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How and *Why* Employee Motivation Changes during High Growth

A Stroll Down Memory Lane in Two High-Growth Firms

by

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Abstract

Title: *How* and *Why* Employee Motivation Changes during High Growth - *A Stroll Down Memory Lane in two High-Growth Firms*

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Purpose: The purpose of this research is to complement existing research within organisational growth and work motivation by focusing particularly on the employees at HGFs. The aim is to study what factors determine employee motivation, to what extent and, how it changes as the firm increases in size.

Methodology: The study is of qualitative character, with a multiple case study design and an abductive research approach. The main data used in the study is collected from in-depth interviews with employees from two companies, operating in two different industries, technology and industry.

Theoretical perspectives: The study is operationalised through the employment of Self-Determination Theory, and the empirical findings and analysis of the study are synthesised in accordance with relevant past literature.

Empirical findings: The main empirical findings show that the fulfilment of need satisfaction decreases as the firm increases in size. The three needs, *autonomy*, *competence* and *relatedness*, have shown different levels of satisfaction at different points in time, therefore full internalisation has not been reached for neither of the interviewees, in either of the firms. Sense of *autonomy* is generally high although it seems to become limited when the firm increases in size. Alongside the increase in size, types of monetary compensations become increasingly important to the employees.

Conclusions: Theoretical implications include that SDT has been complemented with an additional, fourth category, referred to as *Alignment and contextual factors*. The application of Milestones has been proven a successful example when applying SDT in order to understand changes in employee motivation. Practical implications are foremost directed to managers working in HGFs. Indications show the importance of providing clear guidelines and goals to maintain higher levels of need satisfaction amongst employees throughout growth.

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1 Introduction

Rapidly growing firms and their employees have lately been the subject of much attention (Delmar, Davidsson & Gartner, 2003; McKelvie & Wiklund, 2010). In research, these firms are often referred to as high-growth firms (HGFs). A consensus has emerged around the definition of HGFs, adopted by The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD); enterprises with an average annual growth rate in employees or turnover exceeding 20 %, over a two-year period, is considered as high-growth firms (Eurostat-OECD, 2007). In this report, growth in employees will be applied. Interest in high-growth firms has often been connected to the societal value they generate through innovation and employment (Smallbone & Wyer, 2000). Wiklund, Davidsson, Audretsch, and Karlsson (2011) stated that studying HGFs had become one of the most vital and relevant topics in management and social science research. To date, research of HGFs has largely been devoted to their founders (Dobbs & Hamilton, 2007; Nyström, 2019).

According to psychologists, motivation refers to “why a person in a given situation selects one response over another or makes a given response with greater energisation or frequency” (Bargh, Gollwitzer & Oettingen, 2010: p. 268). The research community and practitioners have examined founders and their motivation in relation to organisational growth within different areas, such as: decision-making (Shane & Venkataraman, 2000), attitudes towards growth, (Brown, Davidsson & Wiklund, 2001; Storey, 1994; Wiklund, Davidsson & Delmar, 2003), and passion (Breugst, Domurath, Patzelt & Klaukien, 2012; Cardon, Foo, Shepherd, & Wiklund, 2012; Cardon, 2008). However, there is a lack of research regarding the motivation and drive behind non-founding individuals who join HGFs, and how their motivation changes as the firm increases in size rapidly (Adrjan, 2018; Nyström, 2018; Nyström, 2019). Some research regarding employees and motivation is encountered in ‘joiners’ and founders, where joiners are defined as individuals that are drawn to entrepreneurial ventures as employees rather than as founders (Roach & Sauermann, 2012; Roach & Sauermann, 2015). However, the apparent lack of research in the area suggests that more research is needed with regards to employee motivation in HGFs.

There are numerous reasons why it is important to study employee motivation in HGFs. Firstly, since small firms have fewer employees, each individual will have a proportionally bigger influence on the firm (May, 1997). Moreover, because HGFs are traditionally financially constrained, compared to mature competitors, some researchers argue that their employees are the biggest assets in order for them to compete (Greer, Carr & Hipp, 2016). Hence, the importance of having self-directed, motivated, involved and committed workers, becomes crucial (Deci & Ryan, 1985). Secondly, since HGFs grow at a rapid pace, the nature of the firm is expected to change, henceforth, the work for the individual employee is likewise expected to change continuously (Davidsson & Henrekson, 2002; Valencia, 2019). Therefore, it is interesting to understand how the individual employee's motivation changes as the firm increases in size. Lastly, the focus of HGFs is typically on the matter of organisational growth rather than on profitability (Stevenson & Jarillo, 1990; Brown, Davidsson & Wiklund 2001). As salaries, bonuses and other types of monetary compensation to employees tend to be constrained (Cardon & Stevens, 2004; Nyström, 2019; Shane, 2009), finding ways of motivating employees, other than in monetary terms, should become a larger focus.

1.1 Background

1.1.1 The Importance of Studying High-Growth Firms

Globalisation, changing consumer preferences and technological development have resulted in shorter technological S-curves, meaning that the development cycles of new products and services have been shortened (Schilling, 2017). Hence, to remain competitive, it has become increasingly important for firms to act quickly and comply with changing demands. A way to succeed in the market is through rapid growth (Rogers & Cosgrove, 2019). By growing at a rapid pace, firms are able to reach market dominance by being first to act on consumer preferences, and thereby become the dominant player of the market (Hoffman & Yeh, 2019).

Much of the relevance behind studying HGFs is related to the societal and economical importance that these firms carry. It is argued that HGFs create disproportionately more value to society and the economy in relation to their size (Lee, 2014). Many researchers and practitioners have devoted much attention to HGFs as they act as important job creators and it is argued that HGFs create a disproportionately large amount of jobs (Coad, Daunfeldt, Hölzl, Johansson & Nightingale, 2014; Schreyer, 2000; Henrekson & Johansson, 2010; Davidsson & Delmar, 2006; Delmar, Davidsson & Gartner, 2003). Some researchers even argue that they generate 70 % - 100 % of all new jobs created (Birch & Medoff, 1994; Birch, 1979). By possessing excess capacity of creating new employment, HGFs are expected to drive both societal and economical value.

HGFs and smaller firms in general, are argued to be more innovative than larger firms. Research has found them to be more efficient in terms of dollars spent per innovation and number of innovations per employee (Almeida & Kogut, 1997; Acs & Audretsch, 1988; Holton 1965). These firms seem to have a particular ability of sharing knowledge and technology within the firm (Robbins, Pantuosco, Parker & Fueller, 2000). In a comprehensive study of 9 million companies, conducted by the research firm Cosmetics Inc, it was found that new small firms were responsible for 55 percent of innovations in 365 industries (Kuratko & Hodges, 1998).

Another positive outcome of HGFs are economic spill overs. Even though HGFs might operate both nationally and internationally, they have proven to generate positive local spill overs (Mason, Bishop & Robinson, 2010). These include, improving local productivity, building local skills and business services as well as strengthening the connection to local universities. Such spill overs have proven to increase firm productivity (Acs, Audretsch & Feldman, 1994) and serve as an explanatory reason for the creation of knowledge clusters such as Silicon Valley (Fosfuri & Rønde, 2004).

HGFs contribute to society in several ways and it is argued that there is more research needed in the field given the benefits they generate (Coad et al. 2014; Lee, 2014). When firms grow at this rapid pace, new circumstances are expected to arise, moreover indicating that the relevance and importance of studying HGFs in society will remain constant. Since HGFs prioritise growth over profitability (Brown, Davidsson & Wiklund, 2001; Stevenson & Jarillo, 1990), it is expected that the nature of the firm will change quickly. For example, managers might bring organisational changes, the firm will increase in size, enter new business areas or markets. Moreover, HGFs might simply not look the same as they did a few years ago. Henceforth, it is relevant to investigate how these changes affect the organisation over time. Although there is research within the area of HGFs, it has largely been devoted to the occurrence of growth, rather than looking at the evolution of changes as the firm grows (Delmar, Davidsson & Gartner, 2003). Therefore, it becomes relevant to retrospectively explore different milestones of change during the journey of growth.

1.1.2 The Importance of Employee Motivation in High-Growth Firms

For the majority of the people in the world, life is organised around work (Deci & Ryan, 1985). It influences behaviour, living standards, time-availability, it affects friendships between people, and many other aspects of life. Even though the nature of work can vary greatly, the common purpose of it, for most people, is monetary (Deci & Ryan, 1985). However, whether or not employees enjoy their occupation, is a far more complex matter. Being monetarily rewarded naturally serves as one type of motivation, but it is not the only important aspect with regards to motivation that is necessary to consider.

Interestingly, *work,* in many cases, carries the connotation of 'having to', therefore being associated with something that has to be done, rather than something that is intrinsically interesting (Deci & Ryan, 1985). The connotation of 'having to' might serve as explanatory for the 'job-hopping' labour market that has emerged in recent years. According to US statistics, the average employment length for people between 25-35 is 3.2 years, whilst the age group above 65 have been working at the same place for an average of 10.3 years (U.S Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2019). The statistics indicates that the labour market has shifted towards a more fluid structure where people tend to move around and where retention rates for employees are lower. Low retention rates quickly become costly for firms (De Winne, Marescaux, Sles, van Beveren & Vanormelingen, 2018). Moreover, a high turnover of employees indicates that firms need to put more resources on recruiting, and research suggests that newly hired employees are not fully operational and efficient until they have become accustomed to their work. Hence, it should be in the firms' interest to keep employee retention high.

Connected to employee retention and work satisfaction, is work motivation. In order for firms to thrive and survive, employees need to be motivated to perform well (Deci & Ryan, 1985). Typically, the nature of the work environment within HGFs is on an ever-changing trajectory (Davidsson & Henreksson, 2002; Valencia, 2019). Therefore, the employee might experience one type of work setting when joining the firm, and a whole different setting a few weeks or months later. Furthermore, smaller firms that grow at a rapid pace might not have the possibility to invest in their employees since growing the firm is prioritised in order to compete (Cardon & Stevens, 2004; Nyström, 2019; Shane, 2009). Consequently, working for such firms will most likely be associated with high risk, lower payments, poor benefits and pension, and a rapidly changing environment (Nyström, 2019). Due to this uncertainty and the scarcity of resources, work motivation becomes an even more relevant topic for researchers of HGFs to investigate further.

1.2 Aim and Objectives

It is clear that HGFs are relevant and important in today's society. Because of the growing presence and importance of HGFs, research aimed at understanding them becomes increasingly important. The work environment at HGFs changes fast, and this consequently affects how employees perceive working at an HGF. Therefore, it becomes crucial to accumulate further, and deeper, understanding of employees and how their motivation, specifically, changes in such environments. In this context, a qualitative approach has been chosen to gain a comprehensive and deep understanding of what employee-specific underlying factors determine motivational change and how this evolves over time. Two HGFs within two distinctly different industries have been chosen in order to understand what might indicate general, rather than firm specific changes of motivation. By applying SDT theory in the context of HGFs and motivational change as a firm increases in size, it is the authors' intention to test the theory's applicability to this context, as well as seek complementary dimensions that might benefit future research in the application of SDT. Furthermore, by improving knowledge within this area, the aim is to help managers to better understand how their employees' motivation changes as the firm increases in size, providing managers with potential insights necessary to reach an overall higher level of motivation.

1.3 Research Purpose

The purpose of this research is to complement existing research within organisational growth and work motivation by focusing particularly on the employees at HGFs. As briefly mentioned above, research with regards to employees at HGFs is in scarce supply. Moreover, research which looks deeper into what motivates these employees and how that motivation changes during the different growth phases of the firm, is even more difficult to come by. Instead, researchers have so far concentrated much effort towards the entrepreneurs and investors of these same companies, providing a gap of research to be filled with regards to employee motivations. Hence, the research question of this study is as follows:

How is employee motivation in high growth firms affected as the firm increases in size?

1.4 Research Limitations

There are several limitations to this research paper. Some of the limitations are formal in their nature, whereas some of the limitations, instead, are purposefully imposed by the authors themselves. With regards to the formal limitations, a maximum of 25 000 words is set, and the research itself has been conducted from start to finish for eight weeks. Naturally, such restrictions limit the scope of the paper, as well as the depth of it.

Furthermore, some clarification with regards to the research question and its implications is deemed suitable here. The focus of the study is to look at how employee motivation changes as the firm they work at increases in size. However, an increase of firm size will consequently affect a large number of other factors, all relevant to the motivation of the employee, as well. Such factors are for example the employees' level of freedom and control, the clarity of roles and objectives, the culture of the company, the structure and level of formalisation of the company, as well as the nature of the employee's tasks, just to name some examples. To clarify, the research is therefore not limited to merely the change of the firm's size, but also to all of the consequently changing factors as well.

1.5 Outline of the Thesis

The first part of the thesis, Chapter 1, introduces the reader to the identified context of research. It serves as an overhauling description and points out the relevance of the research. Furthermore, Chapter 1 describes the background, aims and objectives and the purpose of conducting this research. The concepts that will be utilised are described briefly to make the reader aware of the context and its relevance. Chapter 2 consists of a literature review and a presentation of the theory which have been operationalised in the empirical findings and analysis part. The literature addresses previous studies within the areas of; firm growth, high-growth-firms, employees and motivation, and work motivation. The theoretical review presents the theory that has served as the framework of which the interview structure has been based upon. Self-Determination Theory (SDT) is described in detail.

Chapter 3 describes the methodology applied when conducting the research. This includes the research approach, design, selection of cases, description of data collection, and an outline of the quality of the research. Chapter 4 consists of a visual presentation of the data collected related to growth, an analysis of relevant statements in relation to the SDT, and an analysis of motivational changes related to SDT and firm growth. In Chapter 5, a discussion is conducted regarding the results of the analysis made in Chapter 4. In this part, the empirical findings and analysis will be synthesised with relevant literature from the literature review to create a more nuanced understanding. Chapter 6 is a conclusion of the thesis where both practical and theoretical implications are presented and discussed. This chapter does also discuss limitations of the study and it provides suggestions on possible future research.

2 Literature and Theoretical Review

The following chapter will include research deemed relevant for the study of employee motivation at HGFs. The chapter is divided into three main parts: Firm Growth, Employees and Motivation, and SDT. The first two parts contain a number of sub-sections providing further depth into the relevant topics, whereas the last part is a thorough account of the chosen theoretical framework applied in this study. This base of knowledge will be used later in the discussion, where the empirical data and the analysis of the research will be evaluated in accordance to past research.

2.1 Firm Growth

Firm growth as a phenomenon is widely researched and according to the Web of Science it has approximately 23 000 published articles addressing the topic (Scopus, 2020). The origins of the concept is difficult to identify and a variety of terms have been used to define the different stages of firm growth and company life cycles (Gupta, Guhan & Krishnaswami, 2013). Although different terminology has been used, most researchers suggest that it includes the start of a firm, followed by a growing phase of numerous challenges and crises, which is followed by a phase where the company either matures or fails (Adizes, 1979; Chaston, 2010; Churchill & Lewis, 1983; Greiner, 1998).

Organisational growth or firm growth is a rather wide concept and can be measured in several ways such as; revenue generation, value addition, expansion, total sales, number of employees, increase in volume of business (Carlson, Weiss, Blake, Wang, Black & Davies, 1998; Gupta, Guha & Subramanian, 2013). Several ways of measuring growth rates have also been presented. Some prominent researchers such as Delmar, Davidsson & Gartner (2003) separate between relative growth, which is growth presented in percentages, and absolute growth, which is measured in absolute numbers, (often increase in number of employees). Other researchers have applied the “Birch Index" which constitutes a weighted average of absolute and relative growth (Coad, 2007).

The theoretical development within the field has been surprisingly slow which is demonstrated by the fact that Edith Penrose's publication on firm growth from 1959 still remains to be one of the most popular theories applied (McKelvie and Wiklund, 2010). In her research, she argues that growth is dependent on the rate at which management is able to implement the plan of using their external and internal resources to create competitive advantages (Gupta, Guhan & Subramanian, 2013; Penrose, 1959). Other researchers have been acknowledged in their work of theorising the growth path of firms. Greiner (1998), has laid the foundation of the theory regarding enterprise development (Gupta, Guhan & Subramanian, 2013). He argues that each firm goes through five distinct phases, *creativity, direction, delegation, coordination* and *collaboration* (Greiner, 1998). The firm goes through so-called evolution and revolution crises that are resolved through implementing new structures or programmes. Researchers have also built upon Greiner's research and created separate similar models amplifying stages of growth (Adizes, 1979; Chaston, 2010; Churchill & Lewis, 1983). Bridge, O'Neill and Cromie (2003), offering a different view on growth phases where it is argued that firm growth should not be divided into different phases. The rationale being that firms do not necessarily follow a linear development. Blundel and Hingley (2001) supports Bridge, O'Neill and Cromie (2003) and suggests that growth can be achieved quickly, slowly or not at all. Other researchers have even questioned the concept of stages- and lifecycle-models since there is no cumulative evidence defining the stages of growth (Levie & Lichstenstein, 2010).

To conclude, growth research has been a major part of firm and enterprise research throughout many years. Researchers have tried to explain why firms grow and what drives growth but with little homogeneity in their results. Therefore, it is likely that firm growth will continue to be one of the most interesting topics within the field of entrepreneurial, management and organisational research.

2.1.1 Characteristics of High-Growth Firms

As defined in the introduction, a firm is regarded as a HGF when it reaches an annual employment growth rate which exceeds 20 per cent. Beyond the mere definition of what technically brings a firm to be formally viewed as a HGF, HGFs have various characteristics which are typical to them.

Studies have shown that firm age is a distinct variable which separates HGFs from other firms in their respective industries, where relatively young firms are typically over-represented amongst HGFs (Mason, Bishop & Robinson, 2009). While young firms are more likely to be HGFs, the majority of HGFs (some 70 per cent) are at least five years old (Anyadike-Danes, Bonner, Hart & Mason, (2009). As firms grow older, there might thus be a tendency for them to have more difficulties growing at rapid rates.

Research is scattered whether there are certain industries in which HGFs are found to a larger extent (Henrekson & Johansson, 2010). Those studies which have found patterns, indicate that such industries are Manufacturing, Retail and Wholesale, as well as Business and Services (Mason, Bishop & Robinson, 2009). These industries are particularly prone to the emergence of HGFs because they are more fast-paced, agile, and customers are not locked into lengthy contracts to the same extent as in other industries such as Construction, Financial Services, and Transport and Communication (Mason, Bishop & Robinson, 2009).

Furthermore, Hinton and Hamilton's (2013) study of HGFs in New Zealand found a couple of joint factors amongst the studied firms. First of all, all of the firms had joint founders with different, complementary skills, which they brought into the company. Moreover, the majority of these founders did not have a university degree, but rather long and relevant experience within the industry in which they had started their firm. Lastly, all of the studied firms are price setters and are consequently able to dictate prices to their customers.

2.1.2 Research of High-Growth Firms

High growth has throughout the years tried to be distinguished from the concept of growth by several researches (Barringer, Jones & Neubaum, 2005; Delmar, Davidsson & Gartner, 2003). It is said that growth tends to be associated with entrepreneurial behaviour whilst high growth prioritise growth over profitability (Brown, Davidsson & Wiklund, 2001; Stevenson & Jarillo, 1990). When studying HGFs, some distinct areas of findings are relevant to be acquainted with. Firstly, it is concluded that HGFs are a small group of firms that possesses an excessive ability to create societal value; creation of new jobs and innovations (Acs & Audretsch, 1988; Birch, 1979; Birch & Medoff, 1994; Cohen & Levinthal, 1989; Falkenhall & Junkka, 2009; Holton 1965;). Secondly, it is empirically revealed that HGFs tend to be smaller and younger than their counterparts (Henrekson & Johansson, 2010; Schreyer, 2000). Lastly, increased presence of HGFs tend to positively influence the overall growth of an industry and the national economy (Bos & Stam, 2014).

In recent decades, there has been an increasing interest in HGFs. Many researchers argue that the interest for HGFs stems from Birch's (1979) research on the importance of small firms to the economy (Henrekson & Johansson, 2010). It was recognised that especially rapidly growing firms, HGFs, had an outstanding ability to generate societal value, especially their ability to render job creation has been highlighted (Birch & Medoff, 1994; Davidsson & Delmar, 1997; Davidsson & Delmar, 2006; Robbins et al. 2000; Stangler, 2010).

Birch's (1979) research suggests that small firms are the largest creators of new jobs. Later, researchers determined that it was neither large nor small firms that created the greatest proportion of jobs, it was the HGFs (Birch & Medoff, 1994). Acs and Mueller (2008) came to a similar conclusion; HGFs create the largest proportion of jobs, non-HGFs with 500+ employees stand for the majority of job losses. Research related to Birch's initial findings has been criticised for the methodology and for overestimating the capacity of HGFs to generate new jobs (Almus, 2002; Davis, Haltiwanger & Schuh, 1996). Other researchers on HGFs' job creation have not reached as 'good' results, but still acknowledge HGFs' positive influence of employment (Curran, 2000; Deschryvere, 2008; Davidsson and Delmar, 1997; Gibb, 2000; Hamilton and Dana, 2003; Reid and Harris, 2004; Robbins et al., 2000; Tonge, Larsen & Roberts, 2000; Westhead and Birley, 1995; Reynolds & White, 1997; Stangler, 2010). Moreover, there is uncertainty regarding if the job creation is due to a large number of firms being started or if it is a small group of HGFs that constitute the biggest proportion of employment creation (Dobbs & Hamilton, 2007). HGFs have also been argued to be great generators of innovations. These types of firms typically reveal strong *absorptive capacity*, meaning they take advantage of another firms' innovation spill overs (Coad, Segarra & Teruel, 2013; Cohen & Levinthal, 1989). In terms of innovation generated per dollar and number of innovations per employee, HGFs has also proven to be superior (Holton 1965; Acs & Audretsch, 1988).

Early studies show that there is a negative correlation between firm growth and firm age, but not a negative effect between firm size and firm growth (Evans, 1987). This phenomenon has been mentioned as Gibrat's Law, originally referred to as Law of Proportional Effect (Gibrat, 1931; Sutton, 1997). More recent research has questioned this empirical evidence and instead suggests that firm size has a negative impact on firm growth (Coad, Segarra & Teruel, 2013). Moreno and Casillas (2007), in their research of distinguishing HGFs from moderate-growth firms, revealed that HGFs tend to be smaller in size and asset turnover compared to moderate-growth firms. Firm age was not proven to be differentiating. Henrekson and Johansson (2010) also found that HGFs on average are smaller and younger than its competitors. Albeit, it is rather the young age than the small size being associated with high growth. Fritsch and Weyh (2006) tested Gibrat's Law on 18 cohorts between 1984 to 2002. Gibrat's Law was rejected on all occasions (Fritsch & Weyh, 2006). Regardless of the heterogeneity, most recent research concludes that HGFs, predominantly, are associated with young and small firms (Schreyer, 2000).

HGFs have been found to positively influence growth on a national- (Coad, Segarra & Teruel, 2013) and industry-level of which they are operating within. In a 12-year study of 43 industries in the Netherlands, Bos and Stam (2014) found that an increase of HGFs subsequently positively influenced the growth of their industry. Although they did not find evidence for the opposite causality, meaning that there was no evidence for a greater presence of HGFs because of long-run positive effects on industry growth. Because HGFs are clearly good value creators on a national level, research within this area has become especially relevant for countries facing economic development stagnation (Henrekson & Johansson, 2010; Coad, Segarra & Teruel, 2013).

It is clear that the interest with regards to HGF-research has increased in recent decades. Looking at the advantages that HGFs generate, it is evident that they play an important role in society. Despite this, there are comparably few studies being done on the growth of HGFs and many researchers urge for further research to be conducted (Henrekson & Johansson, 2010; Coad, Segarra & Teruel, 2013).

2.2 Employees and Motivation

Maslow (1943), in his paper *A Theory of Human Motivation*, introduced the concept of human needs arranged in hierarchies of prepotency. Maslow argued that the appearance of one's need usually rests on the prior satisfaction of another, more urgent need. His hierarchy of needs is visualised through a pyramid where the most basic human needs, physiological needs, are found in the bottom of the pyramid. As those are met, one can move along up the hierarchy and finally put efforts toward the top of the pyramid, self-actualisation, which is the final hierarchy of Maslow's theory. Another theory which has been widely applied in the research regarding motivation, and which bear great similarities to Maslow's theory of needs, is the *two-factor theory,* also recognised as the *motivation-hygiene theory* or *dual-factor theory* (Herzberg, 1959). The two-factor theory builds on the same idea; that humans have certain fundamental needs which they need to satisfy before they can pursue satisfaction of higher and more desirable needs.

Over the years, criticism of both Maslow's (1943) and Herzberg's (1959) theories have been levelled. With regards to Maslow, criticism has mainly revolved around the lack of empirical evidence supporting his theory, as well as concerns over the research methodology applied in his research (Wahba & Bridwell, 1976). Herzberg's theory, on the other hand, has been criticised on three main grounds; that it is methodologically bound, that it is based on faulty research, and lastly, that it is inconsistent with past evidence concerning satisfaction and motivation (House & Wigdor, 1967).

Regardless of the criticism, it can be argued that Maslow's and Herzberg's theories of *needs* have provided the foundation upon which contemporary research within motivation stands upon. The following subsections will provide further depth into what the current state of this research is, with a particular focus on employee motivation in the workplace.

2.2.1 Research within Employee Work Motivation

Work motivation is a set of energetic forces that originate from both within the employee, as well as beyond his or her individual being (Pinder, 1998). These forces determine the motivation in terms of its form, direction, intensity, and duration. Motivation can therefore be described as a psychological process resulting from the interaction between the individual and the environment (Latham & Pinder, 2005), which in this review, concerning work motivation, constitutes the environment in which the employee works.

A person's needs, personality, and values affect, and is affected, by the *work environment* (Latham & Pinder, 2005). Moreover, work motivation is dependent on the fit between the characteristics of the work environment and the values that the employee possesses. On the other hand, researchers argue that it is also the degree of adaptation an employee exhibits with respect to his or her vocational niche that determines the level of motivation the employee holds (Mumford & Stokes, 1992). A motivated employee will to a larger extent participate in the evolution of work tasks, as well as adapt him/herself in the face of change. Nevertheless, research suggests that the ability to predict employee work performance and satisfaction based on personality measures increases when the characteristics of the job itself is taken into account and is put in relation to the values of the employee (Gustafson & Mumford, 1995).

Research in the area of work motivation suggests that *job autonomy* can facilitate learning and employee development, which leads to improved employee performance (Wall, Jackson & Mullarkey, 1995). In his study, Cordery (1997), found four interrelated dimensions that affect an employee's sense of job autonomy; the extent of clear and attainable goals set by the manager of the employee, the extent to which the manager exerts control over the work tasks of the employee, to what extent the manager ensures that necessary resources are available, and lastly, the extent to which the manager gives timely and accurate feedback with regards to the progress of the employee towards goal attainment.

Research conducted in the last couple of decades suggests that *feedback* is closely connected to employee work motivation (Latham & Pinder, 2005). There are a variety of motives of feedback seeking, where Ashford & Black (1996) suggests three primary ones; goal attainment and validation of job performance, to defend or enhance one's ego, and to protect or boost the impression that peers have of oneself. This is further validated as other research has indicated that feedback is used to increase motivation, task focus, effort, goal setting and quality and quantity of performance (Ashford, Blatt & VandeWalle, 2003; Brown, Davidsson & Wiklund, 2001; Renn & Fedor, 2001).

2.2.2 Research within Employee Work Motivation in High-Growth Firms

Research on HGFs and motivation have largely been devoted to the motivation behind *how* and *why* entrepreneurs become founders (Lazear, 2005; Sørensen, 2007). At the same time, although studies with regards to employees' motivation for joining startups have recently emerged, albeit there is still a need for further research in understanding employees' motivation within this area (Roach & Sauermann, 2012). To the authors knowledge, studies about employee motivation are to the largest extent done on either larger firms or startups, but there is little or no research regarding employees' motivation at HGFs especially. (Nyström, 2018; 2019; Adrjan, 2018). Therefore, this section will rely on adjacent literature on employee motivation at HGFs such as; joiners, startups and employee motivation in startups.

Research regarding joiners has emerged in recent years (Breugst et al. 2011; Cardon, 2008; Roach & Sauermann, 2012; 2015; Neff, 2012; Nyström, 2018; 2019). Roach & Sauermann are by many viewed as the originators of this type of research. Joiners can be viewed as a hybrid between founders and traditional employees (Roach & Sauermann, 2015), and they reveal similar preferences when it comes to work; seeking for greater autonomy, looking for the opportunity to work in an exciting work environment, are risk-tolerant and have a desire for commercialising products and technologies (Roach & Sauermann, 2012; Neff, 2012). At the same time, their attitudes towards engaging in entrepreneurship are differently influenced by contextual factors such as norms, opportunities and role models. Norms are factors that could influence and legitimise an individual to join a startup, although given the group-based nature, norms tend to not be as influential as other contextual factors (Stuart & Ding, 2006). Hence, Roach & Sauermann (2012) argue that norms will influence the interest of joining a startup but might not be strong enough to influence a founder whether or not to start a company. A stronger contextual factor that might shape the interest of a founder, are role models. Role models that have startup experience can both legitimise and prove the feasibility of starting a company, hence possibly influencing founders greater than joiners (Suart & Ding, 2006).

Entrepreneurial opportunity might be the strongest contextual factor that sparks an individuals' entrepreneurial interest (Roberts, 1991; Bhide, 2003; Eckhardt & Shane, 2003). This is due to opportunities demonstrating an actionable reason for founding a startup. An important finding that Roach & Sauermann (2015) did was that individuals with entrepreneurial interests do not necessarily want to become founders. Thus, researchers and practitioners should not mistake everyone within a startup as entrepreneurs. It is important for managers hiring joiners to not solely focus on talent, but rather emphasis on finding employees with a joiner's mindset and motivation (Frick, 2015). Hence, strengthening the importance of further research of joiners in order to create a more nuanced understanding of their behaviour, motivation and rationale.

2.3 Self-Determination Theory

The Self-Determination Theory is described by Deci & Ryan (1985; 2000) as an approach to human motivation and personality, which investigates people's inherent growth tendencies and innate psychological needs. These needs are outlined as the basis for people's self-motivation and personality integration. A majority of prior research that have applied the SDT in similar contexts have done so in large and mature corporations (Deci, Koestner & Ryan, 1999; Gagné & Deci, 2005). Therefore, it becomes interesting to apply SDT in this context, looking at HGFs.

SDT in its current state, is the result of decades long research which have built upon existing theories of needs and motivation. An appropriate way to begin defining SDT is by looking at its core assumption which stipulates that "the fullest representation of humanity show [sic] people to be curious, vital, and self-motivated" (Deci & Ryan, 2000, p.68). In other words, people are by nature willing and motivated to learn and to develop.

As previously stated, the origins of contemporary theories of motivation, such as SDT, lie in the need-based theories introduced by e.g. Maslow (1943) and Herzberg (1959). However, these classical theories assume motivation as merely the response to a lack of one of the basic physiological needs which are either assigned in a strict hierarchy or learned from external references (Deci & Ryan, 2000). Motivation was thus, in the early stages of theoretical development within the area, only thought of as existent due to the absence of a physiological need, rather than because one could find pleasure in doing something or seek a desirable separable outcome by doing something.

Prior to the introduction of SDT, the Cognitive Evaluation Theory (CET) was introduced by Deci and Ryan (1985). CET built on the classical theories of needs and aimed at specifying factors that explain variability in intrinsic motivation. CET focuses on the two fundamental psychological needs for *competence* and *autonomy*, and their effects on a person's perceived intrinsic motivation. What they found was that feelings of *competence* cannot enhance feelings of intrinsic motivation, unless they are accompanied by a feeling, or sense of *autonomy* (Deci & Ryan, 1985). Instead of developing a new broader theory of motivation which fully captures the spectrum of different types of motivation, Deci and Ryan incorporated CET as a sub-theory into SDT, which also incorporated the aspect of well-being into its core through a third fundamental psychological need, *relatedness.*

Intrinsic and extrinsic motivation are two distinctly different forms of motivation, both acknowledged within SDT (Deci & Ryan, 2000). Along with intrinsic and extrinsic motivation, SDT defines an additional type of motivation, *amotivation*, which can be referred to as the complete lack of motivation which causes a general state of inactivity (Deci & Ryan, 2000). From these three types of motivation, Deci and Ryan (2000) developed the *Organismic Integration Theory* (OIT), a sub-theory of SDT, which is presented as a framework for motivational categorisation.

2.3.1 The Concept of Needs

SDT, in contrast to prior theories of motivation, uses the level of satisfaction and frustration, not the strength, of psychological needs to predict behaviours' (Chen, Vansteenkiste, Beyers, Boone, Deci, Van der Kaap-Deeder, Duriez, Lens, Matos, Mouratidis & Ryan, 2015). SDT argues that the foundation of human motivation lies upon the fulfilment of a set of basic psychological needs (Ryan & Deci, 2017). The theory states that there is a cost of frustration and advantages or benefits in satisfying the psychological needs (Ryan & Deci, 2017). It defines needs as "...universal necessities, as the nutriments that are essential for optimal human development and integrity" (Gagné & Deci, 2005, p.337). Therefore, something is a need only if its satisfaction of it will either promote or thwart an individual's psychological health.

Foundational to SDT is that the impact of environmental factors of motivation and experience is mediated by a few sets of basic needs (Deci, Olafsen & Ryan, 2017). According to Gagné & Deci (2005) the internalisation and intrinsic motivation of SDT requires nutrients in order to function properly. Internalisation is described as the process of taking in and complying with a certain value or regulation. Integration refers to fully comply and transform a regulation or value into one's own (Ryan & Deci, 2000). Futheron, they stipulate that *basic psychological needs* serve as this nutriment for internalisation and intrinsic motivation. These needs are within SDT referred to as autonomy, relatedness and competence (Ryan & Deci, 2000).

Autonomy: Being engaged in an activity with full sense of willingness and choice (Deci, Olafsen & Ryan, 2017). Describes the need for an individual to feel freedom, self-regulating and self-endorsement of their actions (Ryan & Deci, 2000; Ryan & Deci, 2017).
Competence: Feeling competent in their performance, effective in one's social environment, the innate need to grow, feel confident in front of challenges (Ryan & Deci, 2000; Ryan & Deci, 2017).
Relatedness: Sense of belonging and connectedness, feeling valued or connected to a certain group or setting. Feeling of being accepted (Ryan & Deci, 2000; Ryan & Deci, 2017).

In order to facilitate internalisation, which is the most *autonomous* level of extrinsic motivation, and comply with a certain behaviour or value, emphasis on satisfying these needs can be applied (Deci & Ryan, 2000). To reach a higher level of internalisation, satisfaction of the individual's need for *autonomy* and *competence* has to be fulfilled. Since extrinsically motivated behaviours are not inherently interesting, there is a need for external influences. The utmost prominent reason for individuals to comply with certain behaviours or values is the feeling of being valued by others. Consequently, the need for feeling a sense of *relatedness* serves as another crucial factor to influence behaviours that are not inherently interesting.

2.3.2 Intrinsic and Extrinsic Motivation

Motivation can be divided into two distinct areas, intrinsic and extrinsic (Ryan & Devi, 2000). Intrinsic motivation refers to doing something for it being inherently interesting rather than for a separable outcome and extrinsic motivation is the construct of conducting something in order to attain a separable outcome. Porter and Lawler (1968) who proposed the extrinsic, intrinsic model, built upon the expectancy-valence theory by Vroom (1964), advocated that the work environment should be structured around this model in order to enhance the overall job satisfaction (Gagné & Deci, 2005).

Intrinsic motivation is the purest form of an autonomous activity (Deci, Olafsen & Ryan, 2005). It was first identified in animal behaviour, they found that organisms act with enjoyment, playfulness and curiosity even without any type of external reinforcement (Ryan & Deci, 2000). This also applies for human motivation and behaviour. Human beings in their 'healthiest' state display playfulness, being active, joyful and are inclined to learn and grow without any external incentives. This state has been argued to be critical for human development and for acquiring new knowledge (Ryan & Deci, 2000). Since intrinsic motivation is said to occur in between a person and a task, some researchers have focused on the task being interesting by itself (Skinner, 1953) while others have defined it as the satisfactory fulfilment of psychological needs gained by performing an intrinsically motivated task (Ryan & Deci, 1985). SDT applies the latter one but recognises the importance of performing a task being intrinsically interesting (Ryan & Deci, 2000).

Since most tasks or activities are not conducted due to them being inherently interesting, these are viewed as extrinsically motivated tasks (Ryan & Deci, 2000). Being extrinsically motivated simply means that an individual performs a task wholly or partially in order to get an outcome that is not directly associated with the task itself (Ryan & Deci, 1985). SDT does, however, not proclaim that all extrinsic motivation is bad, but rather presents a more nuanced approach where extrinsic motivation can enhance, stem or does not affect the level of intrinsicness (Deci, Olafsen & Ryan, 2005). Most importantly, SDT distinguishes the level of extrinsic motivation into various categories that differ in the degree of autonomy (Ryan & Deci, 2017; Deci, Olafsen & Ryan, 2005). The different categories are external regulation, introjected regulation, identified regulation and integrated regulation which will be elaborated on in the next subchapter (Ryan & Deci, 2000).

Besides acknowledging the definitions of extrinsic and intrinsic motivation, SDT additionally introduces *amotivation*, referred to as; the state of, or unwillingness to do an activity (Ryan & Deci, 2000). Amotivation stems from the feeling of not valuing the activity, not feeling competent or not valuing the separable outcome enough to perform the activity (Deci, Cascio & Krusell, 1975). Consequently, this often leads to inaction by the individual.

2.3.3 Organismic Integration Theory

SDT presents a continuum of motivation that introduces different forms of extrinsic motivation and moderating contextual factors (Ryan & Deci, 2017). This sub-theory is commonly referred to as Organismic Integration Theory, presented in Figure 1. The continuum presents a scale where the degree of internalisation, leading to full integration is outlined.

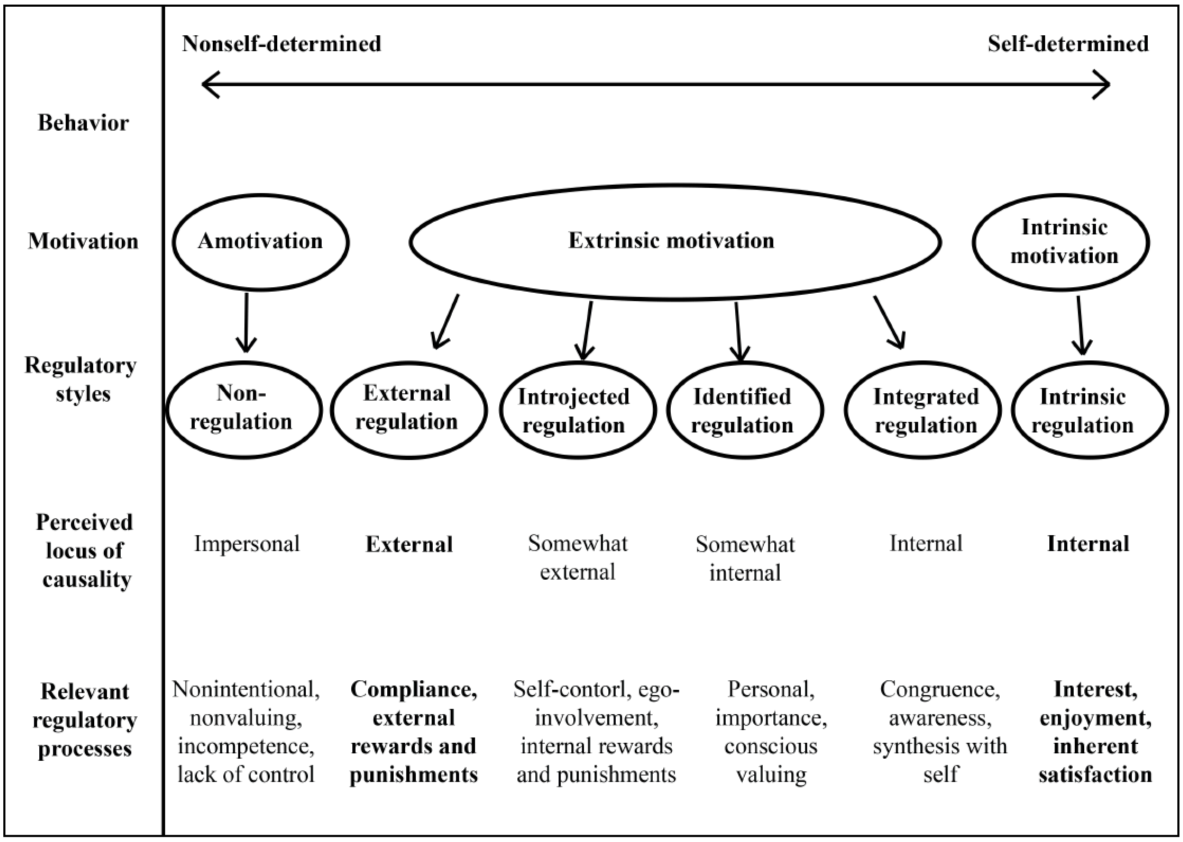


Figure 1. The Organismic Integration Theory taxonomy (Deci & Ryan, 2000)

The continuum presents how an individuals' motivation can range from unwillingness, to docility, to active personal engagement (Ryan & Deci, 2000). The figure visualises to which degree motivation emanates from one's self, aligning with the regulatory styles and perceived locus of causality (PLOC). The top of the figure illustrates an individual's self-determination of behaviour.

As aforementioned, an individual being *amotivated* does not sense any level of self-determination over their behaviour associated with a certain task. A person feeling intrinsically motivated, at the far right of the figure, does on the contrary feel fully self-determined of their behaviour. Next to motivation lies regulatory styles, which refers to what extent an individual feel externally regulated or not. OIT stands out by presenting four different levels of regulation within extrinsic motivation where the level of *autonomy* serves as the most determinant moderating factor to the level of regulation, and it is affected by their level of PLOC. PLOC refers to the feeling that an action is imposed, as a result, of either external or internal reasons (Turban, Tan, Brown & Sheldon, 2007). Put differently, PLOC can either be external or internal, the further right on the figure, the greater the feeling of ownership, self-steering, autonomy and self-determinance is felt. Thus, the actions and individual performance in this situation is a result of internally motivated behaviours or reasons, called internal perceived locus of causality (I-PLOC). SDT proposes that an individual will show greater effort and a greater satisfaction in a certain behaviour in contrast to being externally prompted, referred to as external perceived locus of causality (E-PLOC) (Ryan & Deci, 2000).

The least autonomous regulation in the extrinsic continuum is external regulation (Brown et al. 2007). In this state, individuals feel monitored and controlled by superiors or others. Their behaviour is motivated or advocated by rewards or punishments (Deci, Olafsen & Ryan, 2005). Although external regulation can be a powerful tool to promote a certain behaviour, it does often bring certain long-term shortcomings, such as decremental feelings of *autonomy*, shortcomings in well-being and organisational spill overs. Introjected regulation is slightly more *autonomous* than external regulation, the difference being that introjected regulated persons feel controlled by inner forces rather than by external pressure, as such in external regulation. An introjected controlled person performs a certain behaviour to avoid guilt or anxiety and still has a high level of E-PLOC. Ego-involvement is a clear example of introjection where a person performs an action to enhance their self-esteem and lift up their ego (Ryan & Deci, 2000).

At the next stage, identified regulation, the person has accepted and understood the importance of certain behaviours and thus complies with the regulation as their own. Lastly, the most autonomous and volitional form of extrinsic motivation is integrated regulation (Deci, Olafsen & Ryan, 2005). This means that an individual has fully assimilated with the regulation.

Integration occurs when regulations are brought into congruence with one's personal values. It shares similarities with intrinsic motivation but still has some instrumental elements of values presumed to lead to some separable outcome (Ryan & deci, 2000). Integration is important since different values and beliefs can be a source of conflict. When people have fully assimilated these to one's self, the person will engage in an activity wholeheartedly without any barriers or conflicts (Deci, Olafsen & Ryan, 2005).

As an individual move further to the right in the continuum, the greater the level of internalisation he/she feels, the greater the *autonomy* and to the greater extent they will integrate with certain beliefs and values and accept them as their own (Ryan & Deci, 2000). The greater level of internalisation, the higher level of engagement and enjoyment of the activity, has been revealed (Ryan & Deci, 2000). Putting this into an organisational setting, it becomes highly relevant to understand this in order to reach a higher level of commitment and engagement. The degree of internalisation and level of self-regulation is also highly important for individual development (Ryan & Deci, 2017). Consequently, it should be as important for organisations and entities with employees.

2.3.4 SDT in the Workplace

Prior research of SDT in organisations have supported the theory as an approach to identifying work motivation in various different circumstances and settings. In the following segment, the most important of such studies and findings, with regards to this paper, will be presented briefly and interpreted.

Eden (1975), in a study amongst kibbutz workers found a negative relationship between the perception of extrinsic rewards and how intrinsically motivated the workers felt. This finding therefore strengthens the argument that offering extrinsic rewards for certain behaviours, could counter-intuitively lead to a decrease of performance of those same behaviours (Titmuss, 1970), also known as the 'crowding out'-effect (Frey & Oberholzer-Gee, 1997). Moreover, other studies also concluded that pay-for-performance plans lead to lower well-being in blue-collar workers, and this proved especially true for those workers who felt that their jobs were repetitive (Shirom, Westman & Melamed, 1999).

Other studies found relations between managers allowing for autonomous work and positive work outcomes. Deci, Connel and Ryan (1989), for example, could through their study determine that managers which acknowledged ideas and perspectives from subordinates, acted in a non-controlling and encouraging fashion, providing relevant information and choices, and promoting self-initiation of projects, saw that employees displayed positive work-related attitudes and felt more satisfied with their jobs. Further, other studies, within this particular area of SDT in the workplace, have found that encouragement of autonomy from managers' led to a greater sense of satisfaction with regards to the workers' needs for *competence*, *relatedness*, and *autonomy*, which in turn, led to overall improved feelings of job satisfaction, greater persistence and higher performance evaluations (Baard, Deci & Ryan, 2004; Deci, Ryan, Gagné, Leone, Usunov & Kornazheva, 2001; Gagné & Deci, 2005; Ilardi, Leone, Kasser, & Ryan, 1993).

Lastly, followers of transformational and visionary leaders proved more satisfied with their jobs, as well as a more effective commitment to the organisation in which they work (Bono & Judge, 2003). The same study established that these same followers were more likely to adopt and align behind autonomous goals, rather than controlled goals in their respective workplace.

What becomes apparent in the listed examples of previous research within the field of SDT in the workplace, is that it to a large extent has provided support for the notion that autonomy-supportive management of employees have many positive benefits. Amongst such positive benefits are the promotion of basic need satisfaction, intrinsic motivation, and full internalisation of extrinsic motivation (Gagné & Deci, 2005).

3 Methodology

3.1 Research Approach

As much research has previously been conducted on the entrepreneurs of fast-scaling companies, the purpose of this research, instead, is to shine a light on the employees of these companies and how their individual motivation changes as the company grows. Initially, the primary focus was to gain proper understanding of both the theoretical areas which would come into play in this research, as well as the previous literature published on this, and similar, areas of research. The review of the literature revolves mainly around the subjects of motivation, organisational growth and employees. The insights from this literature review generated a framework from which parameters of the interviews could be established, and questions to interviewees based upon.

According to Creswell and Creswell (2018), there are two main research approaches, the qualitative and quantitative approach, that are appropriate, depending on the circumstances and the context of the research being conducted. With regards to the specifics of this research, the research question to which an answer will be pursued, looking retrospectively on individuals' motivational changes and the literature review describing context-relevant findings, the choice of letting the interviewees themselves define individual important professional milestones is deemed appropriate. The other way of action, to predetermine generic time-marks for the interviewees is concluded to in all likelihood diminish the amount of genuine feelings felt by the interviewees at those generically produced time-marks. By letting the interviewees, themselves choose what moments they identify as the most important, the researchers can be certain that they are chosen because they are influential. The interviewees should therefore have a lot of substantial information to share, which will facilitate understanding *why* and *when* motivation for employees' changes, and thus answering the research question of this study. Because of this fact, one of the two research approaches, the quantitative one, turned out to be ill-fitting. The reason being that it would have been very difficult to set survey-questions fitting all of the interviewees, when the bedrock assumption of the study lies upon the fact that they themselves define the milestones and are given the opportunity to talk freely about them. To adequately capture the nuances, and as much context as possible, a qualitative research approach was instead deemed more suitable. This allows the researchers to respond to specific answers, to more deeply investigate a specific feeling or event articulated by an interviewee, and in that way gain much valuable contextual data which with a quantitative research approach would have been difficult to attain. Moreover, when a phenomenon is trying to be understood through the perspectives of interviewee-participants the qualitative research approach is an appropriate choice (Creswell and Creswell, 2018). Therefore, a qualitative research approach was chosen for this study.

Traditionally, qualitative research has most commonly been characterised by either an inductive approach or a deductive approach. Both approaches, however, are inherently weak in their own particular ways. The inductive approach distils a general rule from a set of observations and what comes out of these observations is merely a concentrate of what is already included in the observations themselves. The deductive approach, on the other hand, often tends to presuppose what is to be explained: that the general rule always holds true (Alvesson & Sköldberg, 2017), hence also in the currently studied case. According to Alvesson and Sköldberg (2017), the abductive approach has some characteristics of both the inductive and the deductive approach. Its focus lies on the underlying patterns and allows for the empirical area of application to be successively developed, and the theory used adjusted. The difference is, according to Alvesson & Sköldberg, that the abductive approach includes *understanding* as well. Because it is desired that new theoretical perspectives emerge during the course of this research, and because the focus of the study lies on understanding how and why motivation changes as the firm increases in size, the abductive approach emerged as natural to be used in this study.

3.2 Research Design

When determining the research design for this study, the nature of the research to be conducted made the choice of a case study a natural one. Case studies are a design of inquiry where the researcher develops an in-depth analysis of a case of one or more individuals. Moreover, cases are limited in terms of time, scope and activity (Stake, 1995; Yin, 2009; 2012), which was much in line with the parameters of this research. According to Stake (1995), case studies can be divided into three separate types of case studies – intrinsic, instrumental and multiple case studies. In an intrinsic case study, the case itself is of primary interest in the research. Here, the research is driven by a yearning to learn more about the uniqueness of the case rather than to advance the theory in the field or how the case might be representative for other cases (Stake, 1995). An instrumental case study aims to provide insight into a particular issue, redraw generalisations, or build theory. An instrumental case study is used as a tool to facilitate the understanding of something else (Stake, 1995). Lastly, a multiple-case design involves the extensive study of several instrumental case studies. The cases are carefully selected to better understand an issue of phenomena, or to theorise about a broader context. A multiple-case design allows examination of processes and outcomes across different cases, the identification of whether occurrences are context-specific under particular environments or in fact part of a broader systemic pattern (Stake, 1995). Due to the nature and purpose of this research, looking at changes in employee motivation, a multitude of companies and settings are deemed necessary in order to truly identify patterns that are not context or company-specific, but rather a broader phenomenon regardless. Therefore, a multiple case study was chosen as appropriate for conducting this research.

3.3 Selection of Cases

As this research is about studying employees in rapidly changing work environments, the choice of companies to include in the study was critical. The companies included in the study were chosen on the basis of three parameters that were established beforehand. First of all, in order to be eligible for selection, the company in question must have experienced growth in accordance with the stated definition of a HGF, previously stipulated in this paper. By making sure that this parameter was fulfilled, one could safely assume that there had been major operational, logistical and other similar changes occurring during this period. The second parameter, on which the choice of companies was determined, was that the company in question needed to exceed 500 employees at present. This parameter was set to make sure the firm had a significant increase in employees, since that is the measure for growth in this study. The desire to study a company fulfilling these two parameters was because this was thought to bring more clarity in terms of particular and distinctly different phases for interviewees in their employment at the company. The third and final parameter, set as a prerequisite for selecting companies, was that the company not be older than 10 years. This parameter was chosen in order for the interviewees' memory of events to be somewhat up-to-date and precise – a particular necessity when conducting qualitative research. One firm within the industry sector and one within the technological sector was chosen. This enabled conclusions to be drawn as to what may be industry-specific observations and what, instead, is observations regardless of industry. Moreover, in accordance with Hinton and Hamilton (2013) it was beneficial that the founders of the firms had different backgrounds. Entrepreneurial background for the technological firm, and extensive industry specific experience with regards to the industrial firm.

3.4 Data Collection Method

According to Creswell (2014) there are a number of different methods that can be used to collect data, and it is common that the researcher makes use of several data sources. Moreover, the data collection steps include setting the boundaries for the study, collecting information through observations, interviews, documents and visual materials, as well as establishing the protocol for recording information (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). In this study, the data collected can be separated into two different categories; primary data and secondary data. The primary data consists of semi-structured interviews with employees working for the selected companies. The secondary data consists of the companies' webpages and industry reports. An explanation as to why these methods were chosen for this study will be explained further below.

3.4.1 Primary Data

Within qualitative research, and further on within case studies, one of the most common and important sources of data are interviews (Yin, 2009). Conducting qualitative interviews means that the researcher conducts interviews face-to-face, by telephone, on the internet, or engages in focus group interviews (Creswell, 2014). Moreover, interviews can be divided into two different categories of interview setups; semi-structured interviews and unstructured interviews. Semi-structured interviews are described as conducting interviews in accordance with a previously determined interview protocol. However, one can still allow for follow-up questions to be asked as the interview proceeds and if there is additional information beyond the predetermined questions that prove useful to seek. Unstructured interviews, on the other hand, are interviews where the researchers rely entirely on notes to guide them, which makes the conversation appear a lot like a normal conversation as opposed to an interview (Bryman & Bell, 2015).

Because of the theoretical framework chosen, SDT, it was determined crucial to ask the interviewees a certain set of questions aimed at covering all aspects of the framework. However, it was nonetheless deemed important to allow for the interviews to take unexpected routes in case it proved necessary to obtain critical information. Thus, semi-structured interviews were determined to be the most appropriate interview setup for this study. Furthermore, the questions asked to interviewees in qualitative research can be asked in either an open or a closed fashion (Bryman & Bell, 2015). With an open question, respondents are asked a question and can reply however they want. With a closed question, respondents are instead presented with a set of fixed alternatives from which they have to choose an appropriate answer (Bryman & Bell, 2015). Again, because it was critical for the research that respondents be allowed to elaborate on thoughts and to be exhaustive, it was determined that open questions be used in the interview protocol. The flexibility provided by this sort of data collection was made possible due to the abductive approach of the study, as well as the iterative nature of the process. This allowed for perspectives and issues to be discovered during the progress of interviews which was very valuable.

Examples from interview protocol:
What kind of reward did you value the most at this point?
Describe what motivated and demotivated you at work at this time.
How did you feel about being a part of the company?
How did you feel about the level of your responsibilities?
At this point in time, did you take on additional responsibilities and tasks, beyond your ordinary ones?

3.4.1.1 Sampling Strategy of Interviewees

In qualitative research it is common to use a variety of sampling strategies in order to access the desired respondents necessary for the study. In this research, the first sampling strategy employed was convenience sampling. A convenience sample is one that is simply available to the researcher by virtue of its accessibility (Bryman & Bell, 2015). This sampling strategy was primarily used because relevant respondents could be identified in the personal networks of the two authors. Furthermore, this research was conducted amidst the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic currently sweeping all corners of the world. The pandemic is particularly affecting businesses and where they put their focus, making availability of respondents a scarce asset. Thus, the personal networks of the authors became an increasingly important factor in order to secure relevant interviewees to include in the study.

The second sampling strategy used in this study was snowball sampling. With this approach to sampling, the researcher makes initial contact with a small group of people who are relevant to the research topic and then uses these to establish contacts with others (Bryman & Bell, 2015). Initially, one relevant employee from each of the studied companies was targeted and interviewed. These two employees were thereafter asked to provide additional appropriate interviewees to take part in the study. Employing this strategy allowed a set of four relevant employees to be selected from each of the studied companies.

In accordance with the chosen sampling strategies, employees were approached and interviewed. Beyond the sampling strategies, it remained important that all interviewees were non-founding employees of the companies.

3.4.1.2 Conduction of Interviews

All interviews conducted in this study were done through the digital communications tool, Zoom. This was decided for two different reasons. The first reason is the geographical distance between the authors and the respondents of the study, as the authors are situated in Lund and the respondents in Stockholm. The second reason is due to the ongoing outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic. In the spring of 2020, when this research was conducted, Swedish authorities advised against traveling within Sweden, unless absolutely necessary.

Prior to the interviews, the interviewees were asked to think of two or three milestones to bring with them to the interview. To attain one point of definitive similarity between the interviewees, the event of *joining the firm* was established as a set professional milestone for every interviewee. To test the interview guide, a test interview was conducted beforehand to get a sense of the questions and the timeframe. As a consequence of the test interview, a limitation of two to three additional milestones besides *joining the firm* was determined, allowing a maximum of four milestones. It was deemed necessary to attain more comprehensive answers on fewer milestones to properly understand the motivational drivers and to answer the research question.

A centrality in the interviews were the employee's individual milestones. To attain milestones that were carefully prepared, the interviewees were notified at least two days before the interview to reflect on the question: *"If you look back at the years you have been at the company, can you mention the most important/influential professional milestones that you have experienced affecting your motivation?"*. When the interviews were conducted, this was one of the first questions asked and served as the frame of which the interviews were built upon. By doing so, it was made sure that the milestones were directly connected to the employee's individual motivation rather than something connected to a firm-specific event.

Bryman and Bell (2015) lists both positive and negative effects with regards to telephone interviewing. For example, cost is one positive effect of conducting the interview remotely as respondents nor interviewers need to travel to a designated interview location. Furthermore, it is also likely to increase the availability of hard-to reach respondents as it does not require them to set aside as much time from their calendars. Lastly, sensitive questions may be more effectively asked remotely as respondents might feel more comfortable not having the interviewer present in the same room (Bryman & Bell, 2015). On the contrary, telephone interviewing may also have negative effects where the most prominent one is the inability to adequately observe body language to see how interviewees respond in a physical sense to questions (Bryman & Bell, 2015). To mitigate and reduce the negative impact of this last factor, video was enabled during every interview so that the interviewers could be observed. Nonetheless, it may be argued that it is still not comparable to conducting the interview face-to-face, but it does limit the potential negative downside. The potential negative effect of not conducting interviews face-to-face was however not considered to have had a meaningful impact on the outcome of the data collection.

Moreover, with the approval from the interviewees, the interviews were recorded both in terms of audio and video. This is a commonly used method when data collection consists of interviews, because it enables the interviewers to fully focus on the interviewees, facilitating discussion, as well as asking relevant follow-up questions to answers (Creswell 2014; Yin, 2012).

Table 1. List of interviewees

Employee	Company	Prior industry experience	Role within the company	Length
A	Technological Firm	No	Marketing Specialist	59min
B	Technological Firm	No	Head of Field Logistics	1h 21min
C	Technological Firm	No	Product Manager	57min
D	Technological Firm	No	Marketing Specialist	1h 6min
E	Industrial Firm	No	Product Owner – Software Connected Factory	1h 7min
F	Industrial Firm	Yes	Talent Attraction Manager	52min
G	Industrial Firm	Yes	Technical Account Manager	57 min
H	Industrial Firm	No	Supply Chain Coordinator	1h 11min

3.4.2 Secondary Data

In the research process, one can complement the primary data by collecting and reviewing additional data such as newspapers and official reports (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). By using this type of complementary data, the researcher may facilitate the research process by being able to access the data when needed, and it may also save time and resources of transcribing. However, this secondary data is not directly related to the research question at hand, and this serves as its main disadvantage. For this reason, it is crucial to gather the secondary data based on the research question (Easterby-Smith, Thorpe & Jackson, 2015). In this study, secondary data have been retrieved mainly through the web pages of the two companies included in the study. The aim with retrieving secondary data was to access information with regards to the development of number of employees, as well as the increase in revenue during the studied period. Such information was then used in the interviews in order to provide context and improve the ability of asking relevant complementary questions.

3.5 Data Analysis

The first step of the data analysis of this study was the transcription of the interviews. Transcribing the interviews provided the possibility of going back through the material in hindsight and gaining an updated picture of what was said during the interviews. The method of transcribing is according to Bryman and Bell (2015) considered a necessity in most qualitative research. The data analysis was mostly performed iteratively during the whole process of the research, as is very much in line with the abductive approach taken in this study (Bryman & Bell, 2015).

After completing the conduction of the interviews, and thereafter the transcription of them, Tesch's eight steps in the coding process, as described in Creswell (2014) were followed and implemented in order to adequately code and categorise the answers. To get an overview of the data and to more easily manage it, the data coding program NVivo12 was used. By using NVivo12 it was possible to synthesise the results from the coding, to find relevant insights and draw accurate conclusions from the data. First, all of the transcriptions were read through synoptically to attain a sense for what the underlying meaning of the interviews were. The underlying meanings were written down simultaneously as the transcriptions were read, these were meanings that indicated the employees motivation such as “the longer she/he has been at the firm, the more she seems to comply and internalise with the firm's purpose and vision” or “fending off the US competitors seems to have been highly motivational, especially in the beginning”.

Thereafter, half of the transcriptions, two from each of the companies included in the study, were selected for a thorough read-through. From this part of the process, a list of frequently recurring topics and phrases was established. These topics were then summarised and written down in relation to the individual’s milestone in order to attain an understanding of what were the most determinant factors of motivation at this specific milestone. This was written down such as: “Related to the milestone: Joining the firm → honour to be part of the firm, felt lots of freedom, low level of responsibility” or “Related to milestone: When a colleague joined → felt inspired by him/her, felt more proud of her/his work tasks, got relevant tools to work better, felt a lack of leadership”.

Similar topics and phrases within the list were thereafter clustered together into more broad themes and connected to the OIT model as sub-themes to *autonomy, relatedness, competence* and *alignment and contextual factors*. The last theme emerged as the analysis was conducted and was used to include code-themes that were not directly related to the model but still held importance in order to understand the fulfilment of motivation or to understand company-specific structures at the specific milestone that might have affected the interviewees. Examples of this would be “Non-alignment of compensation and effort”, “the work environment was turbulent at this time due to many HR related questions leading to layoffs” or “he/she liked the diversity of experiences at the firm”. All themes were also classified as having a positive or negative effect on the motivation of an employee. For instance, “High responsibility” was a positive theme within autonomy but “Too high responsibility” was categorised as a negative influence on motivation.

These classifications lead to 93 different topics. To get a more manageable set of codes to apply on the transcription, another synthesis of the topics was made. In this step, the most descriptive wording for a specific overhauling topic was chosen, such as: “Level of uncertainty”, “Degree of challenge” or “Freedom and control”. Ultimately the topics were clustered into 17 themes related to the OIT continuum and 4 themes related to *Alignment and contextual factors*. After this, the selected themes were used to code the data in NVivo12. Each coded theme was then classified as *positive* or *negative*, depending on the interviewees attitude towards it. In other words, if their perception of the theme did positively or negatively influence their level of need satisfaction for *autonomy, relatedness* or *competence*. For instance, a positive attitude to *(High) Level of Freedom and Control* was viewed as enhancing the satisfaction of *autonomy*.

After the data had been coded, each theme was analysed. Since the research question of this thesis aims at answering how employee motivation changes as the firm increases in size, it was necessary to connect an individual's milestones to a point in time to understand how big, in terms of number of employees, the firm was at the specific milestone. This was done through a plotted graph illustrating each employees' milestone and the size of the firm, presented in *Chapter 4.1 Visual presentation of empirical findings* in Figure 2 and Figure 3. These figures enable the identification of possible connections between firm size and the selection of important/influential milestones.

Based on the individual's answers at each milestone related to the themes, their need satisfaction of *autonomy, competence* and *relatedness*, was classified as *High*, *Medium* or *Low*. Then, the results of these codings were connected to the interviewees' specific milestones and *Key motivational drivers* and *Key demotivational drivers.* Lastly, the employees' perceived *Most valued reward* was addressed. These topics served as the foundation of which the level of internalisation was classified for each employee at each milestone. This has been presented in Table 4 and Table 5. The tables make it possible to understand how a certain employee's motivation evolves from each of their articulated milestones.

The thesis relies heavily on the SDT sub theory OIT and its different classifications of regulations, moving from amotivation (when there is no level of internalisation), external motivation (some level of internalisation) to intrinsic motivation (where full integration is felt). Therefore, a classification of what level of internalisation the interviewee felt was made at each milestone. Since the milestones were discussed in chronological order and because both firms have increased a lot in size since the start, the latter milestones occurred when the firm was greater in size in comparison to previous milestones. Thus, the level of internalisation was plotted in relation to each milestone and is presented in 4.3 Changes Aligned with the Increase of Firm Size in Figure 4 and Figure 5. By doing so, it was possible to get an overview of the level of internalisation as well as what type of regulation the employees felt as the firm increased in size over time. This will give an understanding of what implications firm size has on motivation.

Once the data had been coded and distributed amongst the themes, the practice of pattern matching was applied in order to analyse the data. For case study analysis, one of the most appropriate techniques is to use a pattern-matching logic. The logic of pattern matching compares an empirically based pattern, i.e. based data collected from the interviews, with a predicted pattern based on a performed literature review. (Yin, 2009). In this study, pattern matching was applied through comparing the empirical findings obtained through the qualitative interviews, with the predefined psychological needs found in the theoretical framework, SDT. As the data was structured and divided into themes, they were consequently categorised in accordance with the three needs constituting the framework, *Autonomy, Competence* and *Relatedness.* Themes which could not on a sound basis be categorised into either of these three needs, were instead categorised outside of the three needs constituting the theoretical framework. The category where these additional themes were placed, was subsequently named *Alignment and Contextual Factors*. The use of pattern matching may therefore lead to the development of the theoretical framework, SDT. After conducting the pattern matching of the data, the results were visualised and presented, as well as interpreted, analysed and discussed in depth.

3.6 Quality of Study

When reviewing scientific research and its methodology, it is important to consider what measures have been taken by the researchers to make sure that the research is sound and reliable (Creswell, 2014). Poor performance in this territory might invalidate the findings and negatively affect the quality of the study. Therefore, the validity and reliability of the research becomes highly important areas to consider thoroughly. Validity is concerned with the integrity of the conclusions that are drawn from a piece of research. Reliability, on the other hand, is concerned with the question of whether or not the results of a study are repeatable (Bryman & Bell, 2015).

3.6.1 Validity

Validity is considered one of the strengths of qualitative research and it is based on determining whether or not the findings are accurate from the researchers, the participants, or the readers point of view (Creswell & Miller, 2000). Adhering to the criteria for validity established by Easterby-Smith, Thorpe and Jackson (2015), this study has been transparent in describing its methods, how access to data was made possible, how data was interpreted and coded, and finally how the coded data was analysed. For that reason, the authors feel very confident with regards to the validity of the study.

3.6.2 Reliability

The aim of any research is for it to have high reliability. This means that if a later researcher follows the same procedures as described by an earlier researcher, and performs the study in the same way, this researcher should come to the same conclusion and findings (Yin, 2012). The reliability of this research is considered high as the data was collected directly from employees working at the two companies included in the study. However, since the research deals with the work that individual employees do, and may still be doing for the company, the risk of reservation and avoiding truthfully answering questions, is a factor to consider. Nevertheless, as it was made clear to the interviewees that they would be anonymous in the research, as well as the companies for which they work, the negative impact of this factor is considered adequately mitigated. At the same time, including anonymous respondents in the study does make it harder for later research to emulate the sample of respondents, leading to difficulties of replicating the study, thus potentially deteriorating the reliability of it.

4 Empirical Findings and Analysis

The following chapter includes findings from the empirical research, as well as an analysis of these findings related to the theoretical framework, SDT. First, the findings will be visually presented through a graph for each of the studied companies. The intent is for this visual presentation to be a facilitator for the reader in his or her understanding of the more detailed empirical findings and analysis presented and conducted thereafter. Subsequently, the perceived psychological need satisfaction is presented, and important statements and quotes to answer the research question is highlighted. Because anonymity has been pledged, and the confidentiality of the interviewees therefore must be protected, the findings are a collection of generalised statements. Thereafter, changes of the perceived psychological need satisfaction aligned with the increase of firm size is presented and analysed.

The findings are presented in accordance with the three psychological needs which constitutes SDT, *autonomy, competence,* and *relatedness.* However, a fourth section, 4.2.4 Alignment and Contextual Factors, is added following the three psychological needs of SDT. This section includes such findings which could not be categorised within the psychological needs of SDT. The findings within this fourth section are therefore interesting to analyse in order to possibly gain a better understanding of SDT, and/or to broaden the theoretical perspective of it.

The presentation of the empirical findings revolves largely around the employees' stated milestones. This study aims to answer the research question *How is employee motivation in high growth firms affected as the firm increases in size?* Therefore, it is important to connect the milestones to a certain point in time and to understand how large, in terms of number of employees, the firm was at that milestone and in relation to previous milestones. Since the milestones were discussed with the interviewees' in chronological order, and because both firms have continuously increased in size from the beginning of the studied period, a later milestone will consequently be equal to the firm being larger in number of employees.

4.1 Visual Presentations of Empirical Findings

Figure 2 and Figure 3 presents the change of number of employees within the studied companies. Moreover, it also pinpoints each of the milestones that the interviewees have articulated during the interviews. Thus, the graphs both illustrate the increase in the number of employees during the studied period, as well as when the employees' chosen milestones occurred. The plotted vertical lines along the horizontal line *Milestones* indicates a milestone for one of the employees. A - H refers to which interviewee the milestone is connected to and the numbers reveal what milestone it is, in chronological order. All milestones with the number 1 (ie. A1, H1) share the same milestone, *Joining the firm*, which was predetermined before starting the interviews. This was done in order to include their entire time at the firm and compare how their motivation has changed. The number of employees is presented as indicative and is not certainly determined. The firms' annual reports and estimations by the interviewees is the source for the estimation of number of employees at any given point in the graph. The idea with the graphs is to identify if certain patterns, related to firm size, influences the interviewee's selection of milestones.

4.1.1 Technological Firm

Figure 2. The change of number of employees, and the interviewees' milestones during the studied period.

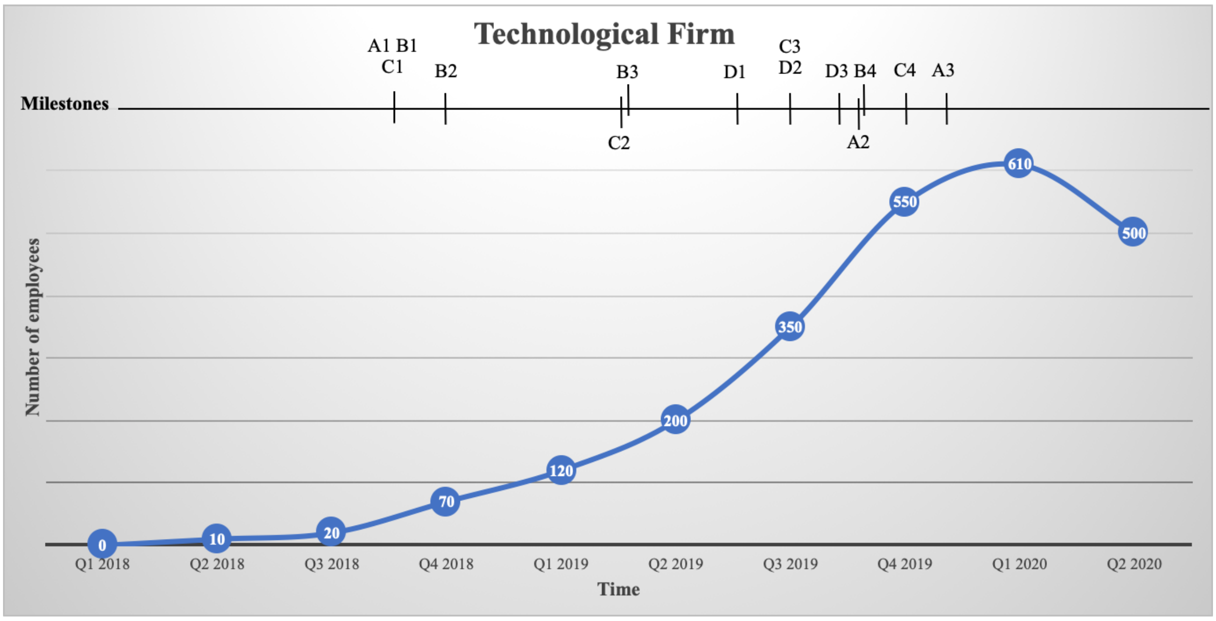


Figure 2 illustrates the increase in employees over time for the Technological Firm. As presented in the graph, employee A, B and C started more or less at the same point in time while employee D started about 9 months later. This enables analysis of whether or not the starting point of an employee leads to any differences in terms of motivation related to the OIT. The sudden decrease in employees around *Q1 2020* is a direct consequence of the COVID-19 outbreak that forced the Technological Firm to let go of a large number of employees. Nonetheless, since all milestones were chosen before this period it has not affected the study.

As presented in Figure 2, the interviewees' milestones are widely scattered across the graph. However, there seems to be an overweighing number of milestones between the end of Q2 2019 until the beginning of Q4 2019. At this point the firm was 250-550 employees. This could indicate that when a firm reaches more than 250 employees, it affects the individual employee to a greater extent than before this point. This period is also where the firm has its most significant period of growth in number of employees. Therefore, it could bear the meaning of rapid growth being connected to changes of motivation since many respondents picked a milestone within this period. It should also be noted that employee D has selected milestones quite closely to each other, this could indicate that it is specific events rather than firm size that has influenced his/her motivation or that the rapid growth at this period made changes occur.

4.1.2 Industrial Firm

Figure 3. The change of number of employees, and the interviewees' milestones during the studied period.

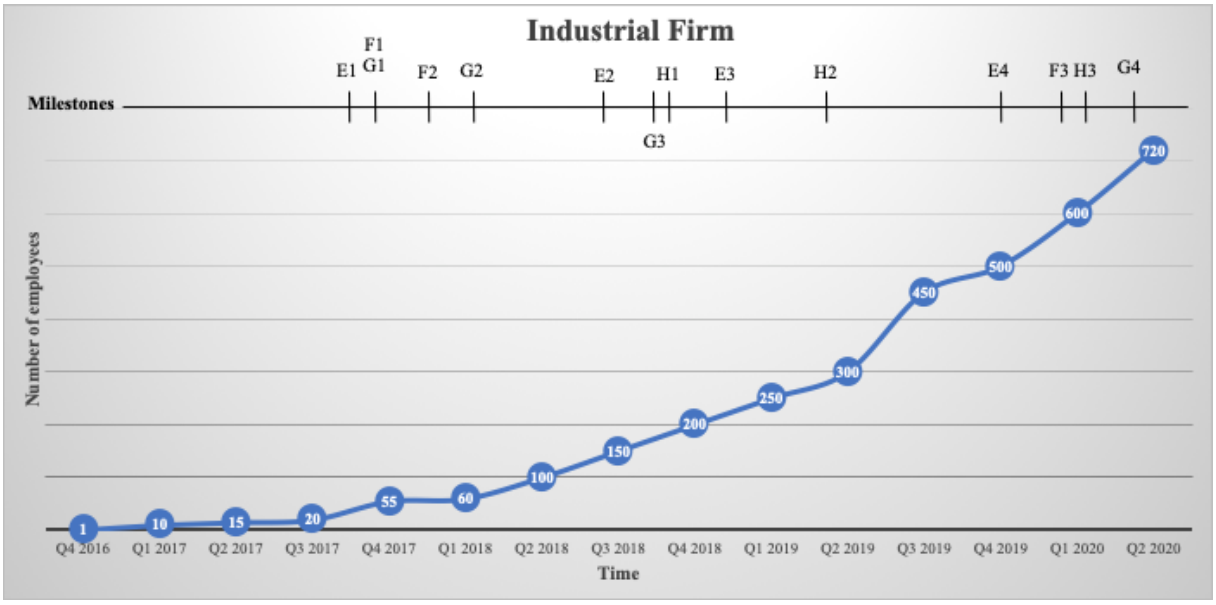


Figure 3 illustrates the increase in employees over time for the Industrial Firm. Employees E, F and G have started at a similar point in time, whereas employee H started about a year later. Similarly, to the case of the Technological Firm, it enables the investigation of whether or not when an employee joins a HGF influences their motivation.

Looking at Figure 3, it does not appear to be a specific pattern or point in time where the interviewees have chosen their milestones. It appears that the milestones are widely scattered along the graph irrespectively of the number of employees at the time. This indicates that there is not a clear relationship between the number of employees and when an employee feels that an impactful change has occurred in their career. In contrast to the Technological Firm, no employee has chosen a milestone between the beginning of Q2 2019 and the beginning of Q4 2019 during which time the firm was between 300-500 employees. Similarly, to the Technological Firm, this is the period where the Industrial Firm's growth of employees peaked. This could be out of coincidence but also due to differences in organisational structure that might have limited the feeling of change.

4.2 Psychological Need Satisfaction

The perceived psychological need satisfaction will be presented in this subchapter. First, coded themes under each of the three psychological needs will be portrayed in tables. Beside each theme, the number of people who are overall positively, as well as negatively inclined towards the theme, as well as the ratio between them, is demonstrated. Thereafter, statements from the employees in accordance with the description in the beginning of this chapter, is presented. After the three psychological needs, a fourth section *4.2.4 Alignment and Contextual Factors,* with themes not fitting into any of the three psychological needs, will be presented under the same arrangement. The empirical findings generated perceptions with regards to these themes which could be either negative or positive. The distribution of these perceptions is presented in Table 2, Table 3, and Table 4. On a general basis, a positive response indicates that the theme positively influences the fulfilment of a *need*, thus enhancing the level of need satisfaction. A negative response does indicate that the feel of satisfaction is negatively affected, that there is a lack of the theme or that they perceive the opposite to be satisfactory.

Although the three psychological needs have been clearly defined in Chapter 2.3.1, during the process of analysis it proved difficult to categorise answers from the interviewees with the utmost certainty. The two psychological needs most difficult to distinguish between were *autonomy* and *competence*. For this reason, it sometimes proved necessary to read ‘between the lines’ of an answer in order to correctly categorise it. Therefore, the choices made in terms of categorisation in general, and in particular with regards to the distinction between *autonomy* and *competence*, are prone to subjectivity.

4.2.1 Autonomy

As previously defined, *autonomy* describes the need for an individual to feel freedom, self-regulation, and self-endorsement of their actions (Ryan & Deci, 2000; Ryan & Deci, 2017). With regards to the definition stated, the following themes were established; *(High) Clarity of Roles and Objectives, (High) Level of Freedom and Control, (High) Level of Uncertainty, (Opportunity for) Strategic Thinking, Leadership (Level of Support)* and *Leadership (Feedback),* presented in Table 2.

Table 2. Positive vs Negative perceptions of identified themes within the need for autonomy

Theme	**Positive (people count)**	**Negative (people count)**	**Ratio (positive/negative)**
(High) Clarity of Roles and Objectives	6	6	Neutral
(High) Level of Freedom and Control	6	3	Predominantly Positive
(High) Level of Uncertainty	3	6	Predominantly Negative
(Opportunity for) Strategic Thinking	3	2	Predominantly Positive
Leadership (Level of Support)	6	3	Predominantly Positive
Leadership (Feedback)	7	7	Neutral

In three of the six listed themes, the interviewees were predominantly positive towards them. In one of the six listed themes, *(High) Level of Uncertainty*, the respondents were predominantly negative towards it and two themes, *Leadership (Feedback)* and *(High) Clarity of Roles and Objectives,* the results show neutrality.

(High) Clarity of Roles and Objectives describes the clarity of the roles and objectives for the interviewees. A positive response within the theme of *(High) Clarity of Roles and Objectives* indicates that the interviewee views it positively to have clear roles and objectives tied to his or her role. A negative response within the same theme instead indicates that the interviewee preferred an ad-hoc work environment without much clarity, or that the lack of clarity was demotivating. "When I joined the firm, no day was the other alike and you sort of just helped out where you were needed the most and this was very fun" is a general statement articulated by a majority of the interviewees, illustrating the view of being inclined towards a more ad-hoc work environment. "In the beginning I had no clear tasks and no KPIs to relate to. As the firm grew in size, I was more and more assigned a specific role, with specific goals tied to that role, which was very motivating" was instead a view held by fewer of the interviewees. This statement illustrates a positive attitude towards a more structured workplace and this view increased in magnitude as the firm increased in size.

A positive response within the theme *(High) Level of Freedom and Control* indicates that the employee views it positively having a large amount of freedom and control in their work. A negative response instead indicates that this freedom and level of control is viewed as unappreciated by the employee. *"*The greatest source of motivation for me is having freedom and responsibility*"* a majority of the respondents from each of the two studied companies expressed a view similar to, or somewhere along the lines of this statement. Having freedom and control of one's work can therefore be viewed as important in attaining motivation amongst the employees included in this study. "...when things change in the last minute, and something which you have worked really hard on is tossed into the bin, that is really demotivating for sure" is a quote expressed by one of the employees, illustrating the demotivation of not being in control.

(High) Level of Uncertainty describes the amount of uncertainty related to work. A positive response within the theme indicates that the interviewee is positively inclined towards operating in a work environment characterised by uncertainty. A negative response, however, instead indicates that the interviewee is negatively inclined towards such a work environment. "It was difficult to be completely motivated because I couldn't be sure I was going to get to stay in my role, or if someone else was going to take over". A version of this statement was mentioned at some point by a majority of the respondents. As illustrated in Table 2, the respondents were largely negatively inclined towards a high level of uncertainty, and instead sought certainty in their work-life. In line with SDT, employees feeling unsure of their role could constrain their feeling of self-regulation since they are not certain of their specific tasks, making it hard to self-regulate it.

A positive response within the theme of *(Opportunity for) Strategic Thinking* indicates that the employee views it favourable having to employ long-term thinking in his or her work. Furthermore, it indicates that the employee wants a variation of tasks rather than repetitive and monotonous ones. A negative response is instead indicative of the employee being prone to favour repetitive and monotonous tasks, or that they had no opportunity for strategic thinking. "And it was really cool being part of making strategic plans and being able to think more long-term about the goals we were trying to achieve" This statement illustrates how a majority of the interviewees felt about this particular theme, it being predominantly positive. Related to SDT, it seems to strengthen the feeling of self-endorsement, possibly connected to having a larger impact on the firm.

A positive response within the theme of *Leadership (Level of Support)* indicates that the employee has been motivated by having good leadership above him or herself in terms of the level of support attained. A negative response, on the contrary, indicates that the leadership in terms of the level of support provided to the employee, has made him or her demotivated. “Having a manager that listens to your ideas and promotes them is really encouraging”. This statement generally describes how a majority of the interviewees felt with regards to this theme which in Table 2 is predominantly positive. The negative responses are associated with poor leadership style and uncertainty in who their boss is. “And I still had little clue of who my manager really was”, “I had a lot of responsibility at this point in time but little, to none, support from my manager since he/she had other things to do” and “We had very poor leadership from our manager, it was not so mature or structured you could say” all exemplifies negative responses to poor levels of support from a manager. When analysing the interviews, it seems as if the leadership (level of support) increases as the firm matures and more structures are formed “Up until now, this was the first time I had a proper manager. It felt nice to have someone to bounce things off with”.

(Leadership) Feedback is related to feedback received from superiors within the firm. A positive response within this theme indicates that the employee perceives the feedback to be subjectively good and increases their feeling of need satisfaction fulfilment for autonomy. “Now we started to get feedback every week, I always felt very seen. I thought it was really nice” was a general statement that indicated positive responses to *Leadership (Feedback)*. A negative response indicates that the feedback is poor or that it was non-existing. In the interviews, both parts were highlighted “It was maybe every third week, having a short meeting with [manager]. He/she had very little insight into what I was doing, which is understandable. It was very far off from his/her focus back then”, “It was rather scarce with feedback generally in the beginning at [the firm], you really didn't have time for that. No one did” and “Maybe at this time there has been some attempts to get a better structure, but it's still not mature at all” One possible reason for this theme to reach neutrality is because the feedback seems to have improved as the firms have grown, therefore the interviewees have experienced both sides. It also seems like the feedback got enhanced as a structure for it became established “Now I have

more structured and more focused feedback on ways of working, which is good" and "I think here, at the last milestone, now there is a structured process for it".

4.2.2 Competence

As stated, *competence* is defined as feeling competent in one's performance, effective in one's social environment, the innate need to grow, and to feel confident in front of challenges (Ryan & Deci, 2000; Ryan & Deci, 2017). Through analysis of the data, the following themes were established; *(Opportunity for) Career Progress, (High) Degree of Challenge, (High) Level of Responsibility,* and *(Opportunity for) Personal Development,* presented in Table 3.

Table 3. Positive vs Negative perceptions of identified themes within the need for competence

Theme	**Positive (people count)**	**Negative (people count)**	**Ratio (positive/negative)**
(Opportunity for) Career Progress	2	3	Predominantly Negative
(High) Degree of Challenge	5	3	Predominantly Positive
(High) Level of Responsibility	8	5	Predominantly Positive
(Opportunity for) Personal Development	6	2	Predominantly Positive

In three of the four listed themes, the interviewees were predominantly positive. In one of the four listed themes, *(Opportunity for) Career Progress*, the interviewees were instead predominantly negative.

The findings within *(Opportunity for) Career Progress* indicates that the employees predominantly perceived their opportunity for making progress and to climb the corporate ladder within the firm to be constrained. A perceived positive response towards the theme indicates that the employee was motivated by having clarity of or the opportunity to advance in his or her career. A perceived negative response towards the theme instead indicates that the employee was not motivated by the career opportunities presented by the firm. Even though the employees joined at an early stage of the firm, many of the interviewees seem to have more or less ended up in their position out of coincidence. It has been expressed that they worked with what was needed for the firm to succeed at that given time “My manager asked me if I could take responsibility for this [certain area] since someone had to do it and no one else had time to do it”. This is especially the case for the Technological Firm, rather than for the Industrial Firm. A possible explanation for this might be that three out of four interviewed employees in the Industrial Firm were hired due to their previous experience and expertise within a certain area since the industrial firm required many specialists to function. Whereas in the Technological Firm four out of four interviewees had more of a generalist background.

(High) Degree of Challenge is related to the individual's job tasks and responsibilities. A positive response to this theme indicates that the interviewees regards challenging work tasks as motivating. A negative response indicates the opposite. A common statement within this theme is that employees felt more motivated to do their job if the tasks were inherently interesting and challenging, the feeling of contributing to the firm, as well as accomplishing something leading to recognition. “I think what motivates me is to be thrown into projects that I can't really control and that I didn't have any experience in before, and just be able to learn new things” In contrast, several respondents expressed a lack of motivation when they did not have challenging tasks to work with. “When there is, I mean no problems to solve and we have all the necessary tools and we don’t need to do any improvements or more efficiency, then I lack motivation”. All interviewees seem to be seeking challenges in their work tasks, which if fulfilled, will enhance their level of *competence* satisfaction.

(High) Level of Responsibility implies whether or not the interviewees felt that they were trusted with responsibility. A positive response indicates that the employee was motivated by having a high responsibility. A negative response means that the employee either felt it to be too high or that they felt their responsibility to be too limited. In general, the interviewees are motivated by having high responsibility and a majority of interviewees believe that they have had high responsibilities, except for in the beginning, throughout their time at both firms. Whether or not it has been formal or informal does however differ “I think everyone had a lot of responsibility, maybe not on paper but it was still high”. Some interviewees did also express that they had too high a level of responsibility, ultimately negatively affecting their feeling of *competence*. The feeling of being ‘punished’ for not completing the task successfully were apparent in these interviews “It was rather “fear motivation” you could say. If my team would fail, I didn’t know whether neither me or the team could stay at the firm”.

A positive response to *(Opportunity for) Personal Development* indicates that the employee perceived to have the opportunity to learn new things and that they were motivated by it. A negative response indicates that the interviewee did not have the possibility for desired personal development. This theme is the one with the most positive responses. It seems to indicate that working in a HGF as an employee offers a great deal of personal development. Statements also indicate that the majority holds personal development as one of the most important motivational factors at their work. "...working for a fast-growing company is like an experience I can't compare to anything else. It's just really like building something that is not there yet, and I saw it as a lot of personal development for me to be part of this kind of experience".

4.2.3 Relatedness

Relatedness is, as previously stipulated, defined as the sense of belonging and connectedness, to feel valued or connected to a certain group or setting, the feeling of being accepted (Ryan & Deci, 2000; Ryan & Deci, 2017). Analysis of the data provided the following themes; *(High degree of) Collaboration, (Importance of) Colleagues, (Motivating) Culture, (Feeling of) Pride, (Sense of) Purpose and Vision, (Importance of) External Recognition,* and *(Importance of) Internal Recognition*, presented in Table 4.

Table 4. Positive vs Negative perceptions of identified themes within the need for relatedness

Theme	**Positive (people count)**	**Negative (people count)**	**Ratio (positive/negative)**
(High degree of) Collaboration	4	3	Predominantly Positive
(Importance of) Colleagues	8	7	Predominantly Positive
(Motivating) Culture	8	4	Predominantly Positive
(Feeling of) Pride	7	2	Predominantly Positive
(Sense of) Purpose and Vision	7	0	Predominantly Positive

(Importance of) External Recognition	5	2	Predominantly Positive
(Importance of) Internal Recognition	8	1	Predominantly Positive

In seven out of seven themes the responses were predominantly positive. The following segment will elaborate on statements and important quotes that exemplifies these findings.

When an employee has responded positively to the theme *(High degree of) Collaboration* it indicates that they have felt motivated by the collaborative environment at the firm. A negative response means that there have been low levels of collaborations or that the existing collaboration has been poor. It seems to be an especially high level of collaboration in the early phases of both firms and this has been expressed as vital since the firms have faced rapid expansions.

> “It was a given thing that if someone needed help then you helped out, and that was the feeling within the company, and everybody did as much as they possibly could. And we also knew that if we didn't have that kind of mentality, it would be too late because autumn was approaching, and the competitors were approaching”

(Importance of) Colleagues indicate if there has been either a positive or negative atmosphere between colleagues. When an employee has responded positively to this theme, the colleagues have been a central and important part to their motivation. It could be either the colleagues at the firm, their team or an individual employee that has been especially important. “Things that motivate me, I would say are the people I work with. The social connection with others and solving problems together with others. Many of my colleagues also inspire me because they have amazing backgrounds and track records” When an employee has responded negatively to this theme, it has been related to the overall atmosphere or their direct boss.

> “It's kind of like you know when you're a kid and your parents never show up when you want them to and then they come home with a very big gift because they want to pay for their bad consciousness. That's a bit how I felt when I got the higher salary that *“okay but you're not helping me out when I need help with our projects, then I'm all by myself and then now you're telling me I'm doing a good job and giving me a higher*

salary to make me happy and make me stay." So, I think what I needed was to have more help and attention continuously"

A positive perceived *(Motivating) Culture* refers to an employee feeling motivated by the culture. The opposite indicates that the employee does not feel motivated by the culture, or that the culture itself is demotivating. This theme has foremost positive responses where colleagues and a collaborative environment are important pillars. "I liked all my colleagues a lot, it was a really nice atmosphere even though everyone worked a lot. I felt like everybody held their temper intact and it was good vibes. I felt very strongly that we were almost like a family". The negative responses seem to be in the phase before people have gotten to know each other and want to prove themselves "What demotivates most is sometimes our very, like, elitist, harsh culture". The culture or the *startup atmosphere* has also been highlighted amongst employees in both the Technological and Industrial Firm. In many cases this seems to be a strong driver for the interviewees to join the firm rather than means of monetary compensation. A positive perceived *(Motivating) Culture* seems to have been important to the employees' level of internalisation and feeling of *relatedness*.

The positive responses within the theme *(Feeling of) Pride* indicates that the employees are proud of their work. A negative response indicates that the feeling of pride is not as present, motivating or important to the fulfilment of *relatedness*. The interviewees' do strongly react positively to this theme where they feel proud or even selected to be part of the firm. "People were like *"what is this?!"*. They hadn't seen anything like it before so that was really fun being out in the city displaying the product" and "I got a bit starstruck. I thought it was very cool and different from my previous employer. I felt selected". The negative responses are associated with the firm increasing in size, thus not making them feel as special or selected as before. Or due to the firm becoming larger, and thus acting more as a 'normal' company rather than a start-up "Now we are, I don't know, like 500 employees, now I don't know people anymore, at this time I do not feel as special or selected anymore" and, "I did not feel the same enthusiasm as previously, the firm had increased in size and became more like a...boring...regular firm".

When interviewees responded positively to *(Sense of) Purpose and Vision* it was interpreted that their motivation and feeling of *relatedness* was strengthened due to internalisation of the firm's values and beliefs. A negative response meant the opposite. This theme is the only one where no interviewee has responded negatively. The *Purpose and Vision* seems to be an important factor for the employees to join, and to stay and work long hours for the firm. This could be explained by interviewees valuing being part of the firm higher, rather than receiving larger monetary compensations. Many employees highlight this specifically “In whatever I do, it needs to serve a greater purpose so that I know that this thing that I'm doing will have like a larger impact on the vision or mission that we are trying to achieve” and *“*Yeah, the biggest motivation is, I mean, the purpose of the company and the vision of the company. I mean we have a sustainability focus which is very important to me”.

(Importance of) External Recognition refers to when the company gets recognition rather than the individual employee. The majority of the interviewees’ responded positively to this theme. When the firm received public recognition or outperformed a close competitor this strengthened the satisfaction of *relatedness*. “In one way I felt very cool that I got to be part of that company because it was also during a time when we were a lot in the media” and “So at that point, I think brand recognition and that part really motivated me as well”. The opposite, a negative response, does similarly to *Pride* indicate that external recognition decrements in importance to the employees. This seems to be connected to the firm increasing in size, becoming more of a ‘regular job’, and that the employee has been at the firm for a longer period of time. “In the beginning it was really cool to work at [the firm], and you were cool just because the firm was cool, but then it gets more sunken in and it becomes more of an everyday, normal job”. In one occasion the respondent did also feel let down due to the firm not publicly recognising their progress equally to other similar major progresses “I got pretty disappointed that the company as a whole didn't celebrate this achievement, more. Because this achievement made us able to continue our operations, and we had celebrated previous accomplishments a lot”.

The positive responses within *(Importance of) Internal Recognition* indicates that the feeling of relatedness is enhanced through internal recognition. The opposite, negative responses, indicates that there is a lack of internal recognition that is desired or that it is not perceived as genuine. What is apparent is that all interviewees mentioned *Internal recognition* to be one of the most important drivers to their motivation “I would say that internal recognition is still very important to me, being acknowledged and appreciated”. The negative expressions by the interviewees has been related to not getting recognition “I would have wanted more regular and real appreciation, but everybody was so stressed out at that time” or when it did not feel genuine “When we signed the contract, then no one could say that we hadn’t done a good job, but I was like, *“thank you, but where have you been when I needed you four weeks ago?!””*. Nonetheless, it is fair to say that internal recognition has been highly valued as a reward and as means to satisfy the need for *relatedness* to all employees.

4.2.4 Alignment and contextual factors

As previously described, this section will include such themes which were not directly related to SDT, but still held importance in order to fully understand the fulfilment of motivation, or to understand company-specific structures at specific milestones that might have affected the employee. With regards to this description, the following themes were established; *Alignment (Expectations vs Reality), Nature of Tasks, Organisational Structure,* and *Workload.* The empirical findings generated both positive and negative perceptions with regards to these themes and the distribution is presented in Table 5.

Table 5. Positive vs Negative perceptions of identified themes within Alignment and Contextual Factors.

Theme	**Positive (people count)**	**Negative (people count)**	**Ratio (positive/negative)**
Alignment (Expectations vs Reality)	4	6	Predominantly Negative
Nature of Tasks	6	5	Predominantly Positive
Organisational Structure	5	5	Neutral
Workload	5	6	Predominantly Negative

In two of the five themes the responses were predominantly negative, in one of the five themes the responses were predominantly positive, and in one of the five themes the responses were neutral. The following segment will elaborate on statements and important quotes that exemplifies these findings.

Alignment (Expectations vs Reality) refers to instances where there was either a discrepancy or not a discrepancy between an employee’s work-life situation, and the expected work-life situation. A positive response within this theme indicates that there was adequate alignment in this regard. A negative response, however, indicates that there was an apparent discrepancy which was also what the majority of the interviewees indicated. “If you talk about the level of responsibility, I still had a junior position and a lower level of responsibility in that sense, but still a lot... how can you say... on paper, perhaps not too much responsibility, but in reality, it was still a lot of responsibility”. Another common example of employees feeling misalignment is when it comes to compensation. In the beginning, the interviewees generally did not mind working long hours, and being compensated poorly for it, because just being part of the company was enough compensation. However, as time went by, and as more people joined the firms, this gradually changed for a majority of the interviewees. “The monetary reward was clearly not in line with what I should have received. I mean I was interim so there was a good excuse for me not to get paid more”. Futheron, the interviewees expressed that people joining later, received higher salaries than themselves and had better pay-progression. Although they talk about it with understanding, there is clearly an undertone of dissatisfaction.

Nature of Tasks indicates to what degree the interviewees found their work tasks to be interesting and stimulating. A positive response within this theme indicates that the interviewees did find their tasks to be interesting. A negative response, on the other hand, indicates the opposite.
“This is what I like doing. It was also why I was extra motivated. Because I think it is really fun with marketing and to build a brand”. This statement generally describes how a majority of the interviewees felt with regards to their individual tasks. Fun, challenging, and motivating were frequently used words when describing one's tasks. Although a majority of the interviewees are positively inclined towards the nature of their tasks, the data clearly shows a gradual shift from the beginning of their employment towards later stages of it. Some perceive tasks which they have performed since the start to become below their level of expertise “...the tasks became gradually less interesting really. Doing pop-ups around town, sure that was fun, but it wasn't like I was doing any kind of analytical or super-demanding work in any way”, and some employees perceive their tasks as becoming more and more aligned with their individual skill sets “...I would say that I think the tasks became more fun. We got more clear tasks, like "Now you are going to do a SWOT-analysis on your country" and I thought this was really fun”.

Organisational Structure refers to the degree to which the respondents felt positive or negative towards the structure of the firm. A positive response indicated that they liked the way in which the firm looked and operated. A negative response indicated the opposite. A majority of the interviewees were typically drawn to the bootstrapping day-to-day structure of their firm, with few days being other days alike. “That's how flat an organisation can become when you are only 10 people and you are all sitting in the same room. Everyone in the team, and still today, are very young, but it felt a little bit like a continuation of studying, which felt really motivating for me”. Both studied companies have had similar development, moving from a very ad-hoc, startup-like atmosphere with no clear or distinctive roles, to larger ‘normal company’-looking firms in all aspects. Such development has divided the interviewees, where half of them are positively inclined towards this development, liking for instance that there are more clear areas of responsibility and ladders of progress within the firm. The other half, which are negatively inclined towards this development, is instead motivated by the fast-moving atmosphere of the earlier stages and misses those days in many regards.

Workload indicates whether or not the respondents viewed their workload to be either satisfactory or not. A majority of the respondents were negatively inclined towards their workload, indicating that they thought it to be too heavy.

> “After a few months I realised I can't over deliver here, and it's never good enough and I got a lot of tough feedback in the beginning. How I was not doing my job and how I was underperforming in different areas. I mean I had 25 areas so if I do good in 15 out of 25, I got to hear I was underperforming and that we needed to move forward, quicker”

Interviewees expressing negative perceptions about their workload mostly did so when referring to the earlier stages of the two studied companies. In these stages, when no clear roles were set and employees generally identified more with the firms, they also took upon themselves additional tasks to a higher extent. They did this because in general they felt very strongly for the firms, and they wanted them to succeed.

4.3 Changes Aligned with Increase of Firm Size

The following subchapter will focus on the changes of motivation which occurred for each of the employees during their time at the studied firms. This will be presented through one table and one graph per company. The table will provide a presentation of each of the employees’ milestones, number of employees, the theme of the milestones, level of need satisfaction (*autonomy*, *competence* and *relatedness*), key motivational and demotivational factors, their most valued reward, and lastly a classification of the level of internalisation during each milestone. By applying this structure, it is possible to get a proper overview of the differences between each milestone, how large the firm was at that time and to see how the level of satisfaction and the level of internalisation changes as the firm increases in size.

When classifying the level of need satisfaction for each topic, *autonomy*, *competence* and *relatedness*, the themes included in each need were analysed, as presented in Table 2, 5 and 6. These themes were connected to each specific milestone and the level of satisfaction was classified as *High*, *Medium* or *Low*. To determine the level of *Internalisation*, as presented in OIT, the classification of needs was taken into account with the addition of the milestone-specific *Key Motivational Drivers* and *Key Demotivational Drivers* as well as the employees' most valued reward. Therefore, an employee feeling high levels of need satisfaction can still vary in the degree of internalisation depending on their perceived *Key Motivational/Demotivational Drivers* and their *Most valued reward*.

Graph 3 and 4 instead visualises how the individual employees' motivation changes alongside the OIT continuum as the degree of internalisation changes. The y-axis represents the level of internalisation, meaning that the higher up on the scale, the more intrinsically motivated the person feels at that specific milestone. The x-axis represents the milestones in chronological order. In other words, the further right a milestone is on the scale, the later in time the milestone occurred. However, it is important to note that when several milestones from different employees are plotted in the same square, it should not be viewed as a difference in time.

4.3.1 Technological Firm

It is important to understand the reasons for an employee choosing a specific milestone as well as trying to recognise if there are certain patterns in the selection. Therefore, overhauling themes of milestones has been identified to understand what type of change, event or happening that caused an employee to highlight a point in time.

Table 6. Detailed presentation of each milestone and the satisfaction of needs for the Technological Firm.

Technological Firm										
Employee	Milestone	Type of Milestone	Number of employes	Satisfaction of AUTONOMY	Satisfaction of COMPETENCE	Satisfaction of RELATEDNESS	Key motivational drivers	Key demotivational drivers	Most valued reward	Level of Internalisation
A1	Joining the firm	Joining	15-20	Medium	Low	High	Pride, “cool” firm, collaboration, fun, family atmosphere, “building something”	Monotonous work, low responsibility	Building the success of the company	Integrated
A2	Took over the Swedish market	Additional responsibility, Role change	≈ 430 - 450	High	Medium	High	Autonomy, task-freedom, fun task, higher responsibility	Recognition not aligned, others were promoted	Higher pay	Identified
A3	Got a new middle-manager	Other	≈ 600	Low	High	Medium	Structure and clarity, feedback	Decremental freedom, additional hierarchical layer, felt pushed down and smaller	Feedback/recognition, monetary, working normal hours	External regulation
B1	Joining the firm	Joining	15-20	Medium	Low	High	Less hierarchical than previous experience, "why not"-mentality, company vision	Boring tasks	shares = feeling of ownership, personal development, future potential	Introjected
B2	The second market launch (abroad)	Additional responsibility, Firm related	≈ 70	Medium	Medium	High	Interesting tasks, work abroad, feelt central to firm	lack of clarity, poor feedback	experience, seeing the new office abroad succeed	Identified
B3	From "soft" position to "hard" position	Role change	≈ 150	High	High	Medium	problem solving, complexity in task, understanding different measures of the firm, personal development	difficulties in collaboration between markets/HQ, no clear boss or support/feedback	personal development, understanding of both qual and quant measures,	Identified
B4	Building a remote team	Additional responsibility	≈ 450	High	High	Medium	work-life balance, future return, decent salary, enhancing/aligning market/HQ collaboration	lack of collaboration between HQ/markets	monetary, work-life balance, shares	Introjected
C1	Joining the firm	Joining	15-20	Medium	Low	High	get work-experience, success of company	Not able to fully dive into work, ambiguous personal focus	internal recognition, company progress, acknowledgment	Identified
C2	New role: Head of User Support	Role change and becoming a manager	≈ 130-150	High	Medium	Medium	internal recognition, work full-time, be a manager, impact of firm, make decisions, company success	responsibility taken away, lack of support on how to structure work/role	recognition: internal team, team- recognition from company	Introjected
C3	Making it through the summer	Overcoming a challenge	≈ 330-350	Medium	High	Medium	fear motivation	dissatisfaction from team, no vacation, salary not aligned with responsibility	unchanged	External
C4	Move to Product Management	Role change	≈ 550	High	High	High	task itself, making impactful changes, clear task	lack of knowledge beforehand	work itself, making frictionless launch, tangible results	Identified
D1	Joining the firm	Joining	150-160	High	Medium	High	being part of the firm, inspiring company, culture	unstructured, could have been better, unclarity of responsibility	recognition, working at the firm, have good people around	Integrated
D2	Responsible for large event	Overcoming a challenge	≈ 350	High	Medium	High	prove competence to the firm, contribute to the firm, being an integral part	hectic	Employee of the month	Identified
D3	Managing a team	Becoming a manager	≈ 450	Medium	Medium	Medium	being a manager, team recognition	unclear communication/planning, had to fire people, having more clear goals and budget	Recognition, personal development, higher pay, role-change	Introjected

By looking at Table 6, it seems to be *Additional responsibility* and *Role change* that has most often been the source to a milestone rather than *Firm related* activities. *Role change* could be connected to a formal change, therefore being easier to remember. It could be associated with new ways of working, a new team, or new responsibilities. *Additional responsibilities* could possibly create the feeling of overdelivering, hence strengthening the feeling of need satisfaction.

Looking at *autonomy*, the results show that the employees who started in the early phase of the firm, A, B and C, all felt a similar level of autonomy, *medium*. At this time the firm was about 15-20 employees. In contrast, employee D, who started a year later when the firm was 150-160 employees, felt a *High* level of *autonomy*. Further on, the patterns of the data show that employee B and C have had an increase in satisfaction of autonomy whilst employee A and D. In this context it should be noted that employee B and C has gotten additional responsibilities whilst A and D has received the opposite.

Satisfaction of need for *competence* starts at a low level for all interviewees except employee D. This level does then incrementally increase for all employees except employee D where it stays on the same level. This could indicate that starting at a later stage, when the firm is more mature, increases the feeling of competence because the firm is more structured. The majority of the respondents have expressed a feeling of being viewed as knowledgeable, since hundreds of people have started after them, and feeling comfortable in front of challenges as they grow into the firm and their professional role.

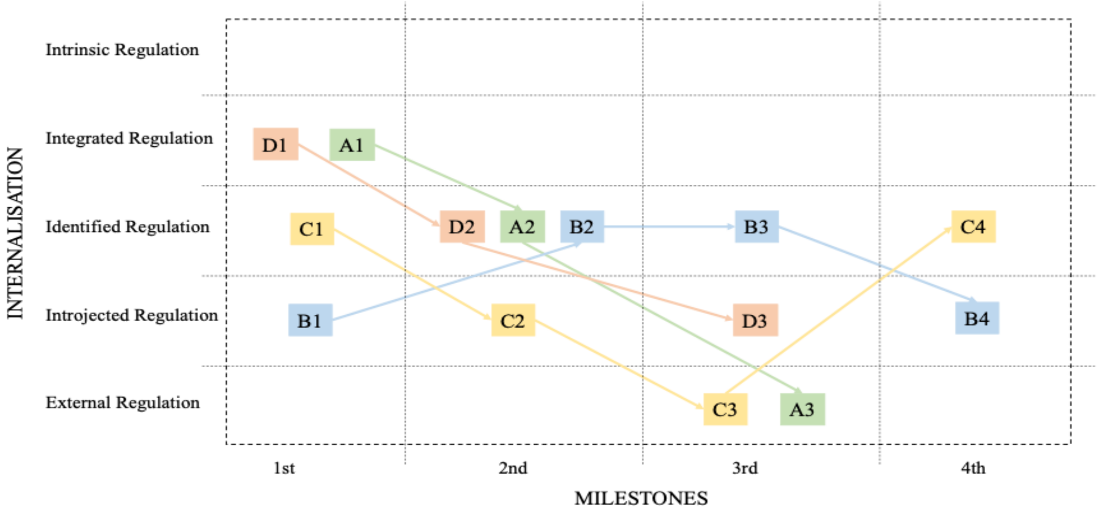
The overall level of *relatedness* is perceived *high* for all interviewees throughout all milestones. Although at their last milestones, except for employee C, the feeling of *relatedness* does decrease to *medium*. In this context, the interviewees' expresses that since the firm becomes larger and more structured, it becomes more of a 'normal' firm and work. They do still express strong feelings for the company and feel pride of having been part of the firm from an early phase, but value other things beyond what is work-related. Employee C in contrast, seems to finally reach a position in the firm that he/she feels strongly connected to. At this milestone, employee C does have a greater level of support from his/her manager and expresses a strong connection to his/her team and feels more important to the firms' success.

When *joining the firm*, all employees seem to be highly motivated by just being allowed to be part of the firm. Expressions such as; *cool firm, startup-atmosphere, why-not mentality* and *being part of the firm* indicates the interviewees' perceived high-levels of self-regulation. Therefore, being placed in the *integrated* or *identified* stage of the OIT continuum. However, employee B1 is the only one that mentions monetary reward, warrants, as one of the most important rewards and is therefore perceived as slightly more *extrinsically* motivated. Thus, placed as *Introjected*.

Moving to the milestones in the middle, the motivational drivers tend to be associated with having more freedom, higher responsibility, prove to be competent and have an impact on the firm to be the most common features. These milestones occur when the firm is in between 150-450 people and it is expressed that the firm tries to create more structure. The Key Demotivational Drivers at these milestones draws upon topics such as; *lack of clarity, poor feedback, recognition not aligned with responsibility, lack of support* and *compensation not aligned with responsibility*. In terms of *Most Valued Reward,* all interviewees' puts emphasis on recognition except employee A that addresses monetary compensation, therefore being viewed as more extrinsically motivated.

At the last milestones the employees seems to be motivated by getting internal recognition, having work-life balance, having clarity and good feedback. At these milestones the firm is above 450 employees. Expressed reasons for what made them demotivated reveal topics such as; *decremental freedom, pushed down the hierarchy, lack of collaboration between HQ/markets, unclear goals* and *lacking communication*. At this point in time, the monetary aspect and work-life balance becomes more important for all respondents except employee C. Internal recognition is still a highly valued reward. This could be due to the fact that the firm at this point no longer is perceived as a startup, but rather as a large and mature firm. At this point people generally have a larger formal responsibility and with that they want to be compensated accordingly, making monetary compensation more important. In the same context, when the firm is no longer characterised by a *startup atmosphere* and roles have been more clearly defined, it seems like the *thrill* is not as present and therefore the employees value work-life balance to a greater extent.

Figure 4. Illustration of the level of internalisation related to each milestone for employees in the Technological Firm.



As shown in Figure 4, the pattern indicates that the motivation becomes more external in comparison to the beginning. The only diversion from this is employee C, who expresses that he/she found their best place at the firm and is highly motivated by the task itself at milestone 4. Since the milestones are expressed in chronological order, it does also mean that the further right on the x-axis, the larger the firm becomes, in terms of employees. The general decrease in *internalisation* could be explained by various factors but this graph gives an indication that firm size might be negatively related to the level of *internalisation*.

4.3.2 Industrial Firm

Looking at *Type of Milestone* at the Industrial Firm there are two dominating themes, *Overcoming a challenge* and *Role change*. It seems to be the individual accomplishments and individually related changes that are the source for choosing an important/influential milestone rather than firm-specific changes. In contrast to the Technological Firm, it seems that employees of the Industrial Firm value the accomplishment of a challenge rather than getting additional responsibilities as more important/influential to their professional career at their firm. Although, *Overcoming a challenge* might be similar to *Additional Responsibilities* in that it could exemplify an event where the individual outperformed the expectations.

Table 7. Detailed presentation of each milestone and the satisfaction of needs for the Industrial Firm.

Industrial Firm

Employee	Milestone	Type of Milestone	Number of employes	Satisfaction of AUTONOMY	Satisfaction of COMPETENCE	Satisfaction of RELATEDNESS	Key motivational drivers	Key demotivational drivers	Most valued reward	Level of Internalisation
E1	Joining the firm	Joining	≈ 15	Medium	Low	Medium	working close to management, variety in tasks, autonomy, proud of being part	working too much, too simple tasks, repetitiveness, hard to evaluate one's performance	public appreciation, internal recognition, bonus and gift was surprisingly nice	Introjected
E2	Full-time employee	Additional responsibility	≈ 120-140	Medium	Medium	Medium	Clarity in role and goals, measure performance, positive acknowledgement	poor leadership --> lack of vision for team	Internal recognition, gratitude from candidates, instant result from doing successful hiring	Introjected
E3	New colleague	Other	≈ 200-220	Medium	High	Medium	the colleague, getting recognition from this person, evolving in her/his work	even though work became more interesting, still transactional tasks, short cycles	Same as previous	Identified
E4	New role: Team lead	Role change and becoming a leader	≈ 510	High	High	Medium	getting formal responsibility and recognition, feeling senior, change of scope, using KPIs	somewhat forced feedback	Recognition for the team, monetary reward came but not necessarily important, if it would have been lacking it would have been unmotivating	Identified
F1	Joining the firm	Joining	≈ 20	High	Medium	Low	company recognition, being part of a startup, autonomy, input became output	stressed by feeling of having to prove her/himself, no "real" appreciation, lack of support, harsh culture	recognition from chairman, warrants and higher salary (did not appreciate it first-hand)	Introjected
F2	First customer contract	Overcoming a challenge	≈ 55	High	Medium	Medium	fear motivation	lack of support and real appreciation, no celebration for the success	Same as before	Introjected
F3	Started local production facility	Firm related	≈ 550	Medium	Medium	High	better feedback, company progress	misses the "craziness"	When the company proceed and succeeds	Identified
G1	Joining the firm	Joining	≈ 20	Medium	Low	Medium	do something new, startup-atmosphere, company progress, less hierarchy	did not know where to contribute	being part of the firm, progress of firm	Identified
G2	Feeling of contributing	Additional responsibility	≈ 60	Medium	Medium	High	feeling of contributing, work itself, company progress, being part	-	being part of firm, firm progress, company had other ways than monetary, always beer in fridge, trusted its employees	Integrated
G3	Started to sell	Overcoming a challenge	≈ 150-180	High	High	High	performing well, company progress, team success	-	similar to before, other than monetary things, trip to Kebnekaise	Integrated
G4	Customer struggling	Overcoming a challenge	≈ 700	Medium	High	Medium	solving things, building the company, higher purpose	not as autonomous, people are more specialists, becoming more proper industrial company	salaries and "similar things" (shares?), because now it's a BIG company	Introjected
H1	Joining the firm	Joining	≈ 160-180	High	Low	High	prove myself, mission & vision, recognition	lack of having a "mentor" to make a plan of how to progress and develop	recognition, team performing good, when completing a successful project	Identified
H2	Moving to manufacturing	Role change	≈ 260-280	Medium	Medium	Medium	starting in new team, the responsibility/tasks, recognition, central part of firm	too controlling manager (micro managing)	recognition from manager, feeling valued by firm and team	Introjected
H3	New team, new manager (had worked for a while)	Role change	≈ 610	High	High	Medium	the team, understanding the firm, the culture, the team, being knowledgeable	lack of feedback, lack of personal plan for the future, mentorship, some extra bonus or vacation would be nice, report hours	feeling that you are contributing to the firm	Identified

The level of *autonomy* satisfaction is at a *high* or *medium* level throughout all milestones for every employee. All employees have at some point felt a *high* level of autonomy. E and H has an increase in *autonomy* whereas employee F and G expresses it to be at a *medium* level at their last milestone. Since both F and G had previous expertise in their area they might have started with great responsibility, but as the firm becomes bigger and more structure follows, the *autonomy* might be constrained.

Three out of four interviewees', E, G and H, have experienced an increased level of *competence* satisfaction from their start at the firm to their last milestone. Looking at their stated motivational drivers it seems to be associated with getting more responsibility, having more impact and foremost feeling more senior within the firm. Employee F does have the same level of *competence* satisfaction throughout all milestones. This is related to the employee initially having too high responsibility which made him/her not feel as comfortable towards challenges and then at the last milestone, switched position into a role with less responsibility (intentionally) then perceived to not fulfilling the innate need to grow.

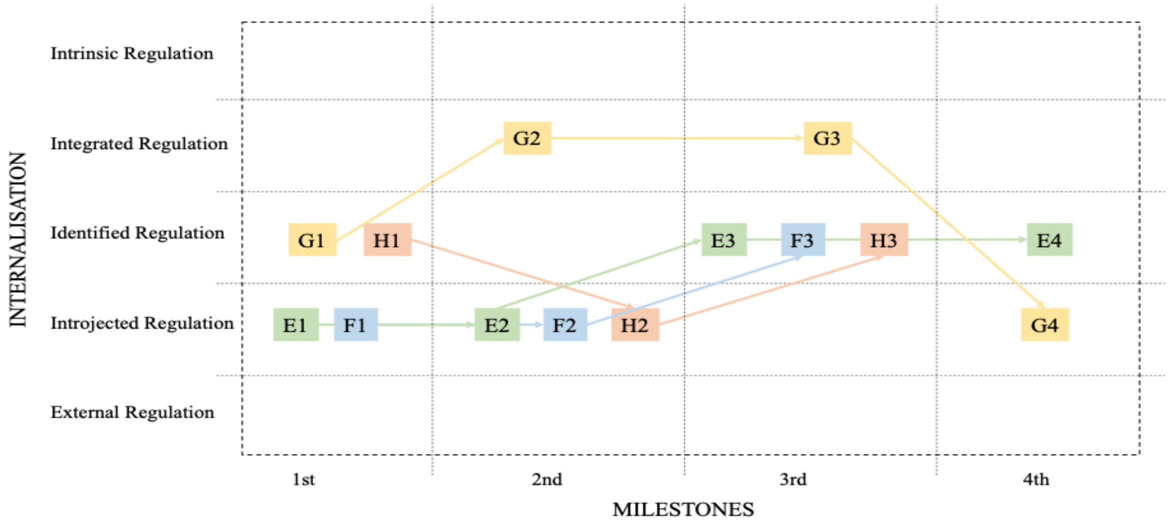
The satisfaction of *relatedness* does differ amongst the interviewees. Employees E, F and G that started at a similar time, when the firm was about 15-25 employees, have experienced a lower level of *relatedness* when joining than employee H. When E, F and G started, they were expressing things such as: *working too much, lack of contributing, harsh culture* and that *people tried to prove themselves* that makes them score lower than employee H in *relatedness* satisfaction (*medium* or *low* versus *high*). In this context, starting at a later stage seems to be associated with a greater feeling of *relatedness*. This could be connected to the firm having been more established. Therefore, the firm's survival does not depend on all actions made to the same extent as in the beginning. Although the satisfaction of *relatedness* is overall on a high level, the feeling does seem to peter out as the firm becomes larger. Employee F and G addresses this by mentioning that the feeling of being special does evaporate as there are larger numbers of people at the firm.

When starting at the firm, all interviewees do to some extent connect their Key Motivational Drivers to being proud of being part of the firm. The Key Demotivational Drivers is by employee F, G and H connected to a lack of clarity. The employees seem to struggle on such things as how to be able to contribute, lack of support and not having clarity in their career progression. Employee E does also touch upon this area saying it is *hard to evaluate one's* *performance,* but her/his Key Demotivational Drivers are largely connected to having monotonous and repetitive tasks. All interviewees' highlights getting recognition as one of their most valued rewards and employee E and F mentioned some sort of monetary compensation, although they did not expect it. Nevertheless, they mentioned it, leading to E and F being classified as more extrinsically motivated, *introjected*, than employee G and H, identified.

At the middle-section milestones (2nd or 2nd and 3rd), the motivational drivers diverge amongst the employees. Getting clarity and positive acknowledgement is highlighted by employee E. Employee G and H expresses the feeling of being a central part and contributing to the firm. Firm success and progress are also mentioned by employee G. The one interviewee that does diverge the most from the rest is employee F. At this milestone he/she experiences an enormous amount of pressure which seems to be decisive to her/his employment. *Fear motivation* is expressed and therefore employee F's level of internalisation is perceived as *introjected*. To employee F, the lack of support and *real* appreciation is negatively influencing their motivation and the most valued reward is the same as before. For employee E and H *poor leadership* is degrading their motivation. *Too transactional work* is also mentioned by employee E. When it comes to the most valued reward, employee E, F and H expresses internal recognition as well as feeling valued by the firm as most important. Employee G seems to rather value rewards that strengthen his/her feeling of *relatedness* such as; travelling with the firm, feeling trusted by the firm, having beers and chips available at the office and similar non-monetary rewards.

At the last milestones, motivational drivers differ amongst the interviewees. Employee E mentioned *getting formal responsibility* and *recognition*, employee F talks about *company progress* and better *feedback*, *solving things* and *the higher purpose* is expressed by employee G and employee H stresses the feeling of *being knowledgeable*, *the culture* and enhanced *understanding of the firm*. Similarities are found in the answers of employee F and G that mentioned *company progress* and *building the company*. Further on, employee E and H draws on similarities by highlighting the importance of *feeling senior or knowledgeable* to their motivation. When it comes to demotivational drivers, the data is also divided. Employee G connects it to the company becoming bigger and therefore people become more specialists, he/she presents a company that becomes more of an ordinary big industrial firm. This could be linked to employee F's answer, *misses the craziness*, due to the firm being more structured. However, employee F connects this largely to her/his change of role. Both employee E and H mentioned the lack of clear and honest feedback in this context. Employee H also expresses, similarly to milestone 1, the lack of a personal plan for the future career but also that the lack of formal reporting of work hours in order to get extra vacation. The monetary compensation has become more important to employee E and G compared to previous milestones as the most valued reward. Although the employee seems to have received desired compensation and argues that the lack of it would rather make her/him demotivated. Due to this, employee G is perceived as introjected while employee E is perceived as *identified* in terms of *internalisation*. Both employee F and H do instead stress more firm-specific rewards. *Company progress and success* is highlighted by employee F and the *feeling of contributing to the firm* is stressed by employee H. Both employee F and H are perceived as identified.

Figure 5. Illustration of the level of internalisation related to each milestone for employees in the Industrial Firm.



As shown in Figure 5, the overall pattern indicates that the motivation becomes more intrinsic in comparison to the beginning. Although a pattern is not as clear as in the Technological firm. Employee E and F has an increase of *internalisation*, while employee H remains on a similar level. The diversion from this is employee G who decreases in *internalisation*. The employee expresses a feeling that the firm has become like a *normal* big firm and puts greater emphasis on monetary compensation. Since the milestones are expressed in chronological order, it does also mean that the further right on the x-axis, the larger the firm becomes, in terms of employees. The general increase in internalisation could be explained by various factors but this graph gives an indication that firm size might be positively related to the level of internalisation.

5 Discussion

> As Mumford and Stokes (1992) suggests: *A motivated employee will to a larger extent participate in the evolution of work tasks, as well as adapt him/herself in the face of change.*

This chapter will combine the empirical findings with the literature to form a synthesis of past research and the empirical evidence which have been accumulated in this study. In this chapter, a deeper analysis will be conducted in congruence with past research.

5.1 Changes of Need Satisfaction as Size of the Firm Increases

5.1.1 Autonomy

The following findings regarding *autonomy* can be made:

1. Overall *autonomy* satisfaction is on a *high* level
2. At some point in time, associated with rapid firm growth, the *autonomy* becomes limited due to higher levels of control, higher uncertainty and a more structured organisation
3. In relation to prior work experiences, the interviewees still perceive both firms to be *autonomy-supportive*
4. Some interviewees' *autonomy* is undermined by having too high responsibility

The satisfaction of *autonomy* does vary from each individual along the studied period, but the general pattern reveals that it starts at a high level, decreases, and finishes on a higher level at the latter milestones. In the early phases of a HGF there are fewer employees, thus each employee’s action has a larger impact (May, 1997; Greer, Carr & Hipp, 2016). According to the literature, growth rate is dependent on management's ability to use the internal and external resources (Penrose, 1959; Gupta, Guhan & Subramanian, 2013). Since the studied firms largely consist of internal resources in the form of employees, especially in the beginning, this makes them very important. Therefore, large emphasis should be put into creating an *autonomous* environment, such as giving employees freedom and control. This also goes in line with Greiner’s (1998) distinctive growth phases, where the first one being *creativity*, strengthening the importance of facilitating *autonomy*. It seems as if this has been provided, given the high levels of *autonomy* and *relatedness* in the early phases.

The decrease in perceived *autonomy* satisfaction at the mid-sectional milestones could possibly be explained by Greiner’s literature. Greiner’s second phase is characterised by *direction* and *delegation*, hence, the employees’ freedom and control, in the studied firms, might be constrained and consequently decrease the level of *autonomy* satisfaction. Lastly, Greiner’s last phase goes into *coordination* and *collaboration* which could be explanatory for the increased feeling of *autonomy* at the latter milestones. Although several researchers argue against separating growth into different phases (Bridge, O’Neill & Cromie, 2003; Blundel & Hingley, 2001; Leive & Lichstenstein, 2010) it seems strikingly accurate in this context with regards to *autonomy*.

The evolution of *autonomy* satisfaction does also seem to connect to Cordery’s (1997) dimensions that affects the level of *autonomy*. During the period of low *autonomy,* firm employees express poor feedback, lack of support, and unclear leadership, which are all included in Cordery’s dimension to reach *autonomy*. Deci, Connel and Ryan (1989) also points towards the need for managers to support *autonomy* in order to create positive work outcomes. Conclusively, it seems as if the decrease in *autonomy* is largely connected to both firms' rapid growth period where unclarity of goals and objectives in combination with poor feedback makes the employees feel less *autonomous* in their job tasks, thus becoming more extrinsically motivated.

Another reason for the decrease in *autonomy* could be connected to employees having too high responsibilities. As revealed in the analysis, almost all interviewees expressed this at some point. Some interviewees even mentioned ‘fear motivation’ during this period. Even though it could be out of coincidence that this period coincided with the time of high-growth, it seems more reasonable that the high workload came as a consequence of growth since six out of eight interviewees had been at the firm from the start, thus having attained a fair share of responsibility.

As Roach and Sauermann (2012; 2015) conclude, employees joining HGFs or startups, *joiners*, are largely similar to founders, seeking greater *autonomy*, are risk takers, and look for the opportunity to work in an exciting work environment. Despite what may have caused the fluctuations in *autonomy* satisfaction, this point to the importance of advocating for a work environment which promotes *autonomy.*

5.1.2 Competence

The following findings can be made with regards to the need satisfaction of *competence*:

1. Satisfaction of *competence* overall increases as the firm grows in size
2. Satisfaction of competence is strengthened by feeling senior, attaining greater clarity of goals and objectives, and less uncertainty
3. *Competence* satisfaction does also seem connected to getting more structured feedback
4. *Competence* satisfaction seems to increase as the firm’s structure changes, when more clear departments emerge employees become more specialised and feel comfortable in front of challenges

Satisfaction of *Competence* reveals the most similar results amongst the interviewees. It is clear that the employees do feel more competent and comfortable in front of challenges as they progress towards the latter milestones. What seems to be most accurately connected to this is the development accredited to the clarity of goals and objectives, level of uncertainty, feedback and the feeling of being senior. Interestingly, this seems to be connected to the organisational structural changes as well as the alignment of expectations. As the interviewees progresses towards the latter milestones, they are describing a larger and more structured firm, where attempts to improve organisational and feedback structure become more apparent, there is more clarity with regards to their individual role, as well as in who they are reporting to. Although the overall *competence* satisfaction increases there are two clear deviations that negatively influences the satisfaction of this need. Something that could improve the fulfilment of *competence* even more would be to clarify the *career progressions* for the employees. Many interviewees talk about their progression within the firm being unclear and ambiguous at their earlier milestones. According to Roach and Sauermann (2012), joiners are however generally risk-tolerant which could mitigate the potential downsides connected to having an unclear career progression.

Some interviewees do also express too high a level of responsibility that undermines the individual's perceived feeling of comfort and confidence in front of challenges. Although it is clear that *competence* satisfaction improves as the firm increases in size, it is important to note that it started at an overall low level within both firms. Interestingly, but not surprisingly, *competence* satisfaction was perceived higher in the Industrial Firm, possibly because employees, and founders, had industrial expertise before joining.

5.1.3 Relatedness

General statements regarding need satisfaction of *relatedness*:

1. Overall, satisfaction of *relatedness* decreases as the firm grows
2. This is especially the case for the Technological Firm while the Industrial Firm maintains a similar level of *relatedness* satisfaction
3. Decreasing satisfaction of *relatedness* is associated to the firm increasing in size and becoming less personal
4. As the firm increases in size, the feeling of devotion to the firm decreases and rewards increases in importance
5. Level of *relatedness* is undermined by poor guidance and leadership for some employees

The satisfaction of *relatedness* decreases for the Technological Firm and slightly increases for the Industrial Firm, although it starts on a lower level for the Industrial Firm. The findings show that all employees in the Technological Firm experience *High* levels of *relatedness* satisfaction when joining the firm, while employees in the Industrial Firm perceives foremost *Medium* levels of *relatedness* satisfaction. An interesting angle of discussion is to compare the founders of the two firms. The Technological Firm's founders have an entrepreneurial background or come directly from university, while the founders of the Industrial Firm have long and relevant industry specific experience. As in Hinton and Hamilton's (2013) research, founders of HGFs most often have a background similar to the Industrial Firm. Whether or not the Industrial Firm has been more successful than the Technological firm is not for this study to answer, but it seems that in this study, having founders with entrepreneurial backgrounds might initially have positive influences on the feeling of *relatedness*. However, since the level of *relatedness* decreases for the Technological Firm and slightly increases for the Industrial Firm, it indicates that founders with industry experiences might be more important in the long-term satisfaction of *relatedness* within HGFs.

Despite the founders having different backgrounds and that the different firms revealed discordant results, combining all interviewees answers irrespectively of firm, the satisfaction of *relatedness* does decrease as the firm increases in size. This could be connected to the fact that the firm becomes larger, thus having more employees that the earlier employees do not have a relationship to. Considering Roach and Sauermann's (2012) research of joiner's preferences, the opportunity to work in an exciting environment is important. Therefore, another reason for the decrease in *relatedness* satisfaction might be that as the firm grows and becomes more structured, the same 'thrill', experienced in the beginning, might not be as present.

5.2 Determinants of Employee Change of Motivation

All interviewees were allowed to individually classify a number of milestones that had been influential to their motivation at their time at the HGF. The most common change that affected the employees' motivation was *Change of roles*. Interestingly, the majority of milestones chosen were connected to positive events. The second most frequent change, *Additional responsibility* and *Overcoming a challenge,* was also connected to progress, accomplishments and positive changes. Possibly, the interpretation of important/influential might be subconsciously positively perceived or that positive instances might be easier to remember. Nevertheless, some milestones were connected to negative experiences and were mostly related to having *too high responsibility* or feeling *pushed down* the hierarchy.

It appears to be additional themes influencing employees' motivation that are not clearly related to the fulfilment of need satisfaction by Ryan and Deci (2000). The additional themes address the feeling of non-alignment between expectations and reality, as well as contextual changes affecting the motivation. It is evident that these areas, as a consequence of growth, have large moderating influences on the employees' motivation in addition to the increase in size. Both of the studied firms go from being very loose and ad-hoc in their nature, to resembling typical larger firms over time. With this type of structural change, the work environment is subject to change which affects the employees. Clearly, the size seems to influence the *needs* satisfaction as discussed above, but additionally, as HGFs grow at such a rapid pace, there is a need to form some sort of structure to withstand the growth, which both firms try to establish, which is in line with what Valencia (2019) proposes. Simultaneously, new organisational structures seem to emerge, influencing the employee's nature of tasks and workload. However, as all of this happens so quickly, it appears as if the firms are struggling to cope with the rate of growth, establishing a gap in employee expectations and their actual work conditions, referred to as alignment in this thesis. This misalignment seems to negatively influence all levels of need satisfaction if not met. To reach greater alignment, higher levels of self-regulation and internalisation seems to be important for the employees' motivation, also supported by (Latham & Pinder, 2005).

Interviewees recognise that people starting later than themselves have received higher salaries. Although they acknowledge it, and talk about it in an understanding manner, reading between the lines, there is some sort of misalignment in their expectations. As it appears, this intensifies as the firm increases in size. The misalignment therefore increases as the firm becomes more structured and the responses indicate that this negatively influences the *autonomy* and *relatedness*, hence, two of the most important motivational needs to improve employee performance has been lost (Wall, Jackson & Mullarkey, 1995). Therefore, the misalignment of compensation in relation to responsibilities gets more attention.

As the firm increases in size and structural changes follow, the majority of the interviewees do mention that the monetary compensation becomes increasingly important. At this point in time, the majority carries high responsibility, but does express a misalignment between responsibility and compensation. Employees seem to become more extrinsically motivated as the tasks themselves are not viewed as inherently interesting, or the colleagues or culture are not as interesting anymore due to the size of the firm. Instead, monetary compensation becomes important. However, as the improved monetary compensation is received, it appears to not enhance the fulfillment of *need* satisfaction. This could potentially be connected to the concept of crowding-out, where extrinsic compensation replaces the previously felt intrinsic motivation (Frey & Oberholzer-Gee, 1997). Although, it is important to note that researchers have found different influences of monetary compensation on work outcomes, where it can be good, bad or non-influential (Deci, Olafsen & Ryan, 2005). Even though this case study indicates that as the firms increases in size, and monetary compensation becomes more important to the employees, making them more extrinsically rather than intrinsically motivated, it is hard to determine whether or not it negatively influences their performance as suggested by Titmuss (1970). Possibly, the salary itself does not seem to be that important to the interviewees, it is rather the misalignment between expectation and reality that could be an issue. Hence, the importance of alignment to fulfil *need* satisfaction should be highlighted.

6 Conclusion

6.1 Research Purpose

The purpose of this study is to gain further understanding of employee motivation in HGFs and how employee motivation is affected during the growth of HGFs. A further purpose of this study is to add additional depth and perspectives to the existing research within organisational growth and motivation. Additionally, the aim and objective of this study is to potentially extend SDT with new perspectives or depth added by this study, which would enlarge the application of it and the understanding of similar contexts. This was done by interviewing employees within two companies, defined as HGFs, within different industries to acquire their perspectives with regards to their motivational development during their employment. Data obtained from the interviews could then be used to understand employee motivation, *how* it changes, and *why* it changes in the studied context. Hence, providing managers with understanding necessary to enhance the overall motivation of employees.

6.2 Theoretical Implications

This study adds to the theoretical understanding of SDT within the studied context by highlighting employees' satisfaction of needs within HGFs. Moreover, the research has resulted in a fourth section, besides the three psychological needs constituting SDT, *Alignment and Contextual Factors.* For that reason, this thesis contributes to SDT with an additional layer. Besides understanding the individuals' perception of their level of self-regulation, it is important to understand the structural dimensions surrounding the specific employee. This is much in line with Pinder's (1988) definition of motivation as energetic forces that originate both from within the employee and beyond the individual being. Therefore, this research provides some firm ground upon which future similar studies can stand steadily, in their pursuit of further understanding motivation within HGFs.

As stipulated in the outset of this thesis, there is an apparent gap in the motivation literature being that only a fraction of conducted studies have focused on the employees of HGFs. Instead, most research has centred around the founders, or investors of these same companies (Roach & Sauermann, 2015). With regards to motivation research, this thesis contributes to literature by combining the SDT and HGFs. A majority of prior research that have applied the SDT in similar contexts have done so in large and more mature corporations (Deci, Koestner & Ryan, 1999; Gagné & Deci, 2005). In that sense, this study also distinguishes itself by researching younger and more immature firms.

The uniqueness of this study, which may also be its greatest contribution to the theoretical implications of applying SDT, is that the interviewees have themselves defined the milestones upon which the data collection has revolved around. Instead of having predefined changes or phases to capture change, the application of milestones enabled the authors to anchor the interviewees' memory to a certain point of motivational change important to the individual employee. This has proven to be crucial in order to understand *how* and *why* motivation for employees' changes, and it exemplifies a way of applying SDT.

6.3 Practical Implications

The conclusions drawn from this study can prove useful for practitioners, especially those who have direct influence over the work-life circumstances of employees working in HGFs (i.e. managers or founders). For instance, it is arguably important for managers who are in charge of employees within a HGF to understand what motivation amongst employees working in HGFs typically looks like and how it typically changes as the firm increases in size. By improving one's understanding in this regard, it is possible to adjust the work-life conditions accordingly to achieve a greater perceived workplace for the employees. For example, the findings of this study showed that a majority of the employees became more extrinsically motivated and less internalised as the firms increased in size, partly because of misalignment and decreasing fulfilment of need satisfaction. Knowing this fact, a manager can consequently employ actions aimed at showing continuous appreciation towards his or her employees as the firm grows larger.

The findings show that misalignments could decrease employee motivation. The data indicates that it stems from a range of different areas, including but not limited to; work and perceived work, work and recognition, as well as work and compensation. Knowing that misalignment is a common demotivational factor within HGFs, managers should work proactively to minimise the impact of such elements. The certainty of these mentioned practical implications is however not considered clear but should rather be seen as indicative of how it may be. During high growth, the chaotic environment seems to negatively influence the level of autonomy due to the employees feeling a lack of clarity in their roles and their objectives. To mitigate this, a suggestion would be to, although it might be problematic, spend time with the early joiners of the firm to talk about their personal aims and visions for their progression.

As stated in the discussion, there seems to exist positive influences on need satisfaction with regards to what background the founders have, although they become notable at different points in time. The entrepreneurial founders enjoy initial high, but decreasing fulfilment of *relatedness* satisfaction, while the industrial founders experience lower initial, but increasing levels of *relatedness*. Hence, to maintain higher levels of need satisfaction from the start and alongside growth, it should be beneficial to have founders with backgrounds from both areas.

6.4 Limitations and Future Research

Although the findings generated by this study is considered to be of high validity and reliability, there are inherent limitations connected to the study which does affect the general applicability of the findings presented, as well as the conclusions reached. First and foremost, because of the formal limitations placed on this study of scope and time-limit, the full extent to which the study might have needed to be conducted was not possible. A greater number of interviewees from more firms, active in a larger number of industries, would have made the findings more generalisable. Only interviewing eight employees, from two firms active in two different industries, is by all accounts not enough to produce the quantity of qualitative observations needed in order to draw more reliable conclusions. However, the researchers feel confident that the findings which have been presented, and the conclusions which have been drawn, are sound and reliable in their nature. Secondly, as previously stated, the current outbreak of COVID-19 has made the conduction of this research more complicated and it most certainly has affected the desired number of interviewees to include in the study. Zoom and otherwise scarcely used communication-tools has been the main source of communication in the writing of this thesis, which should be taken into account when assessing the quality of the data obtained. Lastly, since motivation is highly personal, the classification of statements revolving motivation connected to SDT has consequently been subject to subjectivity. Moreover, although SDT has been deemed suitable for the conduction of this study, it may diminish possible nuances that could be obtained from applying multiple or other theories and frameworks.

With regards to the above-mentioned limitations placed on this study, further research within the area is deemed necessary. It would for instance have been purposeful to include interviewees from a larger sample of companies, active in a greater variety of industries. Moreover, it would be interesting to learn whether or not the Swedish corporate context/circumstances differ from that of other countries. Therefore, a study including not only Swedish companies but instead a set of international, as well as Swedish firms, would be desirable. Furthermore, there are several frameworks and theories to analyse motivation through, therefore we urge further research to try to apply other prominent frameworks for evaluating motivation in this type of context. Lastly, given the societal importance of HGFs and the employees importance to HGFs success, there is a need for further research on this topic and we urge all researchers and practitioners within this area to acknowledge and act upon it.

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8 Appendix A: The Interview Structure

PERSON, COMPANY
GENERAL
In short, can you begin by telling us about the company you work at and what the firm looks like today?
How long have you been at the company?
What is your background (education, work, etc.)?
What are your tasks and responsibilities?
Just to start off a little bit, what would you say primarily motivates and demotivates you at work?
MILESTONES
If you look back at the years you have been at the company, can you mention the most important/influential professional milestones that you have experienced?
Q MILESTONES
General
What led you to join company X? (General)
What did the firm look like at this point?
How did you feel about the fact that the company had grown much larger at this point?
Describe what motivated and demotivated you at work at this time?
Need Satisfaction
How did you feel about being a part of the company?
How did you feel about working with your peers?
How was the non-work time with colleagues?
How interesting did you find your tasks to be at this point?
How did you feel about the level of your responsibilities?

At this point in time, did you take on additional responsibilities and tasks, beyond your ordinary ones?
What motivated you to do so?
What did you feel about the kind of feedback you got at this time?
What kind of reward did you value the most at this point?
What could have made you more motivated at this stage?