

Sustaining human capital in the modern workplace

An exploration of a sustainable workplace at Glimworks, a small-sized Swedish IT company

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Abstract

Research and poll results suggest an ongoing crisis in modern Western European workplaces with high levels of indifference at work underlined by low engagement levels. Data aggregated from 2014 to 2016 by Gallup World Polls state that only 10% of Western European employees are engaged at work while 71% are not engaged and 19% are actively disengaged (Gallup, 2017). These numbers highlight an urgent problem that is the “epidemic levels of indifference toward work” (Duckworth, 2017, p.98). The scientific sphere can contribute to solving this problem by increasing its research on companies that are succeeding at creating engaging workplaces which sustain human capital and resources over time. In doing so, researchers along with practitioners can extract the best-practices and propose workplace models which theoretically result in sustainable workplaces that engage employees and sustain their resources. Through this study, such a model was co-created with the Swedish small-sized IT company Glimworks through semi-structured interviews with its employees, a semi-structured interview with its founder and CEO and a focus group discussion. This resulted in the unique contribution of a conceptual definition of a sustainable workplace and the design of a theoretical model including six variables and thirteen sustainability themes for how to build sustainable workplaces. Finally, this research is also distinctive in its interdisciplinary approach to sustainability science by bridging the field with organizational and engagement theories.

Keywords: Employee engagement, sustainable workplace, human sustainability, organizational sustainability, human capital

Word count: 13 981 words

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1. Introduction

Even though material well-being has improved in an unprecedented manner in the past decades, there remains unresolved health and well-being challenges (Rosling, 2018). One such challenge is the unsustainable high level of disengagement in our modern workplaces (Gallup, 2017). 90% of employees in Western Europe state that they are either disengaged or actively disengaged in their workplace (Gallup, 2017). Alongside the environmental challenges, it appears self-evident that companies also face major social and human sustainability challenges in their workplaces in regards to how employees feel at work (European Commission, 2017). The quality of our health and well-being at work tremendously impacts our overall personal health and well-being. It overlaps into our individual mental health, into the quality of our family and community relationships. According to Gallup amongst others (2017) automatization, robotization, artificial intelligence and global competitiveness are all 21st century major trends which are radically transforming the job market and the way we work. Furthermore, they are adding additional challenges and pressures to labor markets in post-industrial economies. It makes the issue of disengagement at work an ever more urgent and central social, organizational and human sustainability challenge.

I join many scholars in arguing that one of the 21st century's greatest quests ought to be the thriving and well-being of individuals around the world; "ultimately human nature, if it ever realizes itself, will do so by becoming more autonomous" (Pink, 2009, p.108). It is time we uphold the values of the Enlightenment to the highest-level of standards and redesign and restructure our companies to become vectors of individual enlightenment, human, social, organizational and environmental sustainability. As Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi puts it; "once we realize that the boundaries between work and play are artificial, we can take matters in hand and begin the difficult task of making life more livable" (Csikszentmihalyi, 2000, p.190). Hopefully concepts of human and organizational sustainability along with employee engagement will continue to grow in awareness, especially at the corporate and political level so that companies and their workplaces become a place for humans to thrive instead of a place for humans to feel disengaged and carry that into their personal lives.

1.1. Problem-Formulation

Levels of employee engagement around the world are of staggering concern. The 2017 Gallup extensive poll results suggests an ongoing crisis in our modern workplace; namely the "epidemic levels of indifference toward work" (Duckworth, 2017, p.98). Daniel H. Pink underlines the same realization by stating that "the modern workplace's most notable feature may be its lack of engagement" (Pink, 2009, p.111). Put in numbers, the Gallup poll reveals that only 10% of the worldwide population perceive themselves as being engaged at work (Gallup, 2017). As an additional measure, although from a private company, the firm McKinsey & Co, observed that in some countries only 2 to 3% of the workforce considered themselves as highly engaged (Pink, 2009).

Besides being an urgent human sustainability challenge in its own right, when employees are disengaged they also fail to contribute meaningfully outside of their workplace (Wollard, 2011). If companies,

organizations and institutions in Western Europe fail to engage their employees and to sustain their human resources, we decrease the ability of people to engage in other sustainability problematics such as our urgent environmental challenges. By maintaining systematic level of disengagement at work and by depleting people's human capital and resources, broader social movements and environmental change are less likely to occur as disengaged people may fail to organize collectively (Collins & Makowsky, 1972). To invest in workers' engagement level and human sustainability, we equip the labor force and citizens with the ability to further engage in sustainability challenges and political struggles such as the global climate movements (Collins & Makowsky, 1972).

The purpose of this research is to provide practical knowledge grounded in qualitative data to improve the organizational sustainability of companies through increased employee engagement and human sustainability. This thesis works with the foundational idea that the complexity and urgency of today's modern workplaces in predominantly post-industrial economies and highly-skilled labor markets require organizations to become sustainable in their human resource approach alongside their environmental and economic sustainability goals. This research has the potential to contribute to the realization of this through results that can be directly implemented by companies and organizations .

1.2. Contribution to sustainability science

This thesis is grounded in sustainability science, a transdisciplinary approach is used, where multiple scientific branches are integrated to examine the entire system of factors affecting the issue of workplace sustainability (Jerneck et al., 2010).

Sustainability can be categorized by distinguishing four main types of sustainability: human, social, economic and environmental (Goodland, 2002). A core approach to the concept of sustainability is the maintenance of capital, whether human, social, economic or environmental (Goodland, 2002). In that sense, human sustainability is concerned in maintaining human capital and social sustainability is concerned in maintaining social capital (Goodland, 2002). Human capital is defined as "a private good of individuals" such as "health, education, skills, knowledge and leadership" (Goodland, 2002). Social capital is defined as "investments and services that create the basic framework for society" (Goodland, 2002).

Although the term sustainability encompassing all three dimensions (social, economic and environmental) it is subject to various definitions within the sustainability science literature; the idea of meeting human development needs while protecting the earth's life support systems is a common understanding many scholars rely on to define and conceptualize sustainability and sustainable development (Cash et al., 2003).

From the latter sustainability definition, this research focuses more narrowly on the component of meeting human development needs from the perspective that Robert Goodland proposes by defining human capital as the private goods of individuals (Goodland, 2002). Viewed within the context of post-industrial workplaces, human sustainability motivates the goal to sustain human resources in organizations by meeting the "health, education, skills, knowledge and leadership" needs of employees

in the workplace (Goodland, 2002). In that respect, this research interprets “meeting human development needs” as doing what is possible to support, strengthen and develop the mental and emotional capacities of individuals as employees in the workplace. Human development needs can thus be understood as the aggregate of the individual well-being, quality of life, happiness, satisfaction, meaning, health and so forth (Miller, 2013).

On 30 September 2009, researcher Thaddeus R. Miller interviewed Carl Folke, environmental scientist from the Stockholm Resilience Centre, who stated the following: “how can we develop and continue to improve human well-being and our life as a species on this planet...? That’s really what sustainability is about for me.” (Miller, 2013. p.281). In other words, from that point of view, sustainability may have for end goal to improve the well-being of human-beings in the world. Ecological resources in that sense are to be sustained as a necessary means to achieve the goal of human well-being (Miller, 2013).

Sustainability science has made considerable strides in making sustainable development a priority agenda for research, practitioners and policy-makers best embodied by the United Nations’ Agenda 2030 with its 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Sustainability is understood to be based upon three pillars: the environment, the economic and the social.

However when compared to the growing environmental public awareness, scientific research and political interest since the release of the Brundtland Report in 1987, the human component of sustainability and sustainable development has not been pursued with similar success, shown in table 1-3. This has created a gap within the field of sustainability science as well as in how the public commonly perceives sustainability solely in regards to its environmental component.

Table 1: the human and social component in sustainability in SCOPUS.

Search String	Document Results
“Human Sustainability”	91
“Individual Sustainability”	56
“Social Sustainability”	2665
“Organizational Sustainability”	437

Table 2: Number of results for the economic component in sustainability in SCOPUS.

Search String	Document Results
“Economic Sustainability”	3104

Table 3: Number of results for the environmental component in sustainability in SCOPUS.

Search String	Document Results
“Environmental Sustainability”	16 217

These literature search results confirm a similar observation the scholar Jeffrey Pfeffer made by highlighting that Google Scholar delivers 53 000 document results for “environmental sustainability” compared to 569 document results for “human sustainability” (Pfeffer, 2010). That is a ratio of 1 human sustainability article for every 93 environmental sustainability articles. In his article “Building Sustainable Organizations: The Human Factor” (2010), Jeffrey Pfeffer argues that despite the “growing public and business interest in building sustainable organizations” (Pfeffer, 2010, p.1), the literature predominantly focuses on the effects organizations have on environmental resources, and less the effects they have on human resources (Pfeffer, 2010).

This thesis assumes similarly to Jeffrey Pfeffer, that research, practitioner-interest and policy-making should aim to sustain human resources comparably to our sustainable development aim of sustaining environmental resources. It is only in doing so, that we can then claim to be promoting and pushing for a holistic and interdisciplinary approach to sustainable development. As long as environmental sustainability out-competes human sustainability by a ratio of 93, sustainable development and sustainability science fail to uphold its conceptualization based upon social, economic and environmental sustainability.

From the perspective of organizational sustainability, Woocheol Kim and Jiwon Park (2017) have recently made additional claims, in the peer reviewed journal “Sustainability”, to the fact that the human dimension of organizational sustainability has been undermined in comparison to its economic and environmental dimensions. They conclude their research with a call to further investigate the “human dimension of organizational sustainability” in the context of European countries as well as to define and measure the concept of organizational sustainability (Kim & Park, 2017).

The result of the main focus of sustainability on environmental challenges is partly the undermining of human wellbeing challenges, with the example of employee wellbeing and engagement in the workplace, which this thesis aims to overbridge.

1.3. Research Aim and Research Questions

The aim of this thesis is to answer the research calls made by scholars to tackle the lack of sustainability science research, practionary focus and political appeal to the human dimension of sustainability (Pfeffer, 2010; Goodland, 2002; Park & Kim 2017; Miller, 2013; Folke, 2013). Most of those research calls

have been made in the past decade highlighting a growing research interest and need to extend the human and social sustainability field. This thesis is conducted within the perspective of human and organizational sustainability in the modern workplace in post-industrial economies. By narrowing the focus to the workplace and companies, the research overlaps into organizational sustainability and extends this field to human and social sustainability.

In that sense, I hypothesize that aiming at researching and improving employee engagement may serve as a valuable tool to address human sustainability challenges in the workplace.

This thesis answers the following two research questions:

RQ1: How can employers and employees co-design and implement workplace models that maximize the sustainability of human resources in the workplace?

RQ2: How can engagement theory contribute to framing and increasing the sustainability of human resources in the workplace and contribute to designing sustainable workplace models?

2. Background

2.1. Political and institutional context

This research embeds itself according to the existing political and institutional structure working towards understanding, defining and solving sustainability challenges. The macro-level institutions and sustainability policy-making that guide this research are firstly, the United Nations with the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and its 17 Sustainable Development Goals. Secondly, the European Union represented by the European Commission. Thirdly, the Swedish Riksdag.

2.1.1. The global context: The United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals

When employees are disengaged from their work, they both suffer from lower levels of well-being in their personal lives and in their professional lives (Wollard, 2011). Employee disengagement can thus be viewed as a direct barrier to the achievement of the SDG number 3 which has for objective to promote good health and well-being by “ensuring healthy lives and promoting the well-being for all at all ages is essential to sustainable development” (United Nations, n.d.). Even more closely connected, disengaged employees can be seen as a failure to achieve the SDG number 8 which has for objective to promote decent work and economic growth by creating “the conditions that allow people to have quality jobs” (United Nations, n.d.).

2.1.2. The continental context: The European Commission

Besides the United Nations, the European Commission (2017) has created a strategic framework on health and safety at work for the years of 2014 to 2020 in an attempt to improve the health and

well-being indicators in the European workplaces. The European Commission stated in their 2017 report that “it is necessary to raise employers' awareness and provide them with further guides and tools” (European Commission, 2017) as to address, manage and try to solve the well-being challenges and psychosocial risks in the workplace in European Union member states. Indirectly, employee disengagement harms the performance of teams, companies, organizations and economies (European Commission, 2017). Furthermore the Gallup surveys have calculated that only 10% of Western European employees are engaged at work, well below the United States of America where 33% of employees are estimated to be engaged (Gallup, 2014).

2.1.3. The national context: The Swedish Riksdag

In 2003, the Swedish government issued the document “A Swedish Strategy for Sustainable Development” in order to communicate the government’s vision of sustainable development based upon the three component approach of economic, social and environmental sustainability. The Swedish ministry of employment states through its government communication with its document “a work environment strategy for modern working life” that one of the three prioritized focus-points of the strategy and backed by concrete measures is to achieve “a sustainable working life” (Riksdag, 2016).

2.1.4. The applied context: Glimworks

This research has been conducted in collaboration with a small-medium sized IT company of 15 employees with its office in the city of Lund, in the South of Sweden. The data collected provides insights into organizational sustainability and how human sustainability understood as the human capital and resources of employees are sustained over time with the strategic implementation of engagement theory. The result is a sustainable workplace model based upon six variables and thirteen themes which put together enable employee engagement to increase and employees’ capital and resources to be sustained over time.

3. Theoretical Framework

The originality and value of this research is partly found in its interdisciplinary approach wherein a theoretical bridge is built between sustainability science and engagement theories. The fields overlap and share a common aim to improve human lives. In order to analyze and provide an in-depth understanding of the relationship between sustainability science and workplace sustainability, different aspects of engagement theories are used to guide the research of this thesis.

3.1. Employee Disengagement

Employee disengagement has been defined by Kahn (1990) as “an internal process, with disengaged employees tending to withdraw emotionally, lack energy for the work, and become uninvolved and uncaring about the people and tasks they encounter at work.” (Wollard, 2011, p. 528).

Following this definition, this research suggests that when 90% of the worldwide workforce experiences low-energy levels and a low willingness to contribute meaningfully (Gallup, 2017), it is a clear sign that we are facing a major and silent epidemic problem in the modern workforce. Disengagement is an urgent issue in the beginning of the 21st century and further researching and implementing employee engagement strategies are of vital necessity to move towards greater human and organizational sustainability (Knight et al., 2016).

From a human perspective, a disengaged employee is more likely to be prone to burnout risks, mental-health risks and stress-related problems (Wollard, 2011). This relates directly to the challenges observed by the European Commission as “over half of the EU workers report that stress is common in their workplace and 4 in 10 think it is not handled well” (European Commission, 2017). From a social perspective, an important perspective is “organizational commitment” (Travis et al., 2016, p.1) wherein disengaged employees are less likely to perform well at work. Finally, for a country like the United States of America (USA), levels of disengaged at work produces an annual cost of \$300 Billion in lost productivity, a cost higher than the total GDP of a country like Portugal (Pink, 2009). That is a direct opportunity cost both in regards to socio-economic development and government tax revenue generation loss which could finance for example social and environmental policies and programs.

3.2. Employee Engagement

Employee engagement is a field that came about in 1990 from Kahn’s early work on engagement theory in the workplace (Shuck, 2011). Engagement theory has evolved to many different fields in an effort to resolve the discontinuity in defining employee engagement between various scientific fields, stemming from “psychology, sociology, management, human resource development (HRD), human resource management, and health care” (Shuck, 2011, p.1), Brad Shuck (2011) defined the existence of four major approaches:

- a) Kahn’s (1990) Need-Satisfying Approach
- b) Maslach et al.’s (2001) Burnout-Antithesis Approach
- c) Harter et al.’s (2002) Satisfaction-Engagement Approach
- d) Saks’s (2006) Multidimensional Approach

In an updated effort to define employee engagement, Brad Shuck with several other scholars have currently come to the following definition: “a positive, active, work-related psychological state operationalized by the maintenance, intensity, and direction of cognitive, emotional, and behavioral energy” (Shuck et al., 2017). In that sense when employee engagement is enacted through the maintenance of employees’ energy levels, it can be argued that human sustainability is achieved by having sustained the human capital and resources of employees such as their health, skills, knowledge and leadership (Goodland, 2002). Employee engagement is thus a necessary precondition and effective strategy to operationalize human sustainability in the workplace to achieve greater organizational sustainability.

A meta-analysis study by the three scholars, Caroline Knight, Malcolm Patterson and Jeremy Dawson (2016) concludes that although work engagement interventions had a positive impact on work engagement, “the overall effect on work engagement was small” (Knight et al., 2016, p.1). It therefore calls for further research and broader interventions that bridge different fields in an interdisciplinary effort to solving disengagement challenges in the workplace.

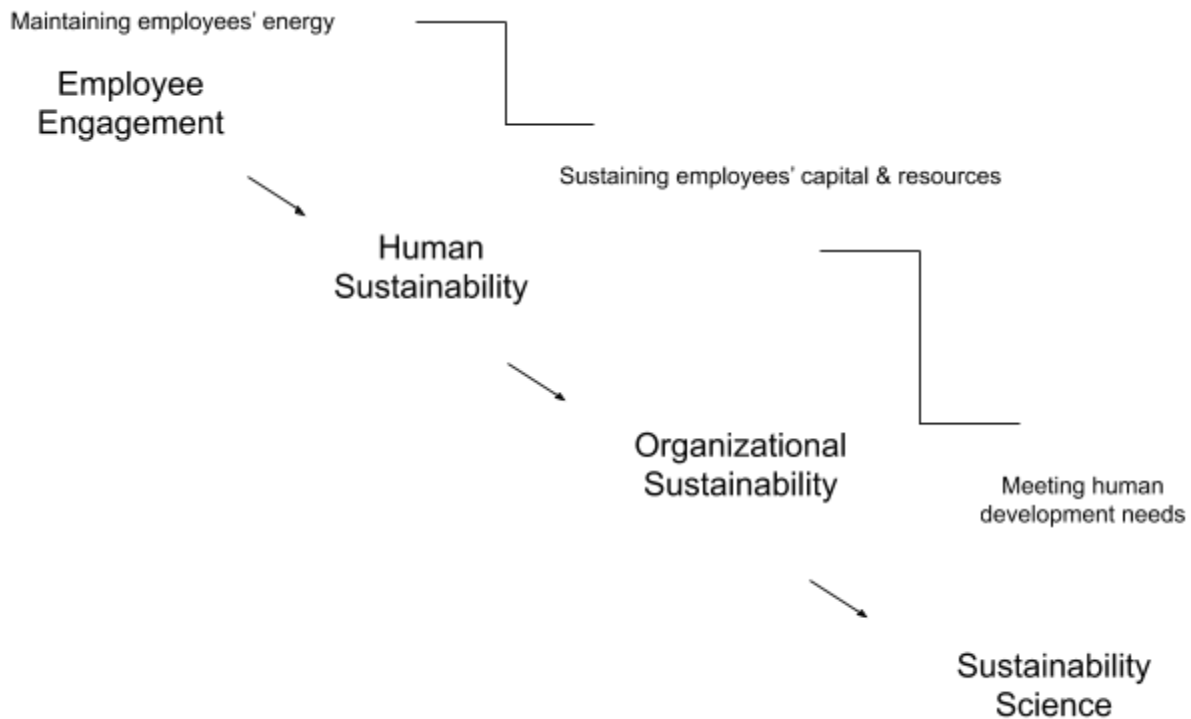


Figure 1: A theoretical model which extends engagement theory to sustainability science (Own Illustration)

3.3. Employee engagement through purpose, autonomy and mastery (Pink, 2009)

In regards to engagement theory, this thesis is partly structured around a conceptual framework proposed by Daniel H. Pink (2009) which attempts at providing employers and employees with the conceptual tools and theories on how to develop engagement levels in the workplace. Additionally, Daniel H. Pink argues for why transforming corporate culture towards higher levels of employee engagement also improves the bottom line of companies, besides improving individual well-being. In that sense, employee engagement is presented as a win-win solution for both employees and employers; a point-of-view which guides the analysis and discussions sections of this research. With the example of the variable autonomy, he highlights that “businesses that offered autonomy grew at four times the rate of the control-oriented firms and had one-third turnover” (Pink, 2009, p.91).

The following citation; “autonomous people working toward mastery perform at very high levels. But those who do so in the service of some greater objective can achieve even more” (Pink, 2009, p. 133) gives a clear overview in which order the three variables; purpose, autonomy and mastery are placed in the conceptual framework I develop through the research of this thesis. I place purpose as the

foundational variable, both because of the scholarly research which observes that it may be the ultimate human driver and also because it seems that without purpose, it is harder to develop the two other variables, autonomy and mastery. Finally, autonomy is placed before mastery as I embed myself within the viewpoint that developing autonomy is a necessary prerequisite for developing mastery.

3.3.1. Purpose

Two drivers have been well known in science to be at the origin of our motivation to take action; our biological drive and the reward-punishment drive. However Daniel H. Pink (2009), with other scholars, are pointing out to the existence of a third drive which explains high performance; namely our drive for purpose. In his own words “the science shows that the secret to high performance isn’t our biological drive or our reward-and-punishment drive, but our third drive - our deep-seated desire to direct our own lives, to extend and expand our abilities, and to live a life of purpose” (Pink, 2009. p.145).

Additional research has established that purpose goals predicted greater well-being than profit goals wherein “the people who’d had purpose goals and felt they were attaining them reported higher levels of satisfaction and subjective well-being than when they were in college, and quite low levels of anxiety and depression” (Pink, 2009. p.142).

3.3.2. Autonomy

Autonomy is one of the three basic human needs, besides competence and relatedness, as identified by Edward L. Deci and Richard Ryan (2004) in their self-determination theory. In addition, the basic human need for autonomy was identified as the most important need out of the three.

“In 2004, Deci and Ryan, along with Paul Baard of Fordham University, carried out a study of workers at an American investment bank. The three researchers found greater job satisfaction among employees whose bosses offered “autonomy support”” (Pink, 2009. p.91). Daniel H. Pink links autonomy to our human nature “to be curious and self-directed” (Pink, 2009. p.89).

Autonomy consists of four essential features: “what people do, when they do it, how they do it, and whom they do it with” (Pink, 2009. p.94) and respectively refers to freedom over task, time, technique and team. In regards to management, leadership and corporate culture, he insists that “it requires resisting the temptation to control people - and instead doing everything we can to reawaken their deep-seated sense of autonomy” (Pink, 2009. p.89).

3.3.3. Mastery

The third variable of the conceptual framework is mastery which refers to the individual willingness to improve skills, seek challenges, stretch oneself and consciously aim at improving. In regards to employee engagement through the lense of productivity, a “study of 11,000 industrial scientists and engineers working at companies in the United States found that the desire for intellectual challenge - that is, the urge to master something new and engaging - was the best predictor of productivity. Scientists

motivated by this intrinsic desire filed significantly more patents than those whose main motivation was money” (Pink, 2009, p.117). Similarly to purpose and autonomy, it seems that seeking mastery is a better predictor of engagement than financial rewards.

4. Methodology

4.1 Ontological and epistemological viewpoint

The epistemological stance of this research is constructivism wherein the sustainable workplace model designed is achieved through the shared investigation of how sustaining human resources in the workplace is understood and explained (Spencer & Snape, 2003). In addition, the qualitative nature of this research implies that my relationship with the social phenomena of human sustainability within organizational sustainability is interactive and not value-free (Spencer & Snape, 2003). This research assumes that higher levels of employee engagement will positively contribute to human sustainability, organizational sustainability and sustainable development. The ontological position of this research is subtle-realism wherein an external reality of human well being exists independent of our beliefs. However this reality is only knowable through our human minds and the socially constructed meanings we assign (Spencer & Snape, 2003).

4.2. Research Design

This research is a qualitative study of organizational and human sustainability through the lense of employee engagement in modern post-industrial workplaces. The objective of the qualitative data of this research is to describe and interpret the experience shared by employees in the Swedish small-medium sized IT company Glimworks (Snape et al., 2003). Glimworks and its employees were selected for the engagement level of the employees and because of Glimworks’ unique approach and strategy to create and promote a sustainable workplace to sustaining human resources and capital in the workplace.

In order to collect primary qualitative data to examine and attempt to answer the two research questions, 15 interviews and 1 focus group were conducted. In the end, 7 interviews and the focus group made the final selection for the data analysis as to keep a geographical, company-size and sectoral relevance. The geographical focus of the data collected is Sweden and more specifically the southernmost region of Skåne. A small-medium sized company was selected through a thorough purposive sampling, a method where a unit is selected depending on desired characteristics (Bryman, 2016), in this case the company culture. As this allows employers to be more flexible in experimenting and creating new workplace models. The information technology (IT) sector was chosen because the type of work, tasks and labor faculties necessary in this sector are representative of a post-industrial economy (Gallup, 2017). In order to build a knowledge base on employee engagement, secondary data on Western European employee engagement from the analytics and advisory company Gallup is analyzed (Gallup, 2017).

The participants in the semi-structured interviews and focus group discussion are working in the

Swedish company Glimworks and are representative of a highly educated and highly skilled labor force.

The theoretical framework used to design and conduct the 7 semi-structured interviews and the focus group discussion is the overlapping literature of the fields of human sustainability, organizational sustainability and engagement theory.

4.3. Research Method

As for the literature review, the scientific database Scopus was used to search for published scientific literature containing both qualitative and quantitative data on the two following fields: human sustainability, social sustainability, organizational sustainability, employee disengagement, employee engagement.

Semi-structured interviews and a focus group discussion were selected as methods to collect data in order to gather in-depth insights and understandings of why and how employees at Glimworks sustain their engagement and well being levels, as well as how they envision improving them. The data is further used to produce a model for how Glimworks has created a sustainable workplace by including both employer and employees in the decision-making.

4.4. Data Collection

4.4.1. Semi-structured interviews

The 6 semi-structured interviews with Glimworks' employees had for aim to research why and how employees report to be engaged at Glimworks. Every single employee interviewed stated that Glimworks is the most engaging workplace they have ever worked in, and do not see themselves changing workplace. Glimworks can be viewed as a pioneering company in implementing most of the theories presented in the literature review and conceptual framework and therefore serves as an excellent case to gather more data on the actual implementation of those theories to successfully create a sustainable workplace which fosters employee engagement.

The semi-structured interview with Johan Ranefors, Glimworks' founder and CEO, had for aim to collect key insights on the type of leadership, management and workplace culture which is required to build sustainable workplaces and to harness employee engagement. The interview guide (Appendix I) was developed in order to collect the data needed in order to answer the posed research questions. In addition, Daniel H. Pink's (2009) theoretical framework on employee engagement was used to structure the interview guide.

Table 4: Semi-structured interview characteristics.

Name	Title	Company or Organization	Country, City
Johan Ranefors	Founder & CEO	Glimworks	Sweden, Lund
Daniel Görtz	In-house philosopher	Glimworks	Sweden, Lund
Bogdan	Employee	Glimworks	Sweden, Lund
Emily	Employee	Glimworks	Sweden, Lund
Johan	Employee	Glimworks	Sweden, Lund
Maria	Employee	Glimworks	Sweden, Lund
Olle	Employee	Glimworks	Sweden, Lund

4.4.2. Focus group discussion

The focus group discussion with Johan Ranefors and three Glimworks' employees had for aim to expand the data collection from the original 7 semi-structured interviews in order to build the sustainable workplace model in co-creation with Glimworks. The interview guide (see Appendix II) was developed aiming to provide useful data in order to answer the posed research questions.

Table 5: Characteristics of Focus Group Discussion participants from the Swedish company Glimworks (2019).

Name	Title	Company or Organization	Country, City
Johan Ranefors	Founder & CEO	Glimworks	Sweden, Lund
Daniel Görtz	In-house philosopher	Glimworks	Sweden, Lund
Johan	Employee	Glimworks	Sweden, Lund
Maria	Employee	Glimworks	Sweden, Lund

Interview participants were chosen according to four different criteria, aimed at collecting useful and robust data.

Table 6: Inclusion criteria for the selection of participants.

Employees with decision-making power and responsibility over their engagement
Employees predominantly using cognitive abilities (rather than physical)
Employees predominantly working in a modern office environment (high-quality infrastructure & service, desk-work, meetings etc.)
English speaking

4.5. Data Analysis

The qualitative method to analyze the findings is conducted by using thematic analysis. Thematic analysis is done in order to bring to light unique insights to sustain human capital and resources in the workplace, and to promote a greater understanding of how to implement organizational sustainability. The thematic analysis has for aim to generate initial codes and gradually find, review and select final themes in order to portray the data collected (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Both the 7 semi-structured interviews and the focus group discussion were transcribed and a thematic analysis was conducted (Braun & Clarke, 2006). All the data, more than 300 pages of transcription, was coded before 6 variable and 13 themes were identified and used to structure the discussion and contribution in the form of the sustainable workplace model.

Using the output of the thematic analysis, the analysis and discussion section examines how the unique workplace model in Glimworks fosters the long term sustainability of its human resources, in other words Glimworks' employees. The analysis and discussion is also structured around the conceptual framework based on Daniel H. Pink's work on the three variables predictive of employee engagement purpose, autonomy and mastery as presented earlier. The analysis results in the creation of a sustainable workplace model for the modern workplace in the context of post-industrial economies and of the highly specialized sector of IT. Finally, the sustainable workplace model framework is discussed and critically assessed.

4.6. Data Limitations

Glimworks was chosen as a research focus purposefully because its employees expressed to be engaged. Nearly all employees estimated from their own experience that Glimworks is the most engaging and sustainable workplace they have ever worked for, and that on a personal level, they have never felt this well at work. The logic behind this decision is that I wanted to examine and answer the research questions in a way which provides data coming from the 10% of employees that estimate to be engaged, so that this research and suggestions can be of benefit to the 90% others who are still struggling with being and feeling disengaged. In that sense, this research only takes into account a small proportion of the labor force.

In addition, the results, discussion and contributions may not be applicable in a sector where manual and repetitive labor is required or in a region of the world where the economy is predominantly agrarian and/or industrial.

The sustainable workplace model is grounded on the qualitative data from the 7 semi-structured interviews and the focus group. Quantitative data would add to the robustness of the model by minimizing personal opinions and subjective preference, thereby providing data that may represent a more objective description of how human capital and resources can be sustained in the workplace. However, due to limitations in time and in order to provide an in-depth analysis of the qualitative aspects of the issue, qualitative data collection fell outside of the scope of this thesis.

Although those findings can not be generalized to Sweden's entire IT sector or economy, they are a strong contribution in advancing the fields of human sustainability, organizational sustainability and engagement theory as well as providing a conceptual model to Sweden's Riksdag and to the European Commission in their attempt to solve sustainability challenges in the workplace.

5. Analysis & Discussion

This first part of the analysis and discussion explores how human and organizational sustainability are perceived within Glimworks' workplace by presenting the findings based on the focus group discussion. The second part presents the findings from the 7 semi-structured interviews in regards to how the three variables predictive of employee engagement; purpose, autonomy and mastery relate to human and organizational sustainability in the workplace. For each of those three variables, thirteen themes were identified as unique insights as a result of data analysis. In the third part, the additional three variables of community, fit/match and leadership are presented as also being sustainability vectors in the workplace. In a fourth part, the thirteen themes and the 6 variables are brought together in a model to conceptually represent the pillars of a sustainable workplace. In a fifth and final part, the findings, six variables, thirteen themes and the sustainable workplace model are discussed.

5.1. Sustainability in the workplace

5.1.1. Glimworks' definition of a sustainable workplace

The first objective of the focus group discussion was to have the four participants put forward a common definition and conceptualization of how they relate the degree of their human sustainability in Glimworks' workplace.

According to the four participants human sustainability is a necessary precondition for organizational sustainability (Focus Group, 2019). In that sense, employees that sustain their engagement in the workplace are a step forward towards enabling greater organizational sustainability (Focus Group, 2019).

The four participants decide to work with the definitional understanding that “sustainability in the workplace is about employees being able to continue working instead of stopping to work. What makes it that people do not burnout or do not take sick-leave” (Focus Group, 2019).

More specifically, the participants postulate that human sustainability in the workplace ought to be viewed from an organizational perspective and an ethical perspective. The former should have for aim that the “labor force must be sustained and not wear out, to go on sick-leave, to be angry, to start striking etc” (Focus Group, 2019). The latter should have for aim to defend the right of employees to feel good and be happy in their workplace. According to Daniel Görtz both the organizational perspective and the ethical perspective need to be put together (Focus Group, 2019).

Finally, the participants chose to refer to “sustaining human resources” as the goal of human sustainability within organizational sustainability (Focus Group, 2019). This highly correlates to Robert Goodland’s (2002) position whereby human sustainability ought to sustain human capital.

5.1.2. The characteristics of a sustainable workplace

The following characteristics are representative of a workplace which sustains human resources over the long term. These insights summarize the responses participants gave to questions about human sustainability, organizational sustainability and sustaining human capital in the workplace (Miller, 2013).

Table 7: characteristics of a sustainable workplace from the perspective of employees at Glimworks (2019)

Employees help and care about each other
The amount and length of sick-leave taken by employees is decreased
Employees feel good
Employees manage short term performance and long term well-being
Employees can openly communicate and take time-off when they are not well
The workplace enables the individuality of each employee
Employees have ownership of their labor
Responsibility of tasks and projects are clearly distributed and communicated
Reward systems are encouraged such as the activation of dopamine and serotonin releases
Employees receive validation through peer-to-peer recognition

Employees are able to be themselves fully
Employees feel that their work contributes meaningfully to their peers, to the company and to the world
Employees are emotionally invested in how well the company performs
Employees aim to improve their skills and receive the necessary support to grow

5.1.3. Why do sustainable workplaces matter

To design, promote and implement workplaces that successfully enact the above characteristics is regarded as an important value by the participants. To strive towards greater organizational sustainability is perceived by the participants to be one of the most important societal goals for the accomplishment of sustainable development (Focus Group, 2019). They argued similarly to environmental scientist Carl Folke that the ultimate goal of sustainability is about developing and continuing to improve the wellbeing and the lives of people (Miller, 2013). In that sense, sustaining environmental resources can be understood from an anthropocentric lense wherein they enable the eventual purpose of sustainability which is to sustain our societies and human life quality (Miller, 2013; Focus group, 2019).

Scholars emphasize the importance of placing value on achieving human and organizational sustainability alongside achieving environmental sustainability (Pfeffer, 2010; Goodland, 2002; Park & Kim 2017; Miller, 2013; Folke, 2013). Daniel Görtz relates similarly to this line of reasoning, as he shares his belief that “something that is sustained is something that we put a value on. The higher the value we put on something, the greater importance its sustainability is perceived” (Focus Group, 2019).

The participants believe that human sustainability “is a primary societal goal and it is a primary goal for all organizations” (Focus Group, 2019). As well as being a productive way to frame sustainability within the workplace because it opens the door to measuring sustainability characteristics that employees in a company believe to be important (Focus Group, 2019). One example from the literature that was pinpointed in the focus group discussion is “the effective mindfulness interventions in schools which have enabled to decrease sick-leave, as well as to decrease stress. They are moving towards a more sustainable organization” (Focus Group, 2019).

This insight into measuring desirable outcomes of sustainability enables a clearer bridge to be built with engagement theory metrics such as employee engagement (Pfeffer, 2010).

5.2. Employee engagement contributes to sustainable workplaces

Engagement theory through the conceptual framework proposed by Daniel H. Pink (2009) relates closely to the definition and conceptualization of human sustainability suggested by Robert Goodland (2002).

Whereas the latter motivates that we need to sustain human capital in the form of people's health, skills, knowledge and leadership, the former argues for sustaining employees' engagement and wellbeing in the workplace. In other words, employees' health and ability to meaningfully use their skills, knowledge and leadership (Pink, 2009; Goodland 2002).

This overlap between engagement theory and conceptualizations of human sustainability and organizational sustainability is further confirmed by the insights and themes extracted from the semi-structured interviews and the focus group discussion (Kim & Park, 2017).

This research thus argues for employee engagement as a strategy to improve the human sustainability of workplaces and thus the overall organizational sustainability of companies (Pink, 2009). In other words, when employees feel engaged in their workplaces, they experience higher levels of wellbeing which contribute to employees being able to sustain their human capital and resources over the long term (Focus group, 2019).

The following section provides the contribution of the three employee engagement variables purpose, autonomy and mastery to the further understanding and conceptualization of sustainability within the workplace (Pink, 2009).

5.2.1. Purpose

One of the characteristics which harnesses human and organizational sustainability in Glimworks is that employees believe and feel that their work contributes positively to the world (Focus Group, 2019). This characteristic relates to the first variable of Daniel H. Pink conceptual framework on employee engagement, namely purpose.

Three themes have emerged from the data analysis focusing on how purpose is understood and used as a strategic variable to sustain human capital and resources in the workplace at Glimworks (Pink, 2009).

The first theme is the alignment of the employees' personal life purpose to Glimworks' company purpose.

A recurring component in several interviews that positively develops purpose is the conscious decision to align the employee's personal sense of purpose and the company's purpose. As noted by Johan Ranefors, purpose must start within the employee, it is not something that Glimworks as a company or Johan as an employer can enforce on an employee; "if people in your company do not have an inner-drive, a life plan, there is nothing that can be aligned with the company's own vision" (Ranefors, 18.03.2019). He further comments that "when you combine the organization's vision with the employees' personal stories, it just makes it a lot stronger (Ranefors, 18.03.2019).

Johan Ranefors' belief is well supported by researcher Millar who claims that "if you want people to be engaged and motivated by what your organization is setting out to achieve, they first need to be

engaged in their own life. People behave how they feel. No amount of employee-engagement activity is going to change this fundamentally.” (Millar, 2012, p.3).

When it comes to living an engaged life both personally and professionally, one of the most effective ways to achieve that may be to merge them both closer together (Ranefors, 18.03.2019). In that sense, aligning the employee’s personal life vision to the professional vision of an organization is a way to experience work as part of your personal life and work as play (Csikszentmihalyi, 2000). Johan Ranefors further clarifies this view by stating that “it is very important to align the company’s vision with your employees’ life vision. There is nothing such as living only in two worlds: the private and professional life. If you want to be happy, it’s best you try to align those two projects” (Ranefors, 18.03.2019).

Glimworks is from that perspective a vehicle for the employee to actualize their own personal visions (employee 2, 03.04.2019; employee 4, 03.04.2019; employee 5, 03.04.2019).

The second theme is that Glimworks’ employees take personal ownership of the company’s purpose.

The employees at Glimworks mention being strongly invested in how well Glimworks operates. They see a direct correlation between the quality of their work and how it impacts the company’s performance (Pink, 2009). Johan related especially to this theme as he shares that “at Glimworks I feel I can be in charge and say this is what I want to contribute with and to create. We can all lead in this culture ... I really want to get the job done that I said I would do when I came here. I really want the company to do well. That creates a desire to contribute and to be a part of the organization” (Focus Group, 2019).

This second theme is especially important when sustaining their engagement becomes tough (Duckworth, 2017). In that sense a strong personal ownership of the company’s purpose makes it easier for employees to sustain their human capital at work for a longer period of time and can thus be seen as a preventive strategy for avoiding burnouts in the workplace (Maslach et al., 2001).

The third theme is that Glimworks’ employees believe that the company and the work they do serves the greater good.

The greater employees perceive that the work they do positively impacts the world, the greater their engagement and ability to sustain their resources (Focus group, 2019). The work must have an explicit meaning; “it feels good to do something that I feel improves and helps the world” (Focus Group, 2019).

Employees at Glimworks believe it is a company with the vision “to help the world progress and to try to develop the next new big thing, to make a paradigm shift in computer software. That is what I like with Glimworks so strongly, it feels that the number one priority is to do something good and money comes second,” (employee 4, 2019). In saying so Johan is an example of how in recent years, impact have become a stronger predictor of engagement than financial incentives (Pink, 2009).

5.2.2. Autonomy

Another characteristic which harnesses human and organizational sustainability in Glimworks is that employees have ownership of their labor (Focus Group, 2019). This characteristic relates to the second variable of Daniel H. Pink's (2009) conceptual framework on employee engagement, namely autonomy. From the data collected, it can be argued that within this research autonomy stands out as the most important variable for many participants, and for some even life-changing in regards to their quality of life (Pink, 2009). So how does a high degree of autonomy in the workplace influence positively their engagement and contributes to sustaining human capital and resources?

Although Glimworks employees possess all four key components of autonomy as encouraged by Daniel H. Pink (2009) (freedom over time, freedom over task, freedom over technique and freedom over team), the data analysis puts forward two components which greatly influence the human and organizational sustainability of Glimworks' workplace.

The first theme is autonomy over time and location (freedom over time).

Employees at Glimworks make their own schedules, they decide where to work from and during what time, every single day of the year.

In the interviews, one participant states that having control over when and where they work from improves their engagement and makes the workplace more sustainable (Shuck, 2011). The increased flexibility facilitates the management of their work flow and recovery (employee 6, 05.03.2019);

"I work now 75% and that I can sometimes at 9pm work and put some last hours later in the evening is super good for me. When you get sometimes a solution to a problem in the mind, then you want to write it down immediately and work on it immediately or research it and check if you can immediately do it instead of having to wait until 08:00 the next day, is super good" (Employee 6, 03.04.2019).

While reflecting on how having autonomy over working hours and where to work, employee 3 strongly related to the fact that "it was a relief for me actually because as a single mother with a child to get to school and to pick up from school, having this flexible time, it just made my life so much easier" (Employee 3, 05.03.2019). In addition she similarly concluded that a flexible working model is having a valuable influence on her work; "being a creative I know that it is not something you can schedule, I will come up with this idea at 9 o'clock tomorrow. It just won't happen. It will happen tonight, it will happen maybe tomorrow at a different time. So being able to adjust those things it is very valuable to me" (Employee 3, 05.03.2019)

Perhaps most importantly from her perspective of being a parent, this working model according to her plays an important role in improving her family and private life:

"I don't need to stress the same way ... I can take time off if I need to and if there is a school presentation on one afternoon I can do that without feeling bad. I don't need to worry about those things, it is about my sense of freedom that I can do what I want. And since I can do what I want and I feel trusted, I also don't want to let them down, so I will do my work. It is not that I will escape my

responsibility because no one is checking in on me because I will try to give back the trust that they have in me” (Employee 3, 05.03.2019).

Furthermore, this increased level of quality family life is evaluated as having a positive influence of creating sustainable societies and communities. In that sense, employee 3 believes that a flexible working environment improves society because “there are many people who struggle with full time work, kids and family life and when you have fixed times and no flexibility, it will not come together everyday” (Employee 3, 05.03.2019).

The second theme is autonomy over task definition and execution (freedom over task).

Employees at Glimworks decide what to work on and how they execute their tasks (Goodland, 2002). Employees at Glimworks have full ownership of the goals they set, and get to articulate those goals along the three levels of why a task must be done, how it must be done, and what the outcome should be (Sinek, 2009). When employees have autonomy of what tasks they work on and how they choose to go about solving and delivering that task, employee engagement further reinforces (Focus Group, 2019):

“I feel that I can work as I like best and that has enabled me to perform better and also to be able to take time off when I felt I needed. This has helped me perform better on the long term. There is an understanding and caring of the employee” (Focus Group, 2019).

Organizations that do not support autonomy do not even know that they make their employees feel imprisoned (Focus Group, 2019). According to the participants, you need a high degree of freedom in order to access the feeling of task and contribution ownership. Most importantly, true task autonomy must go beyond the ability to suggest, to ask questions and to exchange with your manager, rather it is about having full ownership about task definition and execution. The decision-making power must be distributed throughout all employees and not centralized in the hands of a few managers (Goodland, 2002). Daniel Görtz emphasises that when autonomy is enacted in such a manner, it then becomes “another level of freedom. That is where the real autonomy is when you get to define the problem, the question and how to solve it”(Focus Group, 2019).

Employee 2 stated that “responsibilities are healthy, it is a healthy thing. It forces me to think for myself. In a way it’s more encouraging because if you do something really good, you have done it yourself and it should be a huge reward” (Employer 2, 03.04.2019). In relation to the positive health aspect of having autonomy on how to work and solve tasks, employee 6 mentions that when he gets “to find out which is the best way to solve the problem ... I feel I am much more effective” (Employee 6, 03.04.2019).

Employee 2 relates to how the higher the degree of responsibility, the higher the reward of achieving a task is experienced; “I do like feeling that I can on my own solve something, the more I feel I am responsible the more I feel proud, if it’s good it’s much more rewarding” (Employee 2, 03.04).

5.2.3. Mastery

Another characteristic which harnesses human and organizational sustainability in Glimworks is that employees aim to improve their skills and receive the necessary support to grow (Focus Group, 2019). This characteristic relates to the third variable of Daniel H. Pink's (2009) conceptual framework on employee engagement, namely mastery. The reason for why I place the variable autonomy before the variable mastery is because the data suggests that mastery is further enhanced when an employee has initially strengthened his/her own working autonomy (Goodland, 2002).

Glimworks employees share a common growth mindset and have found in Glimworks a company which greatly supports competence development (Focus group, 2019).

Three themes have emerged from the data analysis focusing on how mastery is understood and used as a strategic variable to sustain human capital and resources in the workplace at Glimworks.

The first theme is the alignment of the employees' personal passions and interests to their role at Glimworks and the work they are responsible for.

Several employees relate their working hours closely to their areas of passion and interest, even suggesting that they have succeeded in aligning their hobbies with their work (Employee 2, 03.04.2019; Employee 3, 05.03.2019; Employee 5, 03.04.2019; Employee 6, 03.04.2019).

Employee 6 highlights that it "is good for productivity, I think this is good for so many different things. You do what feels close to you, what interests you, your hobby and you can put that together with your work so that is a positive in all ways and sets (Shuck, 2011). I have achieved that at least. It is really fun" (Employee 6, 03.04.2019). Furthermore, employee 6 specifically highlighted that he has for conscious aim to "try to do my work into my hobby, and I believe that it makes us more productive so I try to remain interested with things I am working on" (Employee 6, 03.04.2019), once again reaffirming the relationship that he sees between aligning work with interest and how that can positively influence work productivity. The alignment of interest and work is a strong factor in enabling higher levels of engagement in the workplace (Shuck, 2011). Indeed employee 5 described her engagement at work to be high as "in one way it is impossible not to be engaged because ... I really wanted to find a job where I could write. It is stuff that I choose to do anyway so why would I not be engaged?" (Employee 5, 03.04.2019).

Aligning personal interests with work seems to not only enable a higher degree of engagement in the workplace but also as an employee suggests, it may overlap to improving private life as "the work affects the personal life a lot. There is stress in not being pleased where you are and of course that flows to other areas, your personal life as an example" (Employee 2, 03.04.2019).

The emphasis on increased productivity when referring to employees aligning personal passions and interests with work tasks is translated into a higher degree of human capital sustainability as

task-achievement positively triggers reward systems that sustain the mental, emotional and nervous resources of employees (Goodland, 2002).

The second theme is that Glimworks' employees seek constant growth and learning.

The scientific literature theorizes that an employee which embraces a growth mindset experience higher engagement (Duckworth, 2017).

Pursuing mastery through a growth mindset is not something that comes quickly and easily (Duckworth, 2017). It needs perseverance and patience as in the case of employee 2 who experiences that "there is always something new to learn, it takes time to conquer a language ... This profession takes a long time to master: that was a hard thing in the beginning, everything took much longer than I thought" (Employee 2, 03.04.2019).

However when employees get the opportunity to learn and to stretch on the workplace, it results in higher engagement levels as well as it grows the human capital of employees as defined by Robert Goodland in the form of improved skills and knowledge (2002). Engagement and human capital are especially improved when employees get to learn within their personal field of interests (Employee 6, 03.04.2019).

The internal reward that is felt by employees that are learning and growing in relation to the progress and/or achievement of a task is a strong component of their human sustainability in the workplace (Duckworth, 2017). Indeed, employee 2 reflects that "in terms of engagement, I get a kick out of solving a big issue because I like problem-solving. Seeing something come alive. See something work after you worked hard for it, that is a rewarding job after you solve a bug for several hours. It is really rewarding in itself" (Employee 2, 03.04.2019). This insights correlates to the findings of researcher Carol Dweck and her 2006 book, *Mindset: The New Psychology of Success*, where goals are differentiated between performance goals and learning goals with the latter being the most predictive of mastery (Dweck, 2006). Once again, the traditional organizational paradigm of performance-driven purposes as well as financial incentives to sustain employees resources is, from this theoretical viewpoint, proven to be less effective in achieving employee wellbeing (Pink, 2009).

Employee 2 clearly mentioned that "I like my days better now ... I have enjoyed other works, but I have mostly gotten bored of them after a short while but this has lasted 2 years so far." (Employee 2, 03.04.2019) which highlights a possible relation between boredom and disengagement and in the reversed scenario, when work is aligned with interests, disengagement can be transformed into engagement (Wollard, 2011).

Lastly, purpose and mastery complement and reinforce each other (Pink, 2009). The more you improve your skills, the easier the work tasks become. Most importantly, purpose sustains the employees' willpower resources when the tasks they are involved in fall outside of their core competencies. Indeed, "if you have a strong purpose, then you can take the risk and continue even if you do not fully understand what you do. Purpose creates more motivation" (Focus Group, 2019).

The third theme is that Glimworks' employees embrace peer-to-peer recognition as a reward mechanism.

Within this theme, the participants in the focus group discussion and in the semi-structured interviews view peer-to-peer recognition through the perspective of chemical releases in the brain and body such as dopamine and serotonin as reward-systems which engage employees over longer periods of time and thus sustain their capital and resources over time (Goodland, 2002). In that sense, if we want to build a sustainable workplace, we must understand what creates serotonin in the brain and body as reward-systems. For instance, how the ways in which we speak to each other which produces serotonin, and the ways in which we talk to each other which creates stress and how we can avoid that (Focus group, 2019).

In addition, several employees put an emphasis on wanting to personally know their colleagues as that increases trust, security and productivity, best illustrated by the following reflection from employee 5: "Yes it's really enjoyable to work when you know each other's strengths. Especially when you have majorly different skills. It brings you back to yourself. What can I develop, what can I be good at? What can I give and offer?" (employee 5, 03.04.2019). In order to engage employees in pursuing mastery at work, a key pattern from the employees' insights is the importance of feeling included, appreciated, and receiving feedback and to get to know each other on a personal basis, ranging from their personal preferences, personal characteristics, personality traits, and personal life events and context. (Focus group, 2019). According to Glimworks' employees this helps in creating a culture where all employees can safely strive towards their personal mastery and support each other along the way (Pink, 2009).

Lastly, peer-to-peer recognition is strongly enacted when employees realize that they have contributed to an innovation in the company, especially when the outcome is closely related to the employees' personal passions and interests; "I work with what I want and can. That is a lot of fun, to feel that what you have done contributes. Especially when the colleagues find that it adds value" (employee 5, 03.04.2019). Daniel Görtz complements by adding that when he sees that his work adds value to his peers "that gives the energy to continue forward and to want to further contribute. That sustains the workforce. When the workforce is sub-optimally allocated, then that does not sustain" (Focus Group, 2019). In this sense, contributing to your peers in the workplace and receiving their recognition sustains your human capital (Miller, 2013).

5.3. Glimworks is founded on three additional variables

Although being the most comprehensive theoretical framework as to engage employees and sustain human capital in the workplace, Daniel H. Pink's (2009) framework on employee engagement should be complemented by three variables in the viewpoint of Glimworks' employees.

Those three additional variables are: community, fit/match and leadership. The following section will develop on these concepts and their implications for workplace sustainability.

5.3.1. Community

Glimworks' employees defined community as the spirit of togetherness which includes everyone's unique skills, personalities and potential: "a community must support that. It helps us see ourselves and each other so everyone can use their best strengths and grow in them. Otherwise the workplace can not become sustainable where the community does not enable everyone to fit-in" (Focus group, 2019).

Johan Ranefors clarifies what Glimworks' views as being a community by mentioning that "in an ideal organization everyone feels that they are crucial to the purpose and to the organization." The role of an organization is to integrate every employees' personal purpose and to merge those into a meta-purpose and community (Focus group, 2019).

In that sense, a workplace which sustains employee engaged is a workplace which encourages employees to get to know each other on a personal level. Several employees put an emphasis on wanting to personally know their colleagues as that increases trust, security and productivity (employee 5, 03.04.2019; employee 4, 03.04.2019; employee 5, 03.04.2019), best illustrated by the following reflection from employee 5:

"Yes it's really enjoyable to work when you know each other's strengths. Especially when you have majorly different skills. That person is next to me but I have no clue of what they know. Hopefully when we know that can go both ways and exchange. It brings you back to yourself. What can I develop, what can I be good at? What can I give and offer?" (employee 5, 03.04.2019).

5.3.2. Fit/match

Not only should a sustainable workplace fit-in every employee from a personal level but it must also do so in regards to competences as "you can not forget the basis which is the right person at the right place" (Focus group, 2019). Even if you have the three variables purpose, autonomy and mastery fully developed and implemented in your workplace, they will not have their desired effect if employees do not work with tasks relevant to their skills: "what creates sustainability is what matches and you must actively work towards creating a right match" (Focus Group, 2019).

Daniel H. Pink (2009) relates similarly to this variable as he writes that an important source of frustration within employees in modern workplaces is that they often find themselves in situations where there is a mismatch between "what people must do and what people can do. When what they must do exceeds their capabilities, the result is anxiety. When what they must do falls short of their capabilities, the result is boredom. But when the match is just right, the results can be glorious" (Pink, 2009, 119).

5.3.3. Leadership

The variable leadership examines and explores how Johan Ranefors leads and creates support systems which harness human and organizational sustainability in Glimworks.

Several were the employees, when sharing their views on the three variables, purpose, autonomy and mastery, to explicitly express that these variables can only result in engagement and human sustainability if they are enacted in a two-way street (Pink, 2009). In other words, the sustainable workplace model must be designed and implemented both from the perspective of the employees and the employer.

When leadership conveys that it has little awareness about an employee's engagement and well-being, this may negatively influence employee engagement (Miller, 2013). Vice versa, when leadership conveys empathy, interest and is proactive in finding out how the team is feeling, this can boost engagement, a sense of well-being and result in higher levels of human and organizational sustainability.

The three dimensions, purpose, autonomy and mastery, were all analyzed focusing on how leadership is understood and used as a strategic variable to sustain human capital and resources in the workplace at Glimworks (Pink, 2009).

The first theme is how leadership creates purpose.

According to several interviewees, a well-communicated vision boosts employee engagement and sustains employees' capital by enabling employee engagement to be sustained in times of stress, struggles and fatigue (Csikszentmihalyi, 2000; Ranefors, 18.03.2019; employee 3, 03.04.2019; employee 4, 03.04.2019).

In relating to how Glimworks' vision is evolving, employee 5 mentions that it is important to have "an acceptance to know that Glimworks is changing. It is about finding out how can we be stable and at the same time move with it" (employee 5, 03.04.2019).

The second theme is how leadership creates autonomy.

At the end of the day, employees can only become as autonomous as the workplace environment and employers enable employees to be autonomous (Pink, 2009). In other words, autonomy in the workplace starts with the employer's decision to make it a central value of the company's culture and model (Ranefors, 18.03.2019).

Johan Ranefors challenges the idea that in high-creative sectors employers and managers should impose deadlines to their employees. He has made deadlines an obsolete concept within Glimworks; "we have for instance no externally imposed deadlines ... There actually is a difference between external deadlines and internal deadlines: the internal deadlines are good ones, what we don't have is external deadlines" (Ranefors, 18.03.2019). That is to give full decision-making power to his employees as to how they execute their tasks. He further believes that externally imposed deadlines do "not work for an environment of innovation, change and constant improvement. The concept of deadlines is a superficial one which limits the capacity to envision great improvements in your products or your company" (Ranefors 18.03.2019). Johan Ranefors states with clear conviction that "as a founder, it is very

important to put the emphasis on self-management” (Ranefors, 18.03.2019). This principle is perceived as a sign of trust by Glimworks’ employees.

Instead employees must have ownership of their goals and personally evaluate the time-period of a task or project (Goodland, 2002). He acknowledges that internally imposed deadlines by the employees themselves is a good practice of self-management and autonomy.

The third theme is how leadership creates mastery.

Mastery and the pursuit of skill and knowledge development is best enacted according to Glimworks’ employees by meritocratic decision-making (Goodland, 2002). This implies that the workplace ought to be organized in a meritocratic way wherein the decision-maker or the leader is the person who has the best expertise in the specific area in question and/or who is able to most convincingly put forward their case (Ranefors, 18.03.2019, employee 4, 03.04.2019, employee 3, 05.03.2019).

Even though being the company’s founder and CEO, Johan Ranefors does not always take the leadership role in decisions, rather “I sometimes lead and I sometimes follow. For instance, if an employee knows more about a specific problem or project, it is natural that this employee takes the decisions and that I provide him with complementary support he might need” (Ranefors, 18.03.2019). Many employees felt strongly about working with a leader that embraces practices (employee 1 05.03.2019, employee 3, 05.03.2019; employee 4, 03.04.2019).

Working from the factors discussed above, the following section presents and discusses their grander implications and how they can create a strategic model for sustainable workplaces.

5.4. A sustainable workplace model

Table 8: Thirteen themes which sustain human resources and capital in the workplace (2019)

Theme 1	Glimworks’ employees align their personal life purpose to Glimworks’ purpose.
Theme 2	Glimworks’ employees take personal ownership of the company’s purpose.
Theme 3	Glimworks’ employees believe that the company and the work they do serves the greater good.
Theme 4	Glimworks employees possess autonomy over their time and location (freedom over time).

Theme 5	Glimworks employees possess autonomy over their task definition and execution (freedom over task).
Theme 6	Glimworks employees' align their personal passions and interests to their role at Glimworks and the work they are responsible for.
Theme 7	Glimworks' employees seek constant growth and learning.
Theme 8	Glimworks' employees embrace peer-to-peer recognition as a reward mechanism.
Theme 9	Glimworks' employees aim to build a community with a spirit of togetherness
Theme 10	Glimworks' employees seek to be the right person at the right place (fit/match)
Theme 11	A well-communicated vision engages and sustains Glimworks' employees
Theme 12	Trust-based leadership engages and sustains Glimworks' employees
Theme 13	A meritocratic decision-making system engages and sustains Glimworks' employees

The model below is a synthesis of the literature review, the employee engagement framework from Daniel H. Pink, the newly added 3 variables to Pink's framework, the unique contributions from the focus group discussion and the 7 semi-structured interviews, and the thematic analysis of the collected data.

This model serves as a proposition for employees and employers to explore the framework and its best-practices in their own workplace with the end-goal to promote human sustainability through increased employee engagement in order to improve their organizational sustainability, and as described earlier, also improve overall sustainability. In doing so, we should be able to improve the engagement levels of Western Europeans employees to above 10% (Gallup, 2017).

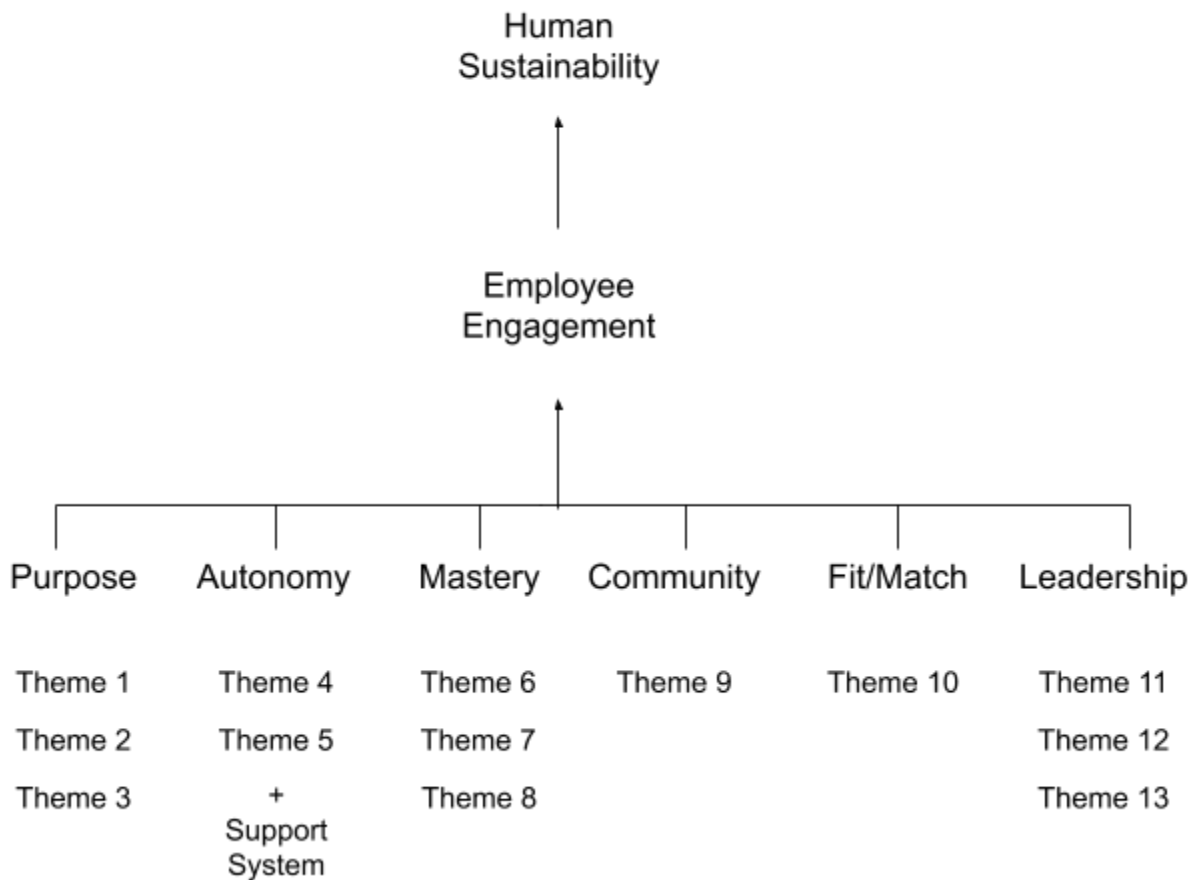


Figure 2: A sustainable workplace model (Own illustration).

The sustainable workplace model describes visually the process by which human sustainability can be implemented and achieved in modern workplaces. Employee engagement in this model is an instrumental strategy in order to increase the human sustainability of employees, in other words, how to sustain employees' resources and capital over time. Employee engagement is enacted by the activation of six variables which contribute to increasing employee engagement according to the literature and to the interviews and focus group discussion participants (Pink, 2009; Shuck, 2011; Wollard, 2011; Knight et al., 2016). The total of thirteen themes can be viewed as sub-variables representative of the best-practices that result in sustaining employees' capital and resources in accordance to the data analysis.

The following statement made by employee 6 encapsulates well the commonly shared feeling employees at Glimworks' have had in regards to the workplace model they have co-created with Johan Ranefors and co-designed within this research:

"I could not think I could find such a great workplace. I feel very well and I fully believe in this model and

this culture that has come about here, that Johan Ranefors and everyone else try to imprint at Glimworks. I believe in it very strongly and I feel it works great for me and I think also for Glimworks” (Employee 6, 03.04.2019).

To define and conceptualize what a sustainable workplace looks like, what it does and how it implements human sustainability strategies is highly relevant to promote broader organizational sustainability throughout organizations in both the private and public sector (Pink, 2009). Indeed, in today’s context of an ageing population, increasing ill-being levels in the workplace with increased burnout and stress statistics, the volatility and uncertainty of both employment precarity and constant skill renewal in a rapidly changing world, organizations alongside policy-makers are at the forefront of our modern wellbeing challenges in post-industrial economies (European Commission, 2017). Thus, sustainable workplace models like the one co-designed in this thesis with Glimworks are of vital research, practice and policy relevance as to propose and successfully implement an alternative vision for how labor markets are organized and regulated as to minimize the human consequences brought up by unsustainable workplaces and labor markets. Indeed from the narrow viewpoint of economic metrics, they can “communicate that everything is going well economically but when it comes to people in the workplace we do not have so many measures yet” (Focus Group, 2019). The risk is that only economic performance and bottom-line metrics are taken into consideration in decision-making by management and shareholders, oblivious to the fact that on average, only 10% of employees go to work engaged in Western Europe (Gallup, 2017). Fundamentally, when policy-makers, employers and employees do not have measurements to assess the human and organizational aspects of workplaces, it by default promotes a labor market environment wherein labor forces are viewed as exchangeable capital wherein if employees are unable to sustain their human capital and resources, that does not pose an organizational problem as they can be exchanged (Collins & Makowsky, 1972).

Viewed from another angle, “if the workforce sustains itself but the organization is not sustained economically, then the result is employees losing their job” (Focus Group, 2019). In that sense, both economic metrics and human metrics support each other to achieve organizational sustainability (Focus Group, 2019).

In 1970, renowned American economist Milton Friedman stipulates that organizations ought to neither have a social responsibility to their employees or an environmental responsibility to the natural capital of the earth. In a famously written piece, Milton Friedman argues that “the social responsibility of business is to increase its profits” (1970). There, he lays a conception of markets and organizations wherein employees are the agent of the individuals who own the organization. In this sense, the labor force is viewed purely in an instrumental and utilitarian perspective that can be used and exchanged with no concern of corporate social responsibility (Friedman, 1970).

As a response to the latter viewpoint, this thesis proposes an alternative worldview, one which places human sustainability at the center of an organization’s sustainability goals: “so that it feels that we are not only coming to Glimworks everyday and using up our resources but actually so that we can come to Glimworks as a self-sustaining environment. The average-employee who has been at Glimworks for 5 years, should become a wholer, more healthier, happier and stronger person than when they first

arrived” (Focus Group, 2019). In other words, organizations become not only vectors of economic performance but also vectors of human wellbeing and development. Johan Ranefors and Glimworks’ interviewed employees believe that if sustainable development is to be achieved, such a worldview is the basis of meeting human development needs (Cash et al., 2003). Employees at Glimworks confirm that they too, view their workplace as a place where they can meet their development needs, grow and sustain themselves.

A sustainable workplace is a workplace which both engages employees and sustains employees’ engagement capabilities. Engagement capability in that sense is made up of the four human capital components, health, skills, knowledge and leadership (Goodland, 2002). That is how sustainability science complements engagement theory in proposing a check-in-balance mechanism to avoid disengagement, illbeing, sick-leave and burnout. At the center of each organization are its people, the employees. In other words, the extent to which we may effectively and efficiently improve the sustainability of modern workplaces is dependent upon how we enable employees to feel at work, perform and collaborate within their teams and broader stakeholder networks (Schmidt & al., 2019). Indeed companies are reliant upon the engagement and human sustainability of their people, or as Bill Campbell writes “people who want to do well, are capable of doing great things, and come to work fired up to do them” (Schmidt & al., 2019).

5.5. A critical assessment of the sustainable workplace model

Is there is more to the story than the six variables, purpose, autonomy, mastery, community, fit/match, leadership and their thirteen themes in order to engage employees and sustain their capital and resources?

This question is raised to take into consideration the potential downsides of implementing the sustainable workplace model. Reflections and follow-up questions with Glimworks employees led to the following reflections. What happens when employees suddenly have a responsibility to develop their own sense of purpose, to align it to the company’s vision, to manage a high degree of autonomy and to grow and improve their working skills? Does the data collected from the seven semi-structured interviews and the focus group only pinpoint towards a positive influence of the six variables and thirteen themes on human and organizational sustainability? Or is there more to the story of our changing twenty-first century workplace?

A starting point is the data collected on how employees at Glimworks have and are subjectively experiencing a high level of autonomy in their workplaces.

First, arriving in a company which embraces autonomy to a high degree was a steep learning curve and personal journey. Second, the process of adapting to a work environment which embraces and expects autonomous employees is scary. The term “scary” was used by several employees:

“I was really scared, it was super scary because you have so much freedom and it is like; how am I going to sort it if that is the level of freedom; what would I do with it? Time was one thing for me;

when do I start work? Is it okay, can I work at night if I get really excited? Is that work? All the questions that I never had ... all these things which I guess you never would think otherwise. It has been scary and fun and it is something that is probably going to go on" (employee 5, 03.04.2019).

This citation may showcase a compelling insight; the one that when trying to transition workplaces towards greater organizational sustainability may require demanding inner and thinking processes for both employees and employers. If we have for aim to improve engagement levels worldwide in the workplace and sustain human capital and resources, it may be beneficial to understand and have empathy for the fact that demanding from employee new responsibilities of purpose, autonomy, mastery, community and fit/match require efforts and challenging personal growth journeys. Employee 5 highlights that it has "been a strong personal journey, I was quite shaken by the freedom ... The beginning was a big wake up call" (Employee 5, 03.04.2019).

Indeed transitioning from a more traditional workplace with schedules, deadlines, fixed tasks and so forth to a close to fully autonomous work environment had such a strong effect that she both had to redefine what work meant and her relationship to work and time. Having more autonomy and power over decision-making could actually create higher levels of stress in the workplace as long as employees have not learned to adapt to new workplace models: "more choice can create more stress. Nobody will tell me you have to do your work this way, be there at this time. You get to ask yourself the question: what do I want to do and how?"(Employee 5, 03.04.2019). Employee 3 added there should be support systems for employees who have newly arrived at Glimworks for them to safely adapt in the beginning, avoid being harmed by increased stress, and to eventually benefit from the increased engagement. (Employee 3, 05.03.2019).

Johan Ranefors showed great awareness of this fact in the focus group discussion as he shares that given total autonomy to all employees at once may backfire if not properly managed. Employees must have the self-awareness to activate their own degree of freedom that feels good for them (Focus Group, 2019). In other words, employees should have the freedom to decide what degree of autonomy they decide to implement in the workplace, thereby having the right to expect support-systems when required. The following citation summarizes Johan Ranefors' reflection on how to avoid putting employees under stress due to increased autonomy in the workplace:

"An organization must in practice package freedom as a tool, something that we choose to activate. We have experienced that people fall down when we give them absolute freedom. It can be scary to be given absolute freedom. We should ask ourselves, can the employee manage absolute freedom if they have never been given the opportunity to have it elsewhere. It is shocking. In the beginning, you do not want it because it becomes too complex. If everything is free and everything moves that is too complex. So the rule is that people must choose themselves to activate the level of freedom they want. The higher you are in the technical hierarchy, the more you need and want autonomy whereas when you are at the beginning, you want more support systems. That is our current challenge, how do we accommodate people that are in the early stages of their self-development or technical autonomy. They need support" (Focus Group, 2019).

5.6. Broader implications and future steps

5.6.1. Broader implications

In order to infuse the modern workplace with greater human and organizational sustainability, it calls for revisiting the way we perceive work, our cultural relationship to work and to engage with engagement interventions which effectively improve sustainability metrics at the employee level.

As pointed out in the literature review, the overall impact of employee engagement interventions in the workplace has been limited (Knight et al., 2011). In other words, we are not solving the epidemic level of disengagement in our Western European workplaces, as the evidence points out to the fact that after 40 years of engagement theory research and practice, 90% of Western European workers still wake up everyday going to work disengaged and disconnected from their work life (Wollard, 2011). Researchers, employers, employees and policy-makers ought to expand the disengagement challenges in modern post-industrial workplaces away from only being researched within engagement theories and brought up at a higher institutional level and incorporated into the sustainable development and sustainability strategies of governments so that it gains a political relevance and similar recognition as an urgent sustainability challenge (Pfeffer, 2010; Goodland, 2002; Park & Kim 2017; Miller, 2013; Folke, 2013). “We would need to look at how to make changes from the market's perspective. How to go into the market and regulate it to enable greater human and organizational sustainability, it is needed.” (Focus Group, 2019).

5.6.2. Political and institutional context

A disengaged global workforce represents a tremendous opportunity cost for not only companies but also national economies and thus taxation revenues for governments. With over 3 billion people employed over the world (International Labor Organization, n.d.), the magnitude of this opportunity cost can be humongous. A study made by Gallup estimates that an increase of 10% in employee engagement can increase profits by 2 400 dollars per employee per year. A country like Sweden with over 5 million employed people may lose each year 2,64 billion dollars in taxation revenue which would pay for 85% of Sweden's entire 2020 reform governmental spending (Government Offices of Sweden, 2019). In other words, by making workplaces more sustainable and increasing the wellbeing of swedish workers, these improvements could potentially finance Sweden's 2020 reforms and financing bill.

This begs the following questions; What would happen if we improved workplaces' sustainability approach and increased engagement levels around the world? To what extent would healthcare costs decrease and taxation revenue increase? How much governmental spending would this both liberate and create in order to solve other urgent socio-economic and environmental challenges?

Sweden's reforms and financing bill for 2020 has allocated 3,23 billion Swedish crowns for the reform “Sweden to become a fossil-free pioneer” and 4,62 billion Swedish crowns for the reform “strengthened welfare state” (Government Offices of Sweden, 2019). These two social and environmental reforms

could be fully financed by an increase in Sweden's workers wellbeing and engagement. In other words, Swedish workers can become the central financing force to enact Sweden's bold social and environmental government policies as a forefront of democracies. For most of the 20th century, Sweden has been a pioneering force in the world by creating and sustaining a model of democracy which places its people and the environment at the forefront of its policies. Sweden ought to once again serve as a model in a 21st century which promises to be ever more socially and environmentally challenging. Every Swedish worker counts.

5.6.3. Future steps

Future research could contribute by implementing and testing the sustainable workplace model in companies where employees rank low on engagement. This would contribute to increasing the available amount of empirical evidence in the field of engagement interventions which is in great need of empirical robustness. Thus, to this day, it can not be argued that we possess the knowledge, models and intervention capabilities to solve the unsustainable disengagement levels in modern workplaces.

The data and analysis would benefit from similar research made in both companies similar to Glimwork and also by diversifying the company backgrounds in order to design additional sustainable workplace models that are built with data from companies operating in different sectors, in different stages of the company life-cycle and possibly different cultural and geographical settings.

Action research holds potential as a methodology to implement the sustainable workplace model and test and improve its empirical validity in companies struggling with disengaged employees. In doing so, it will provide additional empirical knowledge on how to advance the organizational sustainability of employees in our modern workplaces and decrease disengagement levels.

6. Conclusion

This research hypothesized that improving employee engagement in the workplace will play an important role in achieving greater sustainability in the workplace in regards to how employees feel and perform at work. Furthermore it embeds itself in a conceptual framework which proposes that unsustainable workplaces where employees are disengaged can be solved by developing a greater sense and practice of purpose, autonomy and mastery in the workplace. The key results of the interviews and the focus group were consolidated into a sustainable workplace model. The model is a unique theoretical contribution to researchers and practitioners wishing to test its intervention potential by researching its empirical validity and effectiveness in designing sustainable workplaces and increasing employee engagement in companies that suffer from disengaged employees and unsustainable workplaces. An important foundational aspect of this thesis is the lack of research, policy-making interest and practitioner action in the fields of human and social sustainability, in particular within the workplace. Working to enhance sustainability in organizations, has the potential to not only improve the success of organizations but foremost improve the capability of employees to sustain their human capital and resources and in the extension, enhancing the greater field of sustainability.

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Appendices

Appendix I: Interview questions semi-structured interviews

1. Individual Questions

Q1: Could you please present yourself personally?

Q2: If you have one, how would define your life vision?

Q3: Do you relate your life vision to your career?

Q4: What are some of the most important values you try to live by?

Q5: What brought you to Glimworks? How did you arrive in this company?

Q6: What do you do at Glimworks?

2. Glimworks Questions

Q7: How would you define Glimworks' vision/mission?

Q8: Do you see connections between the life vision you shared and Glimworks' vision?

3. Engagement Questions

Q9: How would you evaluate your engagement at Glimworks?

Q10: How would you explain your level of engagement at Glimworks?

Q11: According to you, how does Glimworks' work culture and environment benefit your engagement?

Q12: How do you connect your engagement at work to your overall well-being?

4. Purpose & Mastery Questions

Q13: One of the 3 intrinsic components of high employee engagement is purpose.

Could you elaborate on your sense of purpose at Glimworks? Do you feel your work matters to people in society?

Q14: The second component of employee engagement is the pursuit of mastery.

Could you elaborate on your sense of mastery at Glimworks? Do you feel inspired to do your best at

work?

5. Glimworks Engagement Questions

Q15: On your website, Glimworks puts an emphasis on four qualities: autonomy, competence, community, fit/match. Would you mind sharing how you relate personally to each?

Q15.1. What kind of work autonomy is important to you? What are some of your favorite autonomy practices in Glimworks?

Q15.2. Is competence important to you? How does Glimworks encourage competence development?

Q15.3. How would you describe the community within Glimworks? What do you enjoy most?

Q15.4. Do you feel you are achieving the right fit/match at Glimworks?

5. Glimworks Leadership

Q16: How do you experience Glimworks' leadership?

Q17: Do you have any thoughts/suggestions on what could be done even better to further improve Glimworks' leadership?

6. Additional

Q18: Any final comments, insights, suggestion

Appendix II: Interview questions focus group discussion

Question 1: How do you relate to the topic of sustainability in regards to human resources (people) in the workplace?

Question 2: How would you define a sustainable work environment? What is a sustainable workplace? What does a sustainable workplace do? Do we have some key words?

Question 3: Think back over the time you have been working at Glimworks and share with us your fondest memory (the most enjoyable memory)?

Question 4: How did this memory/event/experience/moment contribute to creating a sustainable work environment at Glimworks?

Question 5: What needs improvement?

Question 6: Suppose you were in charge and you could make one change. What would you do?

Question 7: From the interviews conducted before summer, autonomy seems to be the variable which has engaged the most? Could you elaborate on how it contributes to creating a sustainable work environment?

Question 8: Could you elaborate on how purpose contributes to creating a sustainable work environment?

Question 9: Could you elaborate on how mastery contributes to creating a sustainable work environment?

Question 10: On your website, Glimworks puts an emphasis on four qualities: autonomy, competence, community, fit/match. Could you elaborate on both community & fit/match and how you think they contribute to creating a sustainable workplace at Glimworks?

Question 11: Is there anything which we have missed which you would like to talk about and share?