thesis will hence follow an explorative approach and will try to uncover new variables or relationships in the context of the 30-hour workweek and knowledge workers. Nevertheless, previous knowledge of knowledge work and related concepts exists, so in line with Alvesson and Sköldbberg (2009) we combine existing knowledge work theories with the findings derived from our empirical research. We follow the alethic hermeneutic circle, which is described as constant movement between pre-understanding and understanding to reveal something hidden (Alvesson & Sköldbberg, 2009). In our case, we therefore take advantage of pre-existing knowledge about knowledge work and knowledge-intensive firms, and combine it with our findings of the 30-hour workweek in order to gain new insights about the 30-hour workweek and its effects on knowledge workers.

Due to the nature of our research topic, any quantitative research method was discounted. Via quantitatively comparing yearly revenues and profits of the firm, we could have drawn conclusions about the productivity. The amount of work that could be billed would have indicated whether the output of the knowledge workers had changed with the 30-hour workweek. However, revenues and profits could also be influenced by various other factors such as the economic situation of the industry, the growth of the team, available marketing budgets of the clients and so on. Also, purely

measuring sick days of the knowledge workers would give us less valuable information about the knowledge workers' physical and mental health. Therefore, we considered quantitative measures as less useful in the attempt to assess the effects of the 30-hour workweek on knowledge workers. It would have been of great interest to research if the productivity of the knowledge workers has changed through the 30-hour workweek. However, with the size of our sample no general conclusions can be drawn about factors such as productivity or quality of the work. We can, however, describe if and how a change in the productivity of the individual or the quality of work is perceived by the knowledge workers.

Based on the nature of our topic and our research questions, we chose to study our topic using qualitative research to guarantee an interpretive and in depth focus. In order to learn more about how the 30-hour workweek affects knowledge workers we need to look at subjective perceptions as well as socially constructed meanings of statements expressed by the employees (Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill, 2009). Qualitative research will allow us to find out underlying beliefs, emotions, attitudes and motivations of the research participants and will therefore enable us to explore the thesis topic in depth (Ritchie & Lewis, 2003). Our research design is based on two qualitative methods of data collection: Interviews as primary data and secondary data consisting of scientific journal articles and books as well as statistics generated by governmental institutions, health insurances and professional associations (Ritchie & Lewis, 2003; Veal, 2011).

Case Description

In our study, we will assess the 30-hour workweek in a digital marketing agency, which, according to Lovendahl (2005) and Newell et al. (2009), falls under the category of knowledge-intensive firms. All employees of our research organisation – designers, marketing professionals and developers – are knowledge workers under the common understanding outlined in literature review. We chose this example because in advertising agencies long working hours and work-life balance struggles are common practice. Moreover, the work heavily depends on creativity, innovation and collaboration (Alvesson, 1994), which makes the company interesting as a knowledge-intensive firm. In our case, we will look at DigiWars, a digital marketing agency specialised in tourism marketing in the UK. DigiWars was founded in 2008 by the company's

owner who still holds the position of CEO. In March 2017, DigiWars had 14 employees including part-time and contract workers. DigiWars introduced the 30-hour workweek in March 2016, exactly one year ago.

We decided in accordance with DigiWars to anonymise the company. The individual interviews and quotes will also be anonymised to secure confidentiality, as the aim of our interview study was that participants could openly express their ideas, perceptions, opinions and feelings.

Data Collection

Eleven semi-structured interviews served as our source of primary data. We are aware of the limitations and concerns of this tool regarding the credibility of knowledge transmission (Alvesson, 2003; Bluhm et al., 2011). In order to gain a coherent and in-depth picture, we interviewed each full-time member of the team about their experience with the 30-hour workweek, regardless of hierarchies, functions and so on. This means that we interviewed all ten employees and the CEO and founder. Although we addressed the same set of themes with each employee to ensure a certain degree of comparability, we put emphasis on room for individual elaborations and follow-up questions to gain rich and wide-ranging results. We are aware of the uncertainty of empirical material and, further, of the limitations and concerns regarding semi-structured interviews and their credibility of knowledge transmission (Alvesson, 2003; Bluhm et al., 2011). Hence, we are not claiming to reveal the only truth, the interviews rather helped us explore our research questions and functioned as an example. We found that the answers of the interviewees stretched our imagination and showed us new meanings, opened-up unexplored ideas from our side and helped us challenge our interpretations from pre-existing understanding and secondary data in form of scientific journal articles and books (Veal, 2011).

The interviews were conducted face-to-face at the office of DigiWars in the UK, over the course of three days. The length of our interviews ranged from 25 to 70 minutes; the majority of interviews, however, lasted 35 to 40 minutes. Each interview setting consisted of one interviewee and the two researchers. This format allowed one researcher to take the leading part in posing the questions and building a stronger bond with the interviewee. It further gave time to the other researcher to reflect on the answers, observe and take notes as well as suggest additional questions.

Previous work experience of one researcher across the digital agency industry in the UK provided us with additional background knowledge and broadened our understanding of common work-life balance proportions and the attitude towards overtime hours in this industry.

The interviewees varied in gender and age as well as their time being employed by DigiWars. Approximately half of the employees have experienced DigiWars before and with the 30-hour workweek. Their ability to compare both situations is considered especially valuable when reflecting on the changes the 30-hour workweek has brought. The remaining five have joined DigiWars within the last year. Most employees had worked under the 40-hour workweek before, in different comparable places in comparable positions. For a few, their current role under the 30-hour workweek is their first work experience. The interviewees held the following positions: one CEO, one designer, four front developers and two backend developers, two digital marketers and one account and project manager.

As part of our semi-structured interviews, key themes that were addressed were the perceived changes through the 30-hour workweek, the perception of working life before and after the introduction of the 30-hour workweek as well as perceptions regarding the balance between work and life. All interviews started with the interviewees being asked to describe their role at work and their employer with three words that come to mind first when thinking of DigiWars. Typical questions which were brought up in all interviews included: ‘What has changed for you through the 30-hour workweek?’, ‘Which key benefits do you experience within the 30-hour workweek?’, ‘Do you have any concerns about the 30-hour workweek? If so, what are your concerns?’ ‘How do you feel about overtime hours?’, ‘What does your day look like and what did your day look like in the old system/the 40-hour workweek?’ Generally, these questions were used to encourage employees to elaborate on their views, perceptions and therewith shape the focus of the interview.

Data Analysis

Our ability to analyse the effects of the 30-hour workweek on knowledge workers is dependent on a deep understanding of how communication, creativity, commitment and motivation, quality assessment and autonomy are traditionally understood in the context of knowledge work. Following the hermeneutic tradition in which “the part [...] can only be understood from “the

whole” (Prasad, 2002, in Prasad, 2005, p.35) and the other way around (Prasad, 2005), this pre-understanding built the wider context for our study. In this light, we interpreted our empirical data of knowledge workers who work 30 hours per week.

After conducting and transcribing the interviews, we focused on understanding the interview material by reading and rereading the interviews as Ryan and Bernard (2003) suggest. In the process of analysing the qualitative data, we followed the three steps of sorting, reducing and arguing, which are based on Swedberg’s (2012) rules of theorizing. Making use of the abductive approach, we started sensitising topics and defining initial codes, which are relevant based on our pre-understanding (Swedberg, 2012). This meant to look for overlapping themes mentioned by our interviewees. “Themes come both from the data (an inductive approach) and from the investigator’s prior theoretical understanding of the phenomenon under study (an a priori approach)” (Ryan & Bernard, 2003, p.88). Hence, some codes evolved from the collected research material solely (e.g. the gender argument or some socio-economic consequences of the 30-hour workweek). On the other hand, previous research and our research questions also functioned as focus points and guidance in the selection and discussion of these themes (Ryan & Bernard, 2003). An example of this is our use of the existing concept of work-life balance as one of the departure points for our analysis of the empirical data.

In the following step these initial codes were grouped and condensed into focus codes, which again were data and theory driven. During this process, we were conscious to maintain “an awareness that there is more than one good way of understanding something [...] to produce rich and varied results” (Alvesson, 2003, p.25). Hence, we looked at the material through different lenses and always aimed to stay reflexive and open to alternative characters of our research results. In a next step, we narrowed down our empirical material by omitting codes and categories that were not directly contributing to answering our research questions. We then explored connections and patterns between the categories and placed them under wider themes in order to relate them to broader concepts. This helped us argue and theorise our findings in the analysis section. Throughout the analysis section we will use extracts from the empirical data to underline our findings and enrich the reader’s interpretation and understanding.

Reflections on Credibility and Generalizability

Credibility tests whether results of the interview study are believable and trustworthy (Golafshani, 2003; Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill, 2009). In the following paragraph we want to reflect on this. It could be critically noticed that our thesis is based on only one method of conducting primary data, namely solely through interviews. This, however, was tried to be counteracted by interviewing all members of the team and by providing an extensive theoretical framework, which allows the reader to reflect critically on the interview findings and scrutinise their relevance to the research questions (Shenton, 2004). Furthermore, we have been engaged in conversations to researchers investigating on the same topic and experts in the field of employee well-being in order to exchange insights and research findings. It seems that similar conclusions were drawn. In addition, we provide multiple quotes directly transcribed from the interviews so that the reader can follow our interpretation process and evaluate our conclusions. As this thesis aims to illustrate different nuanced perceptions and impressions of how knowledge workers reflect on and are affected by the 30-hour workweek, the result of this research cannot provide ‘one absolute truth’ and needs to be understood in this context. Instead, it rather presents many versions of the same circumstances and aims to reflect on the topic from multiple angles.

Based on the nature of semi-structured interviews, our findings depend on the answers given by the interviewees as well as on the fact that the follow-up questions were posed based on the expressed thoughts of the interviewees. Hence, another study about the same topic might not ensure the same findings. Nevertheless, as we worked closely with theoretical frameworks and the working processes were explained in detail, the dependability of the study aims to be assured (Shenton, 2004). In addition, our use of discourse during the interviews and the generally positive company discourse and pride about the 30-hour workweek bears the risk of influencing the interviewees’ way of thinking and formulating their thoughts in a way that might be “an effect of the discourse they are engaged by, rather than an expression of their subjectivity” (Alvesson & Sveningsson, 2003, p.967). In our case this means that people might not have dared to express negative aspects related to the consequences of the 30-hour workweek. Moreover, having two researchers increased the interpretative value of the analysis as subjectivity could be slightly decreased and the analysis could benefit from the knowledge and experience of two researchers

(one with an increased background in psychology and one in business studies). Further, the likelihood of misunderstandings between the researchers was minimised by the fact that both researchers spoke the same native language. Dutton and Dukerich (2006) also name the relational foundation of research, referring to interacting partners that are involved during a research project, as a keystone for interesting and significant research projects. We also see the quality of connections between the two researchers as well as between the researchers and the research participants as a “feeder and enabler of the overall quality” (Dutton & Dukerich, 2006, p.26) of our research project.

The transferability of results relates to the possibility to generalise the findings of this study and apply them to other cases (Merriam, 1998). Due to the subjectivity of our research approach and the fact that only one company has been assessed, the results we got are highly dependent on contextual factors such as the size and industry of the company (Dubois & Gadde, 2002). As we looked at a small knowledge-intensive technology company, the results neither can be automatically claimed to be applicable for medium to large size companies nor for non-technology companies where other structures might be needed. Our aim is instead to provide a real-life example and based on this, provide valuable practical insights.

4. Empirical Analysis

In the following chapter, we will first outline the structure of the 6-hour working day and then present our empirical material and interpret it in light of our main research question: How does the 30-hour workweek influence knowledge workers? In the interpretation of this we will look at how knowledge workers in a digital marketing agency experience the 30-hour workweek, and which benefits and tensions of this system have been perceived. In this, we chose to portray five main interpretations of the 30-hour workweek under which the interviewees' viewpoints are grouped, in order to illustrate the experience of the knowledge workers at DigiWars. Therefore, we introduce the following five interpretations: the 30-hour workweek as 'life enhancer', 'school day', 'efficiency improver', 'utopia', and 'balancing act'.

Structure of the 6-Hour Working Day

Since the introduction of the 30-hour workweek, official working hours at the office are 9.30am to 3.30pm. For ten months the days have been structured by six 45-minute sprints, followed by a 5-minute break. This means that throughout the 45 minutes the employees are supposed to solely focus on tasks that have to be completed during the day. Which tasks and how much time is spent on each task is decided by each employee individually. The breaks are supposed to function as a reward where people get up, chat, move, have a tea or snack and take a screen break. Since the beginning of 2017 this sprint system has been loosened up and employees can decide whether they want to stick to the 45-minute focus sprints or not. To test the system and be able to relate better, we also worked with the 45-minute sprints throughout the thesis project and especially during the writing process. Throughout the day there are also two team catch-ups called 'huddle' (see Table 1). The marketing team meets before lunch and the developers, the designer as well as the account and project manager come together after lunch and discuss current projects and issues. Also, at the end of the day the entire team stands up and gives a quick summary of their day, mentioning wins and losses.

Table 1: Structure of the Typical Working Day at DigiWars' 30-hour Workweek

The 6-hour working day at DigiWars	
9.30	START
9.30 - 10.15	1st 45-min sprint
10.15 - 10.20	5-min break
10.20 - 11.05	2nd 45-min sprint
11.05 - 11.10	5-min break
11.10 - 11.55	3rd 45-min sprint
11.55 - 12.00	5-min break
12.00 - 12.45 12.30 - 12.45	4th 45-min sprint Huddle for the Marketing Team
12.45 - 13.15	LUNCH
13.15 - 13.30 13.30 - 14.15	'Team Huddle' for all Developers, the Designer and the Account and Project Manager 5th 45-min sprint
14.15 - 14.20	5-min break
14.20 - 15.20	6th Power hour
15.20 - 15.30	10 min admin + time logs etc.
15.30 - 15.40	Daily wrap up: wins and losses
Around 15.40	FINISH

The 30-hour Workweek as Life Enhancer

Perhaps one of the most obvious findings was that all eleven employees agreed that the 30-hour workweek has been affecting their balance between work and life positively. Therefore, we labelled this section “the 30-hour workweek as life enhancer”. A key finding was that many employees feel that the work itself is still stressful or has even intensified, however, the overall perceived stress in life has decreased due to increased time to recover from work and recharge batteries. It was pointed out that the 30-hour workweek helps to let stress go after work.

“I do still feel stressed but I feel less stressed than I did. Especially after work because I still find work quite stressful. [...] Before I couldn't let that go, work would still go through my head. I feel I let it go at the end of the day now.” (Peter)

By some it was explained that because of the long evenings and the possibility to do something else besides work it is easier to forget about work. Other interviewees, however, attributed the ability to switch off to their personalities rather than the reduced number of working hours. Furthermore, we found that the employees generally feel more concentrated and less tired during the days and even attribute better results at work to this. Therefore, it seems that the reduced stress not only affects the employees' mood but also their work positively. It was also reported that weekends as well as mornings and evenings became more relaxed:

“I can make dinner and then my husband comes home and we can eat and clean up and start doing something [...]. We keep on saying: It's quarter to six, you wouldn't even normally be home by then. It makes such a difference.” (Daisy)

About the weekends it was mentioned that they became real quality time for family and friends as home duties can be done during the week. So the perception of reduced stress together with having more quality time was described to increase the quality of life.

The appreciation of the additional free time, however, differed. Some employees without family tend to use the extra time similarly to how they used it before. One employee stated: “I don't have any children so I am free to do what I want to do, I don't have any other obligations really.” (Mark) Other interviewees stated that they had good intentions in the beginning to use the additional free

time for taking up new hobbies, but this slowed down quickly and they fell back into old routines. Another employee reported that it is utopian to think that these two extra hours would change one's personality. If one was not very active in private life before, that would not be different with the 6-hour working day.

On the other side, we found great appreciation because the 30-hour workweek seems to give the possibility of having a second career. One employee explained that she can now pursue her career as musician more intensively. "In my free time I have got an album just coming out." (Natalie) This might function as a strong balancing factor for life. Also, the fact that the 30-hour workweek seems to allow additional freelancing work seems to be really appreciated. It appears that young people, who are driven and prefer to work more than six hours a day, have the opportunity to do so:

"I sometimes work on personal projects at home. Technically it is portfolio kind of stuff, it is also my hobby and I have started to do freelance as well. [...] If I were to be stuck till five it could maybe run into other stuff that I want to do whereas now I've got enough time to do it." (Simon)

To be able to pursue passions outside of work seems to enhance the interviewees' lives. Another life enhancing effect of the 30-hour workweek is that it enables a rich family life. One of the reasons for introducing the 30-hour workweek was that the CEO himself is a father of young children.

"This way I can spend more time with the kids which has been great. Doing more with their homework and stuff. [...] This sounds very cliché but it has probably made me a better father." (Ewan)

"I can spend a lot more time with my family and it definitely works out better. We can have dinner together which is nice, totally different to what I was used to. I was kind of working the rest of my life and seeing the kids for a couple of minutes before bed." (Oscar)

Generally, it appears to us that the appreciation of the 30-hour workweek is the strongest amongst people, who have worked in an 8-hour working day and amongst employees with young families

due to the value they see in spending more time at home.

Another key finding was that the 30-hour workweek seems to have a positive effect on employees' physical and psychological health. Many mentioned that there is simply more time for rest and sleep, which makes them less tired and more energetic. "I still feel energy now when I leave. You don't feel too drained. In some jobs I have done in the past, you leave and all you think is going to bed." (Paul) Furthermore, some reported that they feel happier than before: "In terms of depression it takes this away: Oh I have 40 years of this to spend all my time [...] Actually now I am thinking my life is good, I feel happier!" (Natalie)

Also from a business view a change in employees' health was noted as sick days declined. One employee explained that she was constantly exhausted at her previous workplace, leading to frequently being ill. As soon as she came to DigiWars with the 30-hour workweek her sick days reduced dramatically. "I was always ill. It was awful because I was constantly too exhausted. And since I have been here, I have had one sick day. So, it is the most unbelievable difference I could ever imagine." (Daisy) Another positive effect seems to be that employees don't have to take time off work to organise doctors' and other appointments.

Even more positive health effects were reported. One person perceived the 45-minute sprints as very good "to give my eyes a break" (Peter), especially for people with glasses as one does not stare at the screen for so long. Someone else stated that the sprints and regular breaks relieved her neck and shoulder pain because it forces you to get up and move frequently. "Sitting for so long is so bad for you [...] I got problems with my neck and shoulders from being at the computer all the time, the sprints help with that as well" (Daisy). Another employee mentioned that her diet improved radically with the 6-hour working day because it provides time to cook properly in the evenings instead of coming home exhausted and grabbing fast and unhealthy snacks. Also, the same person stated that she chooses to bike or walk to work more frequently now, which positively affects her fitness: "I think my health has generally improved with the 6-hour working day. You go home and you don't have to eat instantly. You have more time. [...] You can make better choices." (Carrie)

Another interesting aspect of the health improving impact of reduced working hours seems to be

that employees are able to get more sunlight before and after work, which is claimed to improve mood and mental health. According to an employee that is especially important for Northern countries where people are usually not exposed to sunlight through long winters.

“And even when we are in the darkest of winter we get a bit of sunlight because of when we start and finish our day. I think that improves people’s mood dramatically [...] and puts you into a better place mentally and physically.” (Carrie)

Furthermore, it was mentioned that the CEO respects if employees do not put work first at all times. “He [the CEO] recognizes: a job is a job and a family is kind of up there.” (Daisy) “You are not a slave to your work.” (Mark) From a business perspective DigiWars seems to be aware that work-life balance is an important factor for many employees nowadays. We heard that in terms of staff attraction and maintaining, it is crucial to show that the management values employees’ time and respects their life conditions.

“I think for employees work-life balance is important, just psychosocially, for them to feel that they want to work here [...] If they spend too much time here then they are going to not enjoy it, not put their best effort in.” (Natalie)

Consequently, we found that most employees seem to appreciate the rather strict separation of their private life and work life through the 30-hour workweek and that this as well as the 45-minute sprints led to various positive effects on employee health and well-being. It seems that it allows people to be less tired and more relaxed overall, which not only affects their private lives but also their ability to focus and concentrate at work. In that sense the 30-hour workweek can indeed be seen as a life enhancer.

The 30-hour Workweek as School Day

The comparison of the 6-hour working day to a “school day” came up amongst a number of interviewees. One reason for this might be the early afternoon finish and the increased free time:

“At the end of the day when you are finishing at 3.40 and it is still daytime [...] it feels like being back in school, you have so much spare time to do stuff. [...] At start I didn't know

what to do with all the time.” (Simon)

Some interviewees explained that in school life they remember to have a life outside school. When your school day was over, you would go and meet friends, play an instrument or your favourite sports. To some extent this feels the same with the 30-hour workweek as it gives the employees the time to be creative, pursue hobbies or be active outside work.

Another reason for this comparison to a school day seems to come from the predictability of the day: “I personally prefer to do these focused six hours every day because that means each day is manageable, you know what to expect.” (Daisy) It was further positively described with: “I am much more energetic now. It’s like school hours. You can concentrate better when you have less hours in the day.” (Mark)

Most likely, however, the school analogy stems from the strict structure of the day with a fixed number of 45-minute units and subsequent breaks which reminds of the clear schedule at schools. These 45-minute sprints were also perceived as “clinical”, “static” or “robot-like”. Most commonly, however, they were compared to a school day: “We have become quite regimented and quite school like.” (Carrie) This way of working which is unusual for a digital marketing agency was perceived differently amongst the employees. Out of eleven employees three developers (out of six developers) stated that they try to avoid these focus sprints or do not stick to them at all because they were experienced as counterproductive and distracting, and perceived as an interruption to work.

“When you are deep into a problem and you are forced to stand up and go away, it can sometimes be difficult to then go back into that chain of thoughts.” (Natalie)

This might indicate that some types of work need some degree of flexibility and that the structure of the 6-hour working day has to be adaptable to the tasks. DigiWars acknowledged that the employees need ownership of their time and made the 45-minute sprints voluntary. Interestingly enough, most of the employees still stick to the 45-minute sprints. With that method, most interviewees perceive the multiple breaks as motivating rewards and a good tool for problem solving:

“I think it helps being concentrated. I think a lot of times in previous places you look at a problem for too long. And you could stare at it the whole day trying to force the solution for too long. And these five minutes where you have a coffee or a tea, kind of give you enough space to really solve it.” (Oscar)

So, in general, the 45-minute sprints are perceived as a helpful tool. Some even mentioned they work with that structure outside the office. However, possible tensions of interfering with employees’ autonomy at work were expressed:

“The hours mimic school hours. That could make it infantile for some. That’s why we thought we are not gonna make this ding, ding, ding. They feel a bit more adult about it and the responsibility is back to them, whereas before it was a bit like: ding, it’s playtime, ding, it’s school time, it’s break time, it’s lunch time.” (Natalie)

Although we first assumed that the rigid character of the sprints would restrict the employees in their autonomy, we found that they still experience a large extent of autonomy and freedom at work. It seems that despite taking away some time flexibility through the 45-minute sprints, the autonomy at DigiWars is not perceived to be restricted.

“I like the freedom. I like that nobody is telling you what to do. I can decide it myself. [...] I have full autonomy in what I do and I really like that because it makes you feel that you are actually getting to do your job.” (Daisy)

Furthermore, employees still have full autonomy in their task allocation. It was mentioned that being creative is something you cannot schedule and that DigiWars offers a high degree of flexibility, which is highly appreciated.

„I find it hard to get told what to do at certain times. If someone said from half nine till ten you have to do such and such, I just couldn’t work. I need to have that flexibility. If you are not in the mood to write, to be told you have to write a blog right now, doesn’t work - at least not for me. So if you are not in a creative mindset, you just can’t come up with ideas.” (Daisy)

Although the 45-minute sprints did not seem to affect creativity negatively we found that the 30-hour workweek might constrain creativity in a way that “if you are quite a creative person, it might be too much pressure if you have got less time, so that you cannot be creative.” (Daisy) This was further supported by the statement: “If you are too stressed, if you are too busy, you can’t be as good creatively as you could be.” (Ewan) On the other hand, it was mentioned that creativity cannot be produced eight hours a day. The 30-hour workweek acknowledges this as well as the assumption that it is more realistic to aim for six hours of creativity than eight. “It’s the type of work we do [...] you can’t be creative eight hours a day. It’s like a writer can’t write solidly for eight hours a day [...] you can’t be consistently creative.” (Ewan) Moreover, within the 30-hour workweek designers and other creatives seem to have more time to find inspiration outside of work.

“I think because we’ve got other hobbies as well it almost feeds into it because you give yourself time to be inspired by doing something that doesn’t use the same parts of your brain. [...] You are using different skills giving you different ideas how a project could be completed or a design could work.” (Oscar)

The high extent of autonomy at work also becomes visible with regards to overtime hours. It lies in the employees’ responsibility to judge if overtime is needed. It was further revealed that the perception on overtime has changed with the 30-hour workweek in the sense that employees are more willing to do overtime as this would mean they still leave before normal office hours. This was perceived as a relief by the management because it made it easier to ask for overtime when needed.

“We get given a deadline and a set amount of hours and if we don’t complete it, it is up to us to complete it outside the work time. [...] It is our own responsibility to deliver to deadline.” (Mark)

In conclusion, although the 30-hour workweek might come along with the comparison to school, it does not seem to inflict with the knowledge workers’ autonomy nor creativity. The increase in free time after work and the perceived predictability of the day mostly seem to be welcomed.

The 30-hour Workweek as Efficiency Improver

The main idea of the 30-hour workweek concept is that output remains the same while working hours are reduced and thereby salaries can be maintained at the same level. In order to produce the same output in less time, efficiency needs to be improved. Therefore, the following section is called “the 30-hour workweek as efficiency improver” and will present how DigiWars’ management and the employees experience the change in efficiency.

When asking the employees to reflect on how efficiency was affected, the common answer was that intensity as well as efficiency has increased. One employee stated that “the only thing that really makes me feel different is the intensity. [...] We are super focused on actual work.” (Simon) The 45-minute sprints were frequently mentioned as a reason for the increased focus: “the 45 minutes definitely work to break up work into manageable chunks and you can work much more focused” (Oscar). Another employee confirmed: “It gives you certain times to get certain things done. Rather than working for hours and then skip the task without having done anything and then skip to the next thing.” (Harrison) As in a 6-hour working day time flies by, all employees mentioned that they need to be more structured and plan out their day more than before. In this aspect, the 45-minute method was perceived as a help to set personal goals and checklists, which make them work faster: “With the sprints you try to set yourself little goals, like till the next break I want to get this finished.” (Daisy) and “You’ve got certain internal deadlines to hit which make you power through these six hours.” (Oscar) Also, the 45-minute sprints create a sense of urgency, matching the common belief amongst knowledge workers that they work better under stress. This is voiced in the following statement: “I work best at stress. When you have that deadline coming up, that suits me.” (Carrie) Additionally, the short working day is often perceived as an incentive to work fast and efficiently, as the following statement shows: “If you’ve finished you get to go home at half three. So, it is in your own interest to work harder.” (Daisy) It seems that the users of this system, which are the majority of the employees, are convinced that the sprints intensified their focus and made them accomplish more in a day. However, not all employees perceived a change in efficiency: “I wasn’t focused all the time when I worked nine to five but it is the same now. I haven’t noticed any difference in my focus or concentration.” (John) Interestingly, this was reported by an employee who does not stick to the 45-minute sprints. In addition, it is remarkable

that employees who do not observe the sprints, typically also are the ones who regularly stay longer.

We found that the system of compressed hours seems to work for most of the marketing team in accordance with the motto: “If you got less time to do it, you just work faster.” (Daisy) Some of the developers, however, mentioned difficulties with working faster: “It takes me as long as it takes to solve something. I am not going to get it done any faster by shortening the day.” (Peter) Even if some developers feel more focused through the sprints, 50 per cent do not feel more efficient. We concluded that developing work might not be as compressible as marketing. One developer, however, mentioned: “If you are kind of working consistently and are working focused then you get roughly the same amount done, if not more.” (Simon) Interestingly, this developer strictly sticks to the sprints. This might again indicate that the 45-minute sprints are one reason for the improved focus and can also for developers lead to a higher work pace.

Furthermore, most interviewees explained that the increase in efficiency is related to less time spent on non-work related activities. Many perceive the working day as too short to “sit there, not do anything” (Simon). The short day does not allow spending time on the phone, social media or other non-work related things. It seems that the elimination of these constant distractions helps them work more focused: “I think it does make me more focused – these 45-minute sprints. Now I am completely focused, whereas before you would have your phone or stuff.” (Natalie) One employee mentioned that in his former job he tended to stretch his work to fill the 8-hour working day and pretended to still be working on a task to not get a new task right away. “I never realised, how little work I was doing in a day and how much time you could be just surfing on Wikipedia, [...] you just found that time because it was there to use.” (Oscar) Also, many interviewees voiced the feeling that they did not want to be the ones who break with the system by “slugging off”. It seems that the avoidance of time wasters is supported by increased accountability towards the team and helps to keep efficiency high.

It was further positively mentioned that the increased time focus provides an opportunity to rethink old processes. The time restrictions force to rethink the status quo and find more efficient ways: “There was less structure when I started and because of the time constraints we had to really focus

on that and do things differently.” (Carrie) Another way to speed up work was found in the increased use of templates and standardisations in project managing but also in design work:

“I’m trying to standardise a lot of designs. [...] We were building stuff with the notion of almost having blocks to put them into other designs. In that way, it has streamlined or simplified it a bit.” (Oscar)

Although it certainly speeds up work, it seems that using templates for design work might contradict with the creativity that is inherent to such work, and could therefore lead to concerns regarding the quality of the product. Regarding this, we found that some employees were concerned about the 30-hour knowledge work influencing the quality of the work. Although no one stated that the quality of their personal work would suffer, a few employees expressed their concerns on this issue indirectly. One central reason was that the time for extra research is very limited now. Furthermore, some employees confessed that they “don’t have time to review things in the same way as before.” (Carrie) One employee mentioned that there is less time for client calls, which might have negative results in the long run with clients feeling neglected: “You don’t feel you can really talk to the client long enough. That’s probably an issue actually.” (Daisy) Due to the lack of time, employees might not go the extra mile to complete a task or spend extra time with the client but would rather go on to the next task.

“It is that agile model of doing the bare minimum of what is required and doing it as you need it, rather than doing everything to 100% and then moving on to the next thing. You don’t have that luxury. But to be honest in most of the cases you don’t need to reach a 100%.” (Carrie)

Especially for perfectionists this would be a change and could be a challenge. When it comes to assessing the quality, as mentioned in the literature review, the work of knowledge workers is mostly intangible. Therefore, quality assessment is often subjective and uncertain and relies on the use of judgement of the knowledge worker. It seems that DigiWars’ employees are well aware of the importance of the quality of their output. Due to the limited time they are aware of their responsibility to judge the relevance of certain tasks and speed things up where they can in the process, or to judge if overtime is needed in order to reach the required quality.

“It is really hard to judge if I am getting the tasks done in the same amount of time and quality. Sometimes you do get quicker, sometimes you don’t. I still need to work outside work at the weekends just to make sure that I am happy with the level of work.” (Mark)

Despite of concerns about quality, we found that DigiWars has not only won various awards in the past, but also recently with the 30-hour workweek: “We have been offered two awards just now, one for effective marketing and one for inspirational technology. We wouldn’t get those if we weren’t competitive enough.” (Ewan) Furthermore, the CEO declared that despite more time pressure, deadlines are usually met and that clients’ complaints have not increased since the implementation of the 30-hour workweek. “The business is still making money, we still get lots of happy clients and we haven’t lost any clients.” (Ewan) Considering these awards and the clients’ satisfaction as an ‘objective’ way of assessing quality, we assume that the 30-hour workweek has not considerably affected the quality of work.

As the CEO mentioned, increased efficiency was perceived as an achievement for the business. The interviewees further revealed a number of other business-related benefits. Firstly, DigiWars receives far more applications than before. It seems that improved PR through the 30-hour workweek contributes to a stronger employer brand, which helps to attract applicants. Secondly, the company experiences less staff turnover. The fact that the employees would not get the same conditions elsewhere seems to bind them to the company. Thirdly, the CEO mentioned that the radical change through the 30-hour workweek helped to “weed out staff” (Ewan) because people cannot loaf within that system as much. It became more obvious who is willing to work that bit harder and who wants to “slug off” (Ewan). On the concern side, interviewees speculated that from a business perspective the biggest threat would certainly be the risk of decreased productivity due to the loss of working hours. Consequently, losing clients and less competitiveness were commonly mentioned fears when asked why other businesses do not offer the 30-hour workweek. Furthermore, the risk of employees taking advantage of the system by working fewer hours but not faster or more efficiently was brought up. It appears that apart from benefits and tensions for them personally, the interviewees have also reflected on benefits and risks related to the 30-hour workweek for the business.

All in all, the interviewees have different perceptions about the extent to which their work can be condensed and speeded up. It seems, however, that the majority would agree that the 30-hour workweek in combination with the 45-minutes focus sprints deserves the label “efficiency improver”.

The 30-hour Workweek as Utopia

In exploring how knowledge workers experience the 30-hour workweek, we found another category of interpretation. The 30-hour workweek seems to be perceived by many as very forward-thinking and was commonly described with “living the dream of technology”. It was voiced by the interviewees that the 30-hour workweek feels like a step towards utopia or like already living utopian ideas: a concept that contributes towards ideal working conditions and a less exploitative working environment, supported by technology advancement. Especially one employee expressed this strongly:

”It feels great! It feels a bit strange going out at half three, when everyone is at work. I feel like we are living the dream of technology. Technology promised that dream where humans would have to work less and can enjoy life and we kind of made it come true.” (Natalie)

“At first I thought it was too utopian. Too good to be true [...] I still think it is like a future utopian ideal that we are living [...] It sort of feels like a dream that maybe will drift away.” (Natalie)

The perceived existence of a balance between work and life seems to play an important role in the employees’ interpretation of the 30-hour workweek as utopia.

“You almost see what life could be without having to work as hard. The six hours seem like a much better idea, I don’t know why more people don’t do it. People are so resistant to the idea of having a better work-life balance. They grab so tightly on to the notion that they have to do overtime or at least the 40 hours. We are having a better work-life balance, we see our family and friends, and do our hobbies more. That feels like the work-life balance that everyone talks about but no one wants to actually go towards.” (Oscar)

The 30-hour workweek was not only perceived as utopia but also most interviewees reflected on the possible socio-economic implications of the 30-hour workweek. It was interesting to hear that the implementation of it would break with old stigmata and set against certain social conventions. Those are obviously not knowledge worker-specific effects but add to the picture of the 30-hour workweek.

On a broader scale, the 30-hour workweek was viewed as a chance to work towards increased gender equality and a fairer role allocation within the family. The interviewees mentioned two possibilities in which it might contribute. In the first example, it was mentioned that if women worked 6-hour working days, they could more likely be able to continue working full-time and pursue their career despite having young children:

“Especially for mums, the 30-hour workweek could be something. They would normally spend more time at work than with their kids, and for the kids at the nursery it would be a longer day than a normal working day for adults. Many mums just do not go to work at all to stay with the kids or they would do part time, which means that you have a really basic job, like basic administration. If they don’t want to give up their career they end up not having time for their kids.” (Daisy)

In a second version, men who are working in a 30-hour workweek would have more time to spend with the children and contribute to household work, especially if the other partner worked within a 40-hour workweek. This could mean that household duties and child rearing could be more fairly distributed. Hence, the 6-hour working day could decrease the tension between a career and family life, and contribute towards a more equal role allocation. As these tensions are predominantly experienced by women, this could mean more equal opportunities especially for them. Another benefit of the 30-hour workweek which was commonly brought up was that with the late start and the early finish, people could avoid traffic and rush hours which makes commuting easier: “I was really excited to start at half nine because in the mornings around nine there is really bad traffic, so if I were to start at nine I’d be cut up in that.” (Simon) This would mean that on a larger scale rush hours could be staggered contributing to a more balanced utilisation of streets. Another interviewee imagined:

“It also has all sorts of other effects on other industries because suddenly people who worked all this time just have time to go to cafes, visit places, do hobbies, all those things that people now suddenly have time to do outside their work. So your money is getting spent locally because you don’t fly to other countries the minute you are free.” (Natalie)

This would indicate that a possible consequence of the 30-hour workweek could be a boost for local industries such as leisure or sports and therefore creating jobs for these industries. In the light of the current modernisation and job rationalisation through technology, this could be a valuable contribution to avoid rising unemployment rates.

“I think part of the problem is also that people are working overtime so there are less job opportunities for other people. That person is basically working two people’s jobs.” (Ewan)

Furthermore, in the interviewees’ eyes the 30-hour workweek symbolises a change in running businesses. It was perceived that this concept would need a non-greedy company owner with a less profit-oriented mindset.

“That they work so long hours in other agencies I think is down to a lot of management being greedy. They think other companies are doing it and they will get away with it as well.” (Paul)

The common understanding amongst the interviewees was that other businesses not only in the creative industry hold on to long working hours because these businesses think working many hours increases output and pleases the clients or customers. Three interviewees gave examples:

“It was a completely different mindset in my last company. They were a creative agency as well but it was very much the longer you work, the more dedicated you are. And I kept trying to say to them that just because you work longer it doesn’t mean that you are better or more efficient. My boss didn’t understand that. He just thought I am lazy.” (Daisy)

“In London I have friends, who work for eleven hours a day as standard. I work half of what they work. The problem is that companies will pay you to work from nine to five but they will add on the pressure that you need to do longer. You feel you won’t be seen

seriously, if you don't.“ (Carrie)

“I remember at my last workplace when I told them I would be leaving to a 30-hour workweek they were like it will never work. They were really beholden to the customers, some of the designers would get phone calls from customers during the night or holidays and you would just be expected to do stuff. I think some folks are just stuck in that: We are working until we die, we got to be there for the clients.” (Oscar)

The underlying assumption seems to be that more work is always better, resulting in a mindset of working longer versus working more efficiently. The interviewees explained the compliance to these conditions with the fear of being replaced in an increasingly global, competitive labour market. Also, the fear of being perceived as less dedicated when not working long hours was voiced amongst a number of interviewees. This notion seems to have changed at DigiWars. Through the 30-hour workweek the hours spent at work are not seen as proof for good job performance anymore: “Because we encourage people to leave at half three now, it is no longer seen as a kind of competition of who is staying the latest.” (Natalie) However, by pointing out that “the bottom-line question will always be there” (Carrie) one interviewee explained “if you reduce the hours, you would still have to be able to produce the same output, especially in such an output-focused industry like ours.” (Carrie). Thereby she relativises the almost utopian ideals that were mentioned before and raises her concerns about the power of the 30-hour workweek to realise all these ideas.

In summary, the terminology of utopia, commonly describing an “imagined place or state of things in which everything is perfect” (Oxford Dictionary, 2017e), seems to have been raised because of the many positive socio-economic implications the interviewees attribute to the 30-hour workweek. Hereby, not all interviewees referred to the 30-hour workweek as a concept where everything is perfect but generally it was perceived as a step towards it.

The 30-hour Workweek as Balancing Act

A typical sentence that was articulated in the interviews was: “The fact that you got all the other benefits can outweigh the shortcomings of the 6-hour working day.” (Mark) Generally, the

awareness that for the benefits of having shorter working hours, some disadvantages have to be accepted was high. When assessing the 30-hour workweek, the interviewees seemed to perform a mental balancing act by describing various trade-offs. The most directly addressed trade-off was the perceived change of the office atmosphere and communication.

“I would definitely like the atmosphere in the office to be a bit more vibrant, a bit more chatty. During the 45-minute sprints, it does feel like in a library. But it is a trade-off with being focused and getting things done, getting away early.” (Mark)

Private chats amongst the employees have been reduced to break times: “They come in at lunch time all chatting away, so in a way we still have that chat, people are just not doing it in the working hours”. (Ewan) Also, social activities have been affected:

“On a Friday [...] we finished at 4 and we would come together, have a drink. That’s just stuff which doesn’t happen anymore. So you could possibly say that there is less team stuff [...] whereas before we had more general chit chat and team building [...] But if you start taking time out of a 6-hour working day to focus on team stuff it kind of defeats the purpose of the 6-hour day. [...] I guess it depends on your perspective. Because if you are investing in a team, they might be more productive and might produce more and better work - better together - but at the same time if you want to do that you have to take some time out of the 6-hour working day and you would be less productive.” (Simon)

This reveals the difficulty that with the ‘rules’ of the 30-hour workweek, of people working focused and leaving on time, the social aspect of work decreases. A few employees seemed to dislike this, others described it as a balancing act between two desirable but mostly incompatible aspects. Not only the informal chats were affected, also the work-related communication within the team decreased. It was frequently stated that the lack of work-related communication is a result of the need to speed things up: “Sometimes people are too busy at work so if you need to speak to someone to get something done, it is hard to fit that in.” (Peter) This raised concerns:

“Typically, I have noticed that there is a lot less time spent on communication. Beforehand we would sit down at the start of a project with a printed-out document and would discuss

things really in detail but now it is like 15 to 20 minutes standing at the designer's computer and flex through it. It feels like there is more pressure to spend less time on things like communication which I think has a negative effect on projects because that's when, typically, things get missing or confused." (Simon)

There seems to be a constant effort in balancing the time spent on tasks and the need to speed things up. This results in a trade-off between being able to finish on time and delivering good work. "There are some times where [...] you are maybe a perfectionist and you don't want to lose that extra bit." (Carrie) As mentioned under the 'efficiency improver' and in the literature review, this could bear the risk of being unsatisfied with the quality of one's own work and thus being less motivated, especially in the case of knowledge workers. However, it seems that with the introduction of daily team meetings for information exchange together with a culture of taking joint (lunch) breaks, DigiWars managed to encounter both the risk of reduced work-communication and the reduction of office-chat.

The most frequently expressed trade-off was the trade-off between increased intensity at work and fewer hours accompanied by better work-life balance. In the interviewees' perception, everyone has to work harder and under increased time pressure.

"Things feel typically a lot more intense. When, I first started with a full working day it was all more laid back and less pressured. [...] Because there is less time now you have to condense all." (Simon)

As a counterpart, however, they are receiving the freedom to leave at 3.30pm and more free time:

"There is a bit of a balancing act, having the pressure of getting sure you get things done. But definitely that you have the sense of freedom that you can just get up and go and don't worry that your managers or your colleagues are thinking: Ah, he is not working hard." (Mark)

"Whereas now, you got to put in that 100% and the rest of the time is yours. You feel like you have been gotten a [...] fair deal: You come in for that short amount of time and then you put in your absolute best effort." (Carrie)

In that context, the 30-hour workweek seems to be a motivating factor for the employees to ‘give’ work consistently at a high speed, as they ‘receive’ the prospect of going home earlier. The incentive of having late afternoons and evenings at one’s own disposal functions as a strong motivator to work:

“At the weekend, you used to think: Oh my God, you have a whole week of work to go into, whereas now [...] I go in at half nine, leave at half three, it’s fine, you kinda don’t have that depression about it.” (Natalie)

Also, from a managerial perspective it is perceived as a deal, a give and take:

“In order for this to work, they have to focus, they have to maintain that productivity. Otherwise this utopian idea would fall down. [...] It is a two-way street. You have given that to them but they are the ones who have to put effort back in if they want to enjoy it.” (Natalie)

This expresses the desire to have a relationship based on equality and fairness between employer and employee. The employees are expected to trade their absolute best during work hours for more free time. As mentioned in the literature review, motivation as well as commitment of the knowledge workers is strongly related to expectations. The interviews confirmed how important it is for the employer to meet the knowledge workers’ expectations:

“I tried to get reduced hours at my previous job, like work four days out of five or a part-time situation but they weren’t receptive at all, so I moved on.” (Oscar)

So, in terms of work-life balance, the 30-hour workweek seems to respect the expectations of the employees at DigiWars and helps to create long-term commitment.

“I think for employees work-life balance is important, just psychosocially, to feel that they want to work here. If they spend too much time here then they gonna not enjoy it, not put their best effort in.” (Natalie)

In the literature review it was outlined how crucial the knowledge workers’ commitment to adapt

to and work with a new system is for its functionality. This was confirmed by the CEO when explaining:

“They already have bought into it, so they know what to expect and that helps. I think you have to have a really good team to make it work well. [...] That's what it takes to make a 6-hour working day work. If it wasn't for them and their commitment, it would probably not work.” (Ewan)

In the case of DigiWars, the team was frequently mentioned as the main factor for success of the new system. This suggests that the concept stands and falls with the commitment of the employees. However, as a further basis for this commitment trust and feeling respected by the employer seems to play an important role:

“Having this trust is really good and makes me work better because I feel he [the CEO] values the time that we do put in and he is not saying that you have to be here till ten o'clock at night to prove that you are doing your job well.” (Daisy)

The wish to keep the system up and the existence of mutual trust seems to prevent people from taking advantage of the new system or slipping back into old habits of procrastination. “You don't want to let the team down. When everyone else is working hard you don't want to be this sole person that is not doing it.” (Oscar) Some, however, expressed the possibility of the “getting used to phenomenon” where the appreciation for the 30-hour workweek decreases and “someone drifts back to their old lousy behaviour” (Natalie).

“I have maybe come to the point where I'm taking that for granted. If I went back to a nine to five job, I would probably think it's terrible. [...] But you do find yourself thinking, half nine to half three is fine but half nine to half two would be better.” (Simon)

Amongst the interviewees, so far, the commitment seems strong enough to reduce the effects of this phenomenon. Also, almost every employee called the possibility of going back to the old system “a shock to the system”. Being aware of the consequences of not sticking to the system seems to help to keep levels of commitment high. This again suggests that it is perceived as a balancing act.

In conclusion, employees see it as reasonable that for the benefits they gain through the 30-hour workweek, other aspects will come shorter. All interviewees referred to the 30-hour workweek as a balancing act, a trade-off or a two-way street. Despite the fact that everyone has to “trade-in” some aspects, we found that by most the 30-hour workweek and its implications are perceived positively in terms of a fair deal from which they benefit more than they have to compromise.

Summary

The empirical analysis has illustrated how the knowledge workers at DigiWars experience the 30-hour workweek. Under the five main interpretation of the 30-hour workweek being a ‘life enhancer’, ‘school day’, ‘efficiency improver’, ‘utopia’, and ‘balancing act’ important categories for knowledge work as well as other implications of the 30-hour workweek have been analysed. This way perceived benefits and possible tensions related to the 30-hour workweek have been disclosed. In the following chapter, we will discuss the key findings of our analysis and relate them to theories and concepts presented in the literature review.

5. Discussion

In the analysis we showed how the 30-hour workweek affects knowledge work and how knowledge workers perceive this working hour model. In the following chapter we aim to extend on our topic and put our findings in the context of the discussion around alternative working models. Therefore, we will start the discussion by reflecting to which extent the 30-hour workweek might be feasible for knowledge work and whether it helps to meet some current challenges within this field. In order to assess its relevance for businesses, we then discuss whether there is a business case for the 30-hour workweek and if it can be seen as an alternative to the conventional nine-to-five model. Lastly, we will discuss the implications of this alternative working model on a socio-economic level.

We want to discuss the effects of the 30-hour workweek on knowledge workers in the light of the predicted increasing relevance of knowledge work in the future; a fact which makes knowledge workers' productivity and well-being especially important (Drucker, 1999). Currently, particularly amongst knowledge workers high stress levels and extensive working hours can be observed leading to burnout and other stress-related illnesses (Lu & Gursoy, 2016). Reports from knowledge-intensive settings confirm that amongst knowledge workers job burnout rates have steadily increased over the last decade (Crowley, 2012; Lucas, 2015). This poses the question if the current way of conducting knowledge work is sustainable. The traditional 40 hours stem from manufacturing work. Requirements to work, however, have changed as the category of knowledge workers has gained importance. Reducing hours could be part of the solution not only to counteract high levels of exhaustion but also to address modern knowledge work related challenges such as increased work intensification, the phenomenon of empty labour and the need to bind knowledge workers to their employers.

Is the 30-hour Workweek Feasible for Knowledge Work?

Therefore, we are going to discuss to what extent the 30-hour workweek seems to be feasible for knowledge work and may help to meet current challenges within this field. At first glance, the 30-hour workweek seems to be a promising concept for knowledge workers. Our empirical data suggests that the 30-hour workweek (combined with the focus sprints) appears to be a good step

towards a better work-life balance without massive productivity suffering. Reducing the working hours alone, however, does not seem advisable. Our findings confirmed this when it became clear that the employees who regularly need to do overtime are the ones who do not stick to the 45-minute sprints. Also, in the case of the French 35-hour workweek it becomes obvious that reducing working hours alone is not effective. Here, working hours were *inter alia* reduced to ensure better work-life balance for employees. However, more than 15 years after the introduction actual weekly working hours have not changed much and are still above 40 indicating that time reduction alone is not sufficient. Hence, it seems reasonable to assume that the reduction of working hours with the aim of keeping productivity at the same level, only works if implemented in combination with some efficiency-increasing tools.

In our empirical case the 30-hour workweek is perceived as an ‘efficiency improver’. The predominant tool that is perceived to increase efficiency within the 30-hour workweek is the focus sprints. These 45-minute sprints are the instrument that apparently compensate for the hour reduction by allowing more focused and therefore faster work. The basis for this is that the type of work (knowledge work such as programming and marketing activities) can be fitted into more or less regulated time sprints. Despite commonly stated concerns that the complexity of knowledge work does not allow to accurately forecast how long tasks will take, our research material, as well as the findings of Gobbo and Vaccari (2008) and Davenport, Jarvenpaa and Beers (1996) suggest that it is possible. The high extent of freedom in structuring knowledge work tasks seems to allow scheduling work accordingly.

Gobbo and Vaccari (2008) further endorse that the “timeboxing strategy” (p.180) can help to maintain a sustainable pace and increase velocity; they exemplify this on programming work. It was further observed that through these sprints “wasted time and overwork are drastically reduced, while the distinction between free time and work time becomes clearer” (p.181). All these efficiency-increasing effects were also noted at DigiWars indicating that it seems possible to work with focus sprints and speed up knowledge work.

According to the findings of scholars, micro-breaks are another tool through which energy levels of knowledge workers can be increased (Fritz, Lam & Spreitzer, 2011). The rise in energy and

drive, at and after work, was also felt by our interviewees. This leads us to suggest that efficiency in knowledge work can be increased and that increased energy levels contribute to a high speed of work.

Apart from these tools, certain effects of the 30-hour workweek were found to also increase efficiency and compensate for the reduced - and often more intensive - hours spent at work. The 30-hour workweek provides more time for sleep and rest. Pang (2016) argues that through this errors during work can be prevented resulting in less time spent on solving them. Our empirical material further indicates that there is less room for perfectionism in the 30-hour workweek, which increases the speed of work. As the quality of work has apparently not suffered up to the point of this investigation, it seems reasonable to suggest that moderating perfectionism is a means of getting through the same amount of work faster. Other researchers confirm that paying less attention to details can make knowledge work more efficient (Davenport, Jarvenpaa & Beers, 1996).

Also, the use of technology and increased standardisation allows a rise in efficiency. Generally, technologies such as online forums and blogs provide fast access to knowledge and give the opportunity to ask for advice beyond the team's expertise, which in turn can help with problem solving. In terms of standardisation, our empirical material reveals that increased time pressure leads to the use of standardisation, for example in form of templates for design as well as for project management work. This is in line with Alvesson (2004), who has observed that "Knowledge can also be reused, leading to increased efficiency or improved quality" (p.173). At this point it has to be noted that this research is based on perceptions of the knowledge workers; a study of this size cannot be considered suitable for accurate efficiency nor productivity measures. Nevertheless, all these arguments seem to support the fact that knowledge work can be conducted more efficiently, serving as a prerequisite for the feasibility of the 30-hour workweek for knowledge workers.

As expressed throughout the thesis, unrestricted autonomy in conducting knowledge work and in deciding how to organize the work is crucial for knowledge workers' performance. At DigiWars, it appears that the autonomy at work has - against our expectations - not sorely been afflicted.

Quite the opposite was perceived because the knowledge workers felt that their judgement was even demanded stronger. Alvesson (2004) points out that judging the importance of different tasks is part of the autonomy by knowledge workers. In this, the 30-hour workweek seems to empower the employees and is associated with autonomy, freedom and responsibility concerning which tasks are worth spending time on and which not.

Nevertheless, timely flexibility is restricted through the set office hours and the implied 45-minute sprints. Starbuck (1992) argues that knowledge workers tend to reduce or completely stop to research and acquire new knowledge as well as learn actively when they feel restricted in their time management. Also, Nonaka (1994) states that redundant time is vital for knowledge workers to be creative and innovative in problem solving. At DigiWars, we found indeed that employees feel having too little or no time for extra research within the 30-hour workweek. As the new system was introduced only one year ago, the long-term effects of this matter are not yet foreseeable. Still, one might predict that less research and active learning might negatively affect the quality of work in the long run.

On the other hand, however, it appears that the 30-hour workweek allows employees to extend their knowledge, get inspiration and be more creative outside work due to more leisure time; this may reciprocally inspire their creativity at work. At DigiWars, it was observed that some employees do further research in their own time, are engaged in freelance work or other non-work related activities such as (team) sports, handicraft or music production, which they expressed have an inspiring influence on their actual work. Research supportingly showed that for example doing sports is beneficial for cognitive functioning and mood (Lichtman & Poser, 1983). Also, a positive correlation was found between leisure activities, which in some way entail high cognitive effort and social interaction, which in turn improves cognitive abilities (Singh-Manoux, Richards & Marmot, 2003). Furthermore, the employees were found to share knowledge acquired after work due to the good work atmosphere, which relativises the risk of reduced learning with the 30-hour workweek. Moreover, through loosening up the 45-minute sprints to 'give back the ownership of time' to the employees, it seems that DigiWars is aware of the importance of self-managed time for knowledge workers.

One reason why the 30-hour workweek may not be feasible for knowledge work is the strong influence the concept has on communication and knowledge exchange, because as shown in the literature review, communication and collaboration are essential for knowledge work. At this point, an investigation on long-term risks of less social activity and team building, as well as collaboration in knowledge work would be needed to really assess the drawback. Based on our findings, however, we argue that the reduced work-related communication can to some degree be balanced out with daily team meetings (huddles). This also extends to the decreased opportunity for private chat at work. The importance of social aspects at work, especially in advertising agency settings, is demonstrated for example in the research of Alvesson (1994) on the advertising scene. Also, according to Fritz, Lam and Spreitzer (2011), social interaction during breaks can improve relationships within the team and can further lead to better job performance. Hence, the introduction and maintaining of some formal communication tools (e.g. common project management systems and team-huddles) as well as promoters for informal communication (e.g. joint lunch breaks) seem to be effective to counteract decreased communication and to encourage team spirit.

The analysis of our empirical material further suggests that the 30-hour workweek seems to be a valuable means to counteract modern knowledge work challenges such as increased work intensification, the occurrence of empty labour and the increased need for psychological contract building i.e. the challenge to bind the knowledge worker to the firm through a strengthening of psychological bonds. In the following section we are going to reflect on the question to what extent the 30-hour workweek helps to meet those challenges faced by knowledge workers and knowledge-intensive firms, beginning with the challenge of work intensification.

A generally recognised problem amongst knowledge workers is the increased intensity of work (Kelliher & Anderson, 2010). The requirement to multitask, tighter deadlines, more time pressure and so on have proven to increase stress levels and stress-related absenteeism (Aghaz & Sheikh, 2016; Maslach, Schaufeli & Leiter, 2001). Through the 30-hour workweek implicating increased focus and time pressure, the intensity seems to become even stronger than perceived anyway in the fast environment of client and project oriented agency work. This was often indicated by the interviewees. However, it seems that the perceived increase in work intensity *inter alia* stems from

the 45-minute sprints, which induce employees to set more internal deadlines and raise the pressure to hustle through tasks. The thought of having to do more things in a shorter time might also increase the perception of stress. This, however, only proved to be the case at the beginning, before getting used to the system. By now, it seems to be mostly the sprints, which are responsible for the perceived work-intensification.

Hence, when considering that the 30-hour workweek seems to be accompanied by increased work intensification, one could argue that it amplifies the problem of work intensification and might fuel stress related health issues. However, our findings seem to relativise this concern. As explained in the literature review, stress-free time, sufficient sleep and regular breaks have major effects on cognitive performance, usually enhancing it (Helton & Russell, 2015; Krueger, 1989). Cognitive agility is especially important in knowledge work, and therefore the incentive to take regular breaks and the increased time for rest and recovery on weekends and evenings, paired with the opportunity to sleep longer, is likely to lead to a healthier stress-tension-relaxation ratio. This is supported by our findings, which showed that perceived stress levels at work rose whereas general perceived stress levels in everyday life could be minimised. Therefore, the 30-hour workweek seems to be a means to deal with the issue of increasing work intensification rather than an additional cause.

Another increasingly occurring phenomenon amongst knowledge workers is ‘empty labour’. It is a concept by Roland Paulson (2014) that describes the fact that many employees are engaged in non-work related activities during working hours. Empty labour *inter alia* occurs while enduring, which means to sit idle at work until the day is over. Paulson (2014) calls this “the inherent inefficiency of the capitalist employment contract” (p.137). This means that empty labour is derived from the fact that we mostly get paid for the time spent at work, rather than the actual work we do. Also, spending time at the office to show commitment is nothing unusual (Paulson, 2014). Within the 30-hour workweek this risk might not be given as much, since employees are expected to leave after six hours. Our empirical material also suggests that the employees have wasted less time on non-work-related activities like social media since the implementation of the 30-hour workweek. One reason for this might be that the 45-minute sprints force employees to structure their days more and set themselves small goals. Along with increased awareness of time, this

appears to lead to less time wasted.

The minimisation of empty labour is a problem of increasing relevance for companies as it is especially expensive in knowledge work, hard to detect and difficult to prevent with the countless unobtrusive distractions for knowledge workers. At first, it certainly sounds promising that the 30-hour workweek cuts out empty labour and apparently leads to less time wasted at work. Also, Paulson's (2015) finding that employees spend one and a half to three hours of empty labour on average per day, may suggest a major benefit of the 30-hour workweek. Nevertheless, this finding has to be seen more nuanced as with a 30-hour workweek employees work two hours less per day. Since the 30-hour workweek results in a loss of circa ten working hours per person per week, the countering effect of the 30-hour workweek would only pay off if people loaf for more than two hours a day.

Despite this, the reduction of empty labour also results in an increased separation of work activities and private matters. This is achieved by reducing the use of social media, cell phones and such like for private activities at work, which contributes to strengthening the lines between work and private life. This separation might help to improve employees' commitment when at work. Also, the fact that empty labour has been increasing in recent years due to more and more distractions (Paulson, 2014) might strengthen the argument that the 30-hour workweek could be a way to encounter the challenges of the digital world for now and for the future. To be precise, one has to highlight the fact that the 30-hour workweek is not the only way to reduce time waste at work. Certain new software programmes have been developed to also counteract this issue, for example programmes that block out Internet access to specific websites such as social media platforms (e.g. Freedom.to, 2017). In conclusion, the 30-hour workweek is not the only way to counteract empty labour. However, it is a strong means to foster a mindset amongst employees that working time should be spent on focused work rather than private activities.

Our research also reveals that the 30-hour workweek seems to have a particularly strong effect on the psychological contract building between knowledge worker and employer. Our interview data illustrates how this takes place in the minds of the knowledge workers when perceiving the 30-hour workweek as a "balancing act". As mentioned in the literature review, this concept suggests

that employees of knowledge-intensive firms see the relationship with their employer as a give-and-take, leading to reciprocal obligations that go beyond the classical concept of providing labour for monetary remuneration (Scholarios & Marks, 2004). This poses a challenge to knowledge-intensive firms, as the expectations of knowledge workers are often distinct and implicit (Newell et al., 2009). According to Huang (2011), knowledge workers are regularly attributed with the desire to change firms regularly. Encountering the risk of losing the knowledge worker, a strong psychological contract is said to be of high value in binding the knowledge worker to the company (Newell et al., 2009). Especially, as the fight for talent in knowledge work is fierce, this contract gains increased relevance (Newell et al., 2009). The 30-hour workweek could play an important role in counteracting these challenges.

Based on our empirical material we argue that the 30-hour workweek offers the knowledge worker a better work-life balance which seems to have a positive effect on the knowledge workers' loyalty and appears to considerably strengthen the psychological contract. By this, also the knowledge workers' motivation and commitment to work seems to be affected positively. This was exemplified by most employees agreeing to take the obligation to 'give 100% while at work', work that little bit harder and accept reduced 'chat around the office'. In return, however, their expectations of leaving on time and being trusted with their ability to deliver need to be fulfilled. At DigiWars, this notion of fulfilment seems to have developed over time with the CEO "keeping his promises" by encouraging the employees to leave at 3.30pm. Hence, expectations meet reality, which strengthens trust between employee and employer. Also, the feeling of being treated fairly, as opposed to feeling exploited through a culture of long uncompensated working hours some had experienced in former jobs, seems to have increased commitment and the appreciation of this over another employer. Guest (2004) summarises that issues of trust and fairness lie at the heart of the psychological contract.

In most research literature the fulfilment of expectations towards career opportunities, interesting and challenging work as well as opportunities to develop expertise and status are said to strengthen the psychological contract the most (Newell et al., 2009). Interestingly enough, work-life balance is seldom listed as an expectation demanded by knowledge workers. This raises the question how important work-life balance is amongst knowledge workers for the psychological contract. One

could argue that the 30-hour workweek is rather unfavourable for knowledge workers as it entails relatively strict and short office hours. Knowledge workers are commonly described as people who do not mind working countless hours because work has a great significance in their lives and influences how they see themselves (Sveningsson & Alvesson, 2016). Furthermore, they often find fulfilment and joy in their work (Newell et al., 2009). Having this picture of the dedicated knowledge workers in mind, one could argue that these might not want the working hours to be reduced to six hours a day. Our interview data, however, provides evidence that the majority of the knowledge workers expressed great appreciation for the increase in free time. This is supported by Scholarios and Marks (2004) who found that providing developers with more work-life balance leads to greater organisational attachment. Kvande (2009) also emphasises the importance of work-life balance and exemplifies this on young fathers in globalised knowledge work. The rising tensions between making family and work compatible inside the ever-growing culture of total commitment in knowledge work, leads us to suggest that the demand for work-life balance will most likely increase and might become a common expectation amongst knowledge workers.

As our empirical material indicates, this argument cannot be generalised as the appreciation of increased work-life balance seems to depend on personal circumstances as well as the personality of the knowledge workers. Our research data suggest that lower appreciation might be found amongst young employees. For them some frustration with the system might occur as there could be decreased opportunity to learn, make errors and have a fun and buzzing environment as time pressure is perceived to increase drastically. On the other hand, the appreciation is highest amongst people who worked in a 40+-hour workweek before, as well as amongst employees with children or strong other extra-work interests and hobbies. Also for those better work-life balance is valued most (Kvande, 2009). This indicates that the appreciation of the 30-hour workweek is likely to affect the psychological contract building, for some stronger for others less.

Nevertheless, we want to emphasise strongly that the 30-hour workweek provides the knowledge worker with a choice. Additional time outside work can either be spent with family and friends or pursuing work-unrelated interests. If this is not desired, the 30-hour workweek gives knowledge workers the time to engage in freelance work, work-related projects or extensive research on the field that he/she is most passionate about workwise. One interviewee even mentioned the

opportunity that one could take on another job if work was the chosen focus in life. For those reasons the 30-hour workweek seems to give knowledge workers increased freedom to decide about how to shape their lives, without being forced to prioritise work over family as numerous researchers have signalled (Frone, 2000; Greenhaus, Collins & Shaw, 2003; Kvande, 2009; Perrons, 2003; Scholarios & Marks, 2004).

In conclusion, the perception is prevalent that the better conditions of the 30-hour workweek come with a price. Those drawbacks, however, are perceived as a trade-off; a compromise rather than a breach of the psychological contract. It seems reasonable to assume that the psychological contract building is the strongest when the effects of the 30-hour workweek are perceived as a fair deal. As this is the overall perception at DigiWars where the appreciation of the 30-hour workweek is generally high, it seems to serve as a strengthening element for the psychological contract and can help to bind knowledge workers to the firm.

Is there a Business Case for the 30-hour Workweek?

As demonstrated above, the 30-hour workweek seems to be feasible for knowledge work and even contributes in meeting some modern challenges related to it. So if this concept allows efficiency to be increased, some employers might think: “Why not just use the benefits of efficiency-increasing tools within an 8-hour working day and thereby increase output?” Our answer to this would be that the increase in efficiency in the 6-hour working day is caused by an increase in work intensity, which, however, needs to be compensated by more stress-free time, in order to assure the knowledge workers’ health in the long run. We further argue that the decrease in social activity at work has to be compensated with the opportunity to socialise in one’s free time. Hence, the gains in free time are the most likely means to offset the decrease in opportunities to chat and the shift from a friendly to a more focused work atmosphere. This should counteract the argument that the efficiency increase through the 30-hour workweek can be reached in a 40-hour workweek.

Apart from this, in the empirical material we found that the 30-hour workweek seems to be related to various business related benefits. Despite increased focus at work, better work-life balance and less overall stress, many interviewees also mentioned business-related advancements associated to the 30-hour workweek. Hence, we want to discuss if there is a business case for it. By that we aim

to enrich the picture of the 30-hour workweek and want to unfold the implications for knowledge-intensive firms.

According to the Oxford Dictionary (2017b), a business case is a “justification for a proposed project or undertaking on the basis of its expected commercial benefit“. This implies that the decision if a project will be undertaken or a new system shall be implemented, is based on its financial profitability. The business case is usually drawn for issues like Diversity Management and CSR, which are characterised by non-monetary, value-driven goals (Dyllick & Hockerts, 2002; Robinson & Dechant, 1997). Through the business case these measures are attempted to be justified business-wise. In spite of many attempts to establish the business case for work-life balance, the direct link between work-life balance and organisational effectiveness is still missing. Nevertheless, a better work-life balance is found to attract better applicants, lead to lower staff turnover and enhance health levels among employees, which in turn is claimed to boost organisational performance (Beauregard & Henry, 2009). Hence, this is an interesting dimension to explore related to the 30-hour workweek.

In order to draw a business case for the 30-hour workweek we aim to show how the perceived benefits may positively influence the bottom-line. Newell et al. (2009) suggest that attracting knowledge workers is a particular big challenge for businesses. High-potentials with rare knowledge and skills are fiercely fought over in the war for talent. Employers try to attract applicants with various means such as high salaries, company cars and more. As an alternative, the 30-hour workweek could attract employees who value work-life balance. The 30-hour workweek seems to offer working conditions, which are rare on the job market and could therefore enhance employer branding. Moreover, the 30-hour workweek could be a tool to attract candidates from younger generations who more and more demand an improved balance of work and life and seem to increasingly value leisure and family time (Sturges & Guest, 2004). Picking up on this shift, many companies are setting measures for a better work-life balance (App, Merk & Büttgen, 2012).

As such measures, however, can conflict with profit-oriented aims of businesses, companies like Google and Co. aim to bring work-life balance in-house. By making work feel like leisure through

company gyms, healthy daily meals, in-house massages and dog-welcome policies they have developed an image of being the ‘most attractive employers’ (D’Onfro & Smith, 2014). For companies, which cannot afford to appeal to applicants through those extraordinary perks or through high financial benefits, the 30-hour workweek might be a way to compete with the big corporations in the competition for talent. Furthermore, many unknown companies or so-called ‘hidden champions’ find themselves struggling with attracting competent employees because of their unknown brand and non-central locations. For them, the 30-hour workweek could improve their chances of attracting employees, and can thus be a valuable marketing tool, because through reduced working hours employees might be more likely to consider a commute.

Moreover, the 30-hour workweek was perceived to be promising for retaining employees. High staff turnover or outage is particularly harmful and costly for knowledge-intensive firms as losing the employee means losing some of the crucial knowledge that is part of the firm’s competitive advantage (Newell et al., 2009). As a consequence, the firm would need to invest in recruiting and training new employees. Moreover, as stated in the literature review, knowledge work highly relies on employee commitment, which has to be built up individually with each new employee. We found that better work-life balance and less overall stress in life are strong motives for many employees to stay with the company. Another fact that suggests a reduction in employer turnover is that employees do not find the same working conditions, which are provided by the 30-hour workweek in any other company. The 30-hour workweek also seems to increase health and to limit sick days and long-term stress related absence, which may improve the chances of retaining employees in the long run.

A third business-related benefit which could strengthen the business case of the 30-hour workweek is the fact that it seems to facilitate “weeding out” by bringing to light who of the employees is less or even not at all committed to the work and the company. Especially within knowledge work it is difficult to assess in the recruitment process if the knowledge worker fits into the team and has the qualifications that he/she promises to have (Alvesson, 2004). Due to the limited time in a 6-hour working day, the 30-hour workweek is effective in revealing who is willing to work consistently and who is loafing or filling the time ‘empty labour’.

These abovementioned business-related benefits might suggest that there is clear evidence for the business case. However, concerns that were expressed regarding the profitability of the 30-hour workweek should not be omitted when reflecting on the business case. One fear related to the 30-hour workweek appeared to be the loss of clients due to possible availability issues related to the decreased office hours. This is an uncontrollable risk, however, our findings suggest that at DigiWars client relationships are not affected. Another business-related risk might be that employees may take advantage of the system by working fewer hours without increasing their efforts to maintain productivity. This, on the other hand, is likely to be counteracted by increased commitment through an enhanced psychological contract.

The main concern regarding the business case for the 30-hour workweek is the perceived risk of decreasing productivity. This risk seems obvious when considering the total loss in working hours across the team. Since an increase in efficiency of knowledge work is hard to predict and cannot be guaranteed, this risk seems to be leveraging the business case. The management can introduce efficiency-improving tools like the 45-minute sprints to make the 30-hour workweek work. However, as found in the empirical material, if the team is not willing or able to increase the efficiency, the system is likely to fail. In our research case the employees indeed feel more focused and believe that they work more efficiently since the 30-hour workweek was introduced. In addition, the CEO even claims that the 30-hour workweek “increased productivity” at DigiWars. However, we do not suggest a cause-effect relationship between the 30-hour workweek and increased efficiency or productivity. As stated in the literature review, the productivity of knowledge-intensive firms is difficult to measure due to the intangible and complex character of the output. Therefore, a precise assessment of how the 30-hour workweek affects productivity and profitability is somewhat ambiguous and certainly not feasible with the qualitative approach and the scope of our research.

In conclusion, we cannot draw a business case with conventional indicators as benefits like increased work-life balance or effects on employer branding resulting from the 30-hour workweek are hard to express in monetary terms. However, the impossibility of drawing a business case should not lead to the assumption that the 30-hour workweek is not rewarding for businesses as demonstrated above. We also want to point out that the motivation of introducing a measure like

the 30-hour workweek is often value-driven. The business case, however, seems to be needed as a justification business-wise. In our case the main motive of introducing it was to enhance employee wellbeing and work-family compatibility. We therefore pose the question if the business case is a functional way of assessing whether a measure is beneficial for the business or not if unquantifiable in nature. It does not seem to be effective to justify unquantifiable measures with monetary indicators. This suggests that a change in mindset is needed.

In the following passage, we are going to discuss if the 30-hour workweek can serve as a trigger to consider new measures of success for companies such as satisfied clients and happy employees and whether an alternative to the capitalist mindset is inherent in the 30-hour workweek.

Is the 30-hour Workweek an Alternative?

As demonstrated in the literature review, working nine to five is by no means the only way of working today. Several alternatives to the conventional 40-hour workweek exist. However, none of them comes without drawbacks. Part-time, for example, which is a favourable way of working for employees having family duties, has several disadvantages in terms of worse career opportunities, more administrative and often less challenging work tasks as well as obviously decreased salary (Tilly, 1996). Flexi-time and working from home are options said to make employees more flexible in their work. Scholars, however, found that having no boundaries between work and private life is associated with the inability to disengage from work, which often results in higher stress levels and burnout rates amongst flexi-time workers (Sonnentag & Bayer, 2005). Furthermore, working from home might isolate the employee leading to a lack of inclusion in the office. As the 30-hour workweek comes with various advantages regarding the abovementioned issues, the question arises whether it may be an alternative to these forms of working. In fact, working in the 30-hour workweek means working full-time. Therefore, in comparison to part-time, the 30-hour workweek has the advantages of a full salary as well as undiminished responsibility and career opportunities. This might be especially valuable for employees with duties like parenting or caring for elderly people. Furthermore, in comparison to working-from-home and flexi-time the 30-hour workweek is advantageous as it allows a separation between work and life, which has repeatedly been attributed to less stress in life

(Kvande, 2009).

Thus, in comparison to the previously mentioned already existing working alternatives and the traditional 40-hour workweek, the 30-hour workweek is perceived as a life enhancing alternative as it seems to allow a greater degree of work-life separation, a better work-life balance, enhanced health and increased equal opportunities. Having this in mind, it is not surprising that some knowledge workers perceive the 30-hour workweek as utopia, an ideal working method that opposes the dominating capitalistic mindset. But is it really an alternative to that? What changes in mindset does the 30-hour workweek imply?

The 30-hour workweek is chosen for other reasons than productivity or output increase. It further does not necessarily support chasing after extensive growth. This appears to be in line with the call for more sustainability that is currently growing ever louder across various disciplines and is a counter-trend to the capitalistic approach (Mattauch, 2015). As such, the 30-hour workweek could evolve to be a symbol for a less output driven, more sustainable way of running a business, revealing a change in mindset.

Based on our empirical material, we further argue that the introduction of the 30-hour workweek indicates an increased focus on employee wellbeing. Fleming and Mandarin (2009) state that in “Western societies, work is [...] of immense influence over our everyday life.” (p.328). This is fuelled by modern knowledge-intensive firms that aim at work-life integration involving constant occupation and engagement of knowledge workers with work. Newell et al. (2009) also state that the fluid working hour models and work-life integration let knowledge work flourish. Psychological detachment from work does not seem to be desired nor necessary. This might be good for knowledge work but the question derives how this affects the knowledge worker. Looking at the negative consequences of psychological non-detachment from work over long periods amongst knowledge workers suggests that boundaries are indeed needed (Kinman & Jones, 2008). Scholars like Sonnentag and Bayer (2005), clearly show the positive effects of detachment on knowledge workers’ mood and wellbeing and demonstrate that a reintroduction of boundaries and increased recovery time can lead to stronger work attachment, engagement and proactivity. Sonnentag (2003) emphasises that recovery has to take place in the non-work domain, comparable

to the increased leisure time in the 30-hour workweek. Deductively, the allowance of rest and work-life separation should be in the interest of firms. Our findings indicate that the 30-hour workweek helps to reinstall boundaries and decrease stress levels. It seems to be a good tool to enable a healthy balance and to prevent over-commitment to work to the extent that physical and mental health suffers.

Furthermore, the 30-hour workweek might serve as a trigger to break with some social norms and conventions. Fleming (2015) describes in his book ‘The mythology of work: How capitalism persists despite itself’ that in capitalist societies a culture of work-addiction has been created where technology enables employees to work non-stop. He seems to strengthen the picture that work ‘invades’ employees’ personal lives. Fleming explains that this work-addicted culture prevents employees from finding fulfilment and enjoyment outside work, costing them their health and quality of life. The 30-hour workweek seems to prevent this invasion of work into employees’ personal lives. Moreover, it calls to rethink work and by providing more time outside work it promotes or even imposes on employees to seek value outside work.

Another common societal belief is that working overtime is a sign of commitment. As declared in the literature review, presenteeism is a phenomenon occurring in many workplaces and can bear risks. It seems that the societal pressure of having a remarkable career, makes overtime necessary. Despite the resulting constraints, this seems to be rather unreflectively accepted by society (Fleming, 2015). Acker (1990) describes the allegedly ‘perfect’ employee as disembodied. This depicts a robot-like worker, who neglects basic needs like rest and social interaction for long office hours. We argue that the 30-hour workweek accepts that employees are first and foremost human beings and in second place employees. It seems to embrace employees in a more holistic way, acknowledging that they might have other responsibilities and passions besides work. This clearly suggests a change in mindset.

Although the 30-hour workweek sets a clear focus on work when at work, it respects the natural limits of employees by allowing them sufficient time for rest and leisure outside the workplace. In accordance with our findings, the 30-hour workweek seems to promote a more moderate way of managing a business. It also seems to be a step towards a more sustainable use of labour and to

lower the likelihood of overusing the ‘resource knowledge worker’. Thus, the 30-hour workweek might foster alternative thinking about how businesses are run and seems to support the questioning of and reflecting upon the rules of the capitalistic system.

This brings us back to the question whether the 30-hour workweek is a ‘real’ alternative to the capitalist mindset, or rather simply an optimisation within the system. In fact, the success of the 30-hour workweek - at least in our case - is still judged by conventional indicators such as output; in this case increased efficiency and maintained productivity. Also, feeling the need to establish a business case for the 30-hour workweek shows that it is not ‘divorced’ from the capitalistic mindset. Generally, the 30-hour workweek would only be introduced by businesses, if it does not come with diminished profits. Hence, despite the fact that the 30-hour workweek sets increased employee wellbeing against potential increase of output, it still plays by the capitalistic rules and focuses on the bottom line. The 30-hour workweek is therefore rather to be seen as an optimisation within the capitalistic system than a real alternative to it.

Nonetheless, the 30-hour workweek does have something radical about it and is accompanied by the notion of a future non-work dominated society, where based on the technological progress, humans can live a life without the struggle of constant overwork. This is why the 30-hour workweek appears to be utopian, ‘living the dream’ or ‘too good to be true’. Despite the notion that a utopia is something ideal, even unrealistic, we hope that with our thesis we have shown that the 30-hour workweek is a rather practical concept with which various concerns in the knowledge-intensive setting can be addressed.

6. Conclusion and Outlook

This thesis has explored the concept of the 30-hour workweek in relation to knowledge workers. The novelty of the topic in research literature allowed us to paint a rich picture of the 30-hour

workweek by choosing the approach of an explorative study. Hereby we were able to explore a variety of different implications, concerns and benefits surrounding this concept. As knowledge work has become increasingly important and burnout rates are alarmingly high in professional occupations, we chose to set our focus on the feasibility of the 30-hour workweek for knowledge work. With our thesis we add to the understanding of what the 30-hour workweek in a knowledge-intensive context means and how different aspects of knowledge work are affected.

The purpose of this study has been to explore the effects of the 30-hour workweek on knowledge workers and its feasibility for knowledge work. Further, we have aimed to comprehensively depict the 30-hour workweek and reflect on current socio-economic trends. The study was based on the research question: How does the 30-hour workweek influence knowledge workers? Further, we have aimed to explore how knowledge workers experience the 30-hour workweek and what perceived tensions and benefits are related to this working hour model. These leading questions helped us discuss if the 30-hour workweek is feasible in a knowledge worker context. The results of the study show that the 30-hour workweek influences knowledge workers in different ways.

This study has expressed the variety of experience of knowledge workers in a digital marketing agency. A main finding is that the knowledge workers perceived the 30-hour workweek as a 'life enhancer'. Despite the increased intensity of work, life was perceived as less stressful. Also, better work-life balance as well as enhanced employee mood and health could be affiliated to the 30-hour workweek. Although different knowledge workers seem to appreciate the increase in free time to different extents, we emphasised that it provides them with the choice whether to put work or other interests first. In spite of the notion of a school day, autonomy has not seemed to be inflicted, timely flexibility, however, has through the implicated focus sprints. The increased time after work seems to have positive effects on inspiration and creativity of the knowledge worker. Moreover, we demonstrated that the 30-hour workweek was perceived as efficiency increasing and seems to prevent knowledge workers from empty labour. Our findings further revealed that for some knowledge workers the 30-hour workweek feels utopian. Numerous positive socio-economic effects are attributed to the 30-hour workweek such as its contribution to gender equality and its capacity to counteract the negative consequences of presenteeism. Another key finding was that the 30-hour workweek is commonly described as a balancing act. Some perceived drawbacks

like an increase of work intensity for the knowledge worker and business-wise the decrease in communication are weighed up against the benefits of more free time to recover and rest leading to increased employee well-being. Overall, it seems that the benefits outweigh the disadvantages, which appears to have a strong positive effect on the psychological contract building between the knowledge worker and the employer. In addition, we discussed the possibility to draw a business case for the 30-hour workweek. All in all, the 30-hour workweek in combination with an efficiency increasing tool as well as regular team meetings and a culture of common breaks seems to be a promising concept for knowledge workers. It appears to be a practical, less capitalistic way of running a business in which the ‘resource knowledge worker’ seems to be utilised in a more sustainable manner.

In conclusion, we want to emphasise the resume of DigiWars’ CEO who said “I think it works for some better than for others, the right system depends on the type of employee and company. No system is ever a hundred per cent perfect, not an 8-hour day, a 4-hour day or a 12-hour day or even a 6-hour day but it [the 30-hour workweek] is better than what we were doing before and I cannot see a reason why we should go back.” (Ewan)

Suggestions for Further Research and Outlook

Due to the novelty of this research topic, there is further need to explore the concept of the 30-hour workweek or other models with reduced working hours for knowledge workers in more detail. Our explorative study served as a first attempt to illustrate the multifacetedness of the concept and can be understood by other researchers as a trigger to explore alternative working hour models in order to find more sustainable ways of conducting knowledge work.

Several interesting questions were raised during the research process, which this thesis left unanswered due to limited scope:

- Why is the 40-hour workweek still standard when Keynes, already in 1933, projected a 15-hour workweek for the 21st century? Is the 30-hour workweek long overdue?
- Which role does technology play in making the 30-hour workweek possible?
- Would a 30-hour workweek work for large and multinational companies?

- For which type of knowledge work might the 30-hour workweek be unfeasible?
- Is the efficiency-increasing model of the 30-hour workweek feasible for all age groups?
- What role do workers unions play in the establishment of the 30-hour workweek?

Our hope is that this thesis has inspired the reader to question current socio-economic trends and various aspects of the capitalist model. Moreover, it will hopefully motivate further research on alternative working hour models in order to find more sustainable ways to run businesses. We will be looking forward to further research about companies which are swimming against the tide of long working hours and chronic overwork, and are experimenting with other ways to better balance work and life, for example, with a 4-day week or other, still unexplored alternatives.

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