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*Fuel or fire: An exploration of psychological detachment in
the entrepreneurial context*

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Abstract

Entrepreneurs face challenging work-related stressors inherent to their occupation. Prolonged exposure to such stressors can have negative consequences on well-being and job satisfaction, which highlights the need for recovery from work-related stressors. This thesis focuses on psychological detachment (PD) as an impactful recovery process. Due to the characteristics of the entrepreneurial profession, entrepreneurs face more difficulties to psychologically detach from work. However, research so far has yielded mixed results on the relationship of stressors, psychological detachment, entrepreneurial well-being and job satisfaction. Within this study, job satisfaction is used as a common indicator of well-being. Hence, this thesis aims to explore the connection between PD and entrepreneurial job satisfaction. Following a qualitative approach, nine semi-structured interviews with a sample of nine early-stage entrepreneurs were conducted. The findings show how entrepreneurs attach a dual meaning to PD and hence experience a dual effect on their job satisfaction. Entrepreneurs are aware of their heightened risk of low PD leading to work-life conflict and low job satisfaction, yet embrace a state of low PD as an inherent part of being an entrepreneur leading to increased job satisfaction. Therefore, this thesis introduces the concept of job connectivity. Job connectivity implies a positive effect on job satisfaction through low PD and reflects how entrepreneurs can leverage certain skills or processes and facilitators to support job satisfaction despite low PD. This way, this study contributes to a deeper understanding of the role of PD as a recovery process from work-related stressors in the context of entrepreneurial well-being, and specifically, job satisfaction.

Keywords: psychological detachment ; job connectivity ; work-related stressors ; entrepreneurial well-being ; entrepreneurial job satisfaction ; recovery

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1. Introduction

Rising organisational demands (Sonnentag & Fritz, 2015) and the question of how individuals can meet these demands while maintaining a good well-being (Bakker et al., 2003) have received more attention by researchers in the past years. The Effort-Recovery Model (ERM) (Meijman & Mulder, 1998), which introduces the need of recovery after experiencing job efforts resulting in strain on well-being, is a fundamental framework of this research.

Studies in organisational psychology identify recovery from work as a crucial mechanism that facilitates individuals staying healthy and engaged when facing high job demands (Sonnentag, Binnewies & Mojza, 2008). Craig and Cooper (1992) described recovery processes as a way to decrease or remove physical and psychological strains caused by job demands at work. Consequently, recovery interventions are the actions that can be taken to help in achieving a state of recovery (Richardson & Rothstein, 2008; Verbeek et al., 2019). Examples of recovery interventions are sleep, physical activity, social support and work-related intervention (e.g. Murnieks et al., 2020; Gunnarsson & Josephson, 2011).

The recovery process which lies at the core of this study is psychological detachment (PD) (Sonnentag & Fritz, 2007). PD means to “disengage oneself psychologically from work when being away from the workplace” (Sonnentag & Fritz, 2015, p.74). It plays both a mediating and moderating role in the relationship of job demands and well-being (Sonnentag & Fritz, 2015). Achieving a state of PD can be facilitated by recovery interventions (Richardson & Rothstein, 2008; Verbeek et al., 2019).

Yet, how do the notions of PD and recovery relate to the entrepreneurial context? While the well-being of entrepreneurs has become subject to an increasing number of studies (e.g. Stephan, 2018), studies on PD and recovery have mostly been researched in the organisational context of salaried employees (Sonnentag & Fritz, 2015; Wendsche & Lohmann-Haislah, 2017). However, obtaining a deeper understanding of PD as a recovery process among entrepreneurs is particularly valuable. Firstly, entrepreneurs face distinctively high levels of job stressors, such as high workload, uncertainty and resource constraints (e.g. Stephan, 2018; Williamson, Gish & Stephan, 2021; Wincent & Örtqvist, 2009).

Secondly, entrepreneurs see their identity reflected in their occupation (Shepherd & Patzelt, 2018; Wach, Stephan & Gorgievski, 2016) and have increased job involvement (Taris et al., 2008), which puts them at a higher risk of low PD after work. Furthermore, the maintenance of good mental well-being is not only essential for entrepreneurs themselves but has also been found to have desirable effects regarding job performance and private life (e.g. Wincent, Örtqvist & Drnoveski, 2008; Stephan, 2018).

Thus, this study aims to contribute to a deeper understanding of the role of PD as a recovery process from work-related stressors in the context of entrepreneurial well-being, and specifically, job satisfaction. Job satisfaction has been selected as a commonly used indicator of mental well-being in entrepreneurial research (Stephan, 2018), hence serving as a proxy for the mental well-being element in this study.

When considering which and how work-related stressors may play a key role in PD as a recovery process in the entrepreneurial context, the stressors workload, role conflict, role ambiguity and time pressure are identified as poignant job stressors in both the stressor-detachment model (Sonnetag & Fritz, 2015) and within the research on antecedents of entrepreneurial well-being (Stephan, 2018). What stands out from the research on these work-related stressors and their impact on entrepreneurial well-being, is the ambiguity of their impact (Bradley & Roberts, 2004; Taris et al., 2008; Millan et al., 2013). This ambiguity could be explained by the challenge-hindrance stressor framework which theorises that some stressors have a positive (challenging) impact, whilst other stressors have a negative (hindering) impact (Cavanaugh et al., 2000; LePine, Podsakoff & Lepine, 2005). Hence, this study focuses on the work-related stressors, such as workload, role conflict, role ambiguity and time pressure, considering which of these stressors are most impactful to PD as a recovery process among entrepreneurs and which of these may classify as challenge stressors (LePine, Podsakoff & Lepine, 2005).

Lastly, this study focuses on the entrepreneurial population as a research setting. It is important to point out that the population of entrepreneurs is not homogenous in the context of stressors and well-being (Wach et al., 2021). In general, past studies in this segment of entrepreneurial research have shown varying differences between entrepreneurs based on e.g. prior start-up experience (Kollmann, Stöckmann & Kensbock, 2019) and presence of employees (Hessels, Rietveld & van der Zwan, 2017).

This is particularly relevant for the subgroup of early-stage entrepreneurs, which is seen to deal with its own set of challenges within the early stages of their venture, such as liability of newness, increased uncertainty and establishing legitimacy (Fisher, 2020; Politis, 2005). Hence, it appears most urgent to explore the dynamic of PD and entrepreneurial job satisfaction for early-stage entrepreneurs.

As such, this study was set out to answer the following research question:

How does psychological detachment relate to job satisfaction among early-stage entrepreneurs?

The aim of this study is two-fold. Firstly, it aims to explore the relation between psychological detachment (PD), entrepreneurial well-being, entrepreneurial stressors and how that relation is influenced. Secondly, it explores the approaches that early-stage entrepreneurs take to recover from work stressors and how these relate to their mental well-being and job satisfaction. Due to the explorative and inductive goal of the study, a qualitative research strategy was selected to answer the presented research question (Bell, Bryman & Harley, 2022).

2. Theoretical Framework

This chapter starts by establishing the importance of entrepreneurial well-being in relation to the scope of the thesis. Next, it explores what is currently known about recovery processes of entrepreneurs and introduces the concept of psychological detachment (PD) as discussed in the entrepreneurial context. Lastly, it introduces the research question and aim of the study.

Prior to looking into what has been established about entrepreneurial well-being and recovery, the term entrepreneur is being limited for the scope of this study. An entrepreneur will be defined as a person who has founded at least one business and is actively working for this business in a self-employed manner (Davidsson, 2005).

2.1 Entrepreneurial well-being

This section establishes an in-depth understanding of entrepreneurial well-being embedded within existing frameworks. Secondly, the antecedents of entrepreneurial well-being are discussed.

Prior to discussing entrepreneurial well-being and recovery, it is important to point out that the population of occupational entrepreneurs is not homogenous in the context of stressors and well-being. In general, past studies in this segment of entrepreneurial research have shown varying differences between entrepreneurs based on e.g. prior start-up experience (Kollmann, Stöckmann & Kensbock, 2019) and presence of employees (Hessels, Rietveld & van der Zwan, 2017). This heterogeneity has also been recognised within the context of PD as a recovery process and entrepreneurial well-being (Wach et al., 2021). This is particularly relevant for the subgroup of early-stage entrepreneurs, which is seen to deal with its own set of challenges within the early stages of their venture, such as liability of newness, increased uncertainty and establishing legitimacy (Fisher, 2020; Politis, 2005). Hence, it appears most urgent to explore the dynamic of PD as a recovery process and entrepreneurial well-being for early-stage entrepreneurs.

Simultaneously, entrepreneurial well-being itself has also been researched from a wide range of different perspectives, ranging from ill-being related measures (e.g. depression, burnout, anxiety and stress) to positive well-being related measures such as satisfaction in both the private (e.g. life and household income satisfaction) and work-related context (e.g. job satisfaction) (Stephan, 2018; Wiklund et al., 2019). Wiklund et al. (2019) attempted to capture the various dimensions of entrepreneurial well-being by defining it as “the experience of satisfaction, positive affect, infrequent negative affect, and psychological functioning in relation to developing, starting, growing, and running an entrepreneurial venture” (Wiklund et al., 2019, p.2). Looking deeper into the different approaches to well-being, an analysis of the 144 studies reviewed by Stephan (2018) revealed life and job satisfaction to be the most common individual measures for entrepreneurial well-being. This thesis follows Stephan’s (2018) analysis and focuses on job satisfaction as a key component of entrepreneurial well-being, hence examining the first element of Wiklund et al.’s. (2019) definition.

2.1.1 Relevance of entrepreneurial well-being

Self-employed only make up around 15,3% of the total workforce in the European Union alone (OECD, 2023). Hence, it appears logical that most of the work and well-being related research has focused on salaried employees in the past. However, entrepreneurs face especially challenging conditions inherent to their occupation, such as particularly high levels of job stressors, levels of uncertainty, resource constraints and stress (e.g. Rauch, Fink & Hatak, 2018; Stephan, 2018; Williamson, Gish & Stephan, 2021; Wincent & Örtqvist, 2009; Wincent, Örtqvist & Drnovsek, 2008). Therefore, entrepreneurial well-being in the face of stressors can be seen as an important area of research.

To understand the importance of entrepreneurial well-being it is key to grasp its consequences. Guided by the findings of Stephan’s (2018) review of the academic field of entrepreneurial well-being, the consequences of entrepreneurial well-being can be divided into three dimensions: venture related performance, direct consequences for the entrepreneurs themselves and consequences for others. A higher level of entrepreneurial well-being is related to positive outcomes in all dimensions (Stephan, 2018).

This has been confirmed by other studies, where a positive relation was found with desirable performance related factors (e.g. Ayala & Manzano, 2014; Gorgievski, Moriano & Bakker, 2014; as reviewed in Stephan, 2018) as well as positive outcomes related to family, friends and other private stakeholders surrounding the entrepreneur (Gorgievski et al., 2010; Gudmundsson, 2013; Wirback et al., 2014 as reviewed in Stephan, 2018). Consequently, high well-being was negatively related to poor health and the experience of stress (Stephan, 2018).

These findings emphasise the importance of entrepreneurial mental well-being both in the business and the personal context of entrepreneurs.

2.1.2 Theoretical foundation for well-being and its antecedents

To understand the nature of the relation between well-being and its antecedents, it is crucial to be aware of two foundational frameworks in this psychological context. The following sections present an overview of the two frameworks. The antecedents of entrepreneurial well-being are examined in 2.1.3.

2.1.2.1 Stressor-strain framework

Most efforts to grasp the relationship between the antecedents of well-being have been based on the stressor-strain concept (Roy et al., 1965). At its core, this framework assumes a solely negative effect from stressors on the well-being of individuals, referred to as strain (Roy et al., 1965) and has been supported in the context of traditional organisational studies (i.e. focusing on salaried employees).

However, Wach and colleagues (2021) apply this concept to the entrepreneurial context. They refine the stressor-strain framework by differentiating between stressors with a possible positive (challenge stressors) effect and stressors with a purely negative effect (hindrance stressors) (LePine, Podsakoff & Lepine, 2005). This represents an opportunity to explain contradicting results regarding the effect of stressors on well-being among entrepreneurs (Wach et al., 2021).

2.1.2.2 Job Demands-Resources-Recovery-Model (JD-R)

Another way to categorise antecedents of mental well-being is through the lens of the Job Demands-Resources-Recovery-Model (JD-R) (Kinnunen et al., 2011; Wendsche & Lohmann-Haislah, 2017). The JD-R theorises that the elements of a work environment can be grouped into job demands and job resources (Demerouti et al., 2001). Job demands refer to “those physical, psychological, social, or organisational aspects of the job that require sustained physical and/or psychological effort and are therefore associated with certain physiological and/or psychological costs” (Bakker et al., 2003, p.344). Examples of job demands are poor physical conditions, workload and so on. Job resources refer to “those physical, psychological, social, or organisational aspects of the job that are either/or: (1) functional in achieving work goals; (2) reduce job demands and the associated costs and (3) stimulate personal growth and development” (Bakker et al., 2003, p.344).

The JD-R relates to the stressor-strain framework in fundamental ways (Roy et al., 1965). Job demands can result in job stressors if the employee cannot sufficiently recover from them and consequently experiences long-lasting strain (Roy et al., 1965; Demerouti et al., 2001; Bakker et al., 2003; Kinnunen et al., 2011). Instead, job resources can assist in alleviating strain by assisting in achieving goals and alleviating workload (Demerouti et al., 2001; Bakker et al., 2003; Kinnunen et al., 2011). However, findings show that the effect of job resources is weaker compared to the effect of job demands (Demerouti et al., 2001; Bakker et al., 2003; Kinnunen et al., 2001). Hence, increasing job resources alone may have minor effects in decreasing strain, while decreasing job demands can be expected to yield comparably larger benefits.

The job demands or stressors established within the stressor-strain framework (Roy et al., 1965) and the JD-R (Demerouti et al., 2001) explain how such job demands or stressors cause strain on mental and physical health. Hence, understanding the antecedents of entrepreneurial well-being requires an understanding of what kind of job demands or stressors are studied within the entrepreneurial context.

2.1.3 Antecedents of entrepreneurial well-being

In an review of 144 scientific articles in the field of entrepreneurial well-being, Stephan (2018) divided the predictors of well-being among entrepreneurs into the six categories of (1) “work characteristics”, (2) “personal resources and vulnerabilities”, (3) “firm and financial characteristics”, (4) “social resources and stressors”, (5) “physical environment” and (6) “market and country context” (Stephan, 2018, p.296). Generally, the number of previously found antecedents and the at times ambiguous results, raise the question of a relational hierarchy among the different categories of antecedents.

For reasons of scope, this thesis focuses on stressors related to work characteristics, while the physical environment and market context were entirely excluded due to a lack of relevance. Other antecedents are described to gain a better understanding of the bigger picture, yet will be less focused on throughout the data collection and data analysis. This decision supports the goal of this study, which is to contribute to an understanding of how to improve well-being of entrepreneurs through the lens of PD as a recovery process. Considering work-related stressors are shown to have a large impact on well-being and recovery (Bakker et al., 2003; Demerouti et al., 2001; Kinnunen et al., 2011), the authors assume these types of antecedent to be most valuable to explore.

2.1.3.1 Work characteristics stressors

Role stressors

Role stress is the only antecedent of well-being unambiguously found to be negatively associated with well-being, reflected in role conflict and role ambiguity (Stephan, 2018). Additionally, it is seen as a hindrance stressor (Wach et al., 2021; LePine, Podsakoff & Lepine, 2005).

Work-strain stressors

High demands, often also described as workload, were found to have a negative relation with entrepreneurial well-being by 19 studies, while two studies found no relation (Stephan, 2018).

A study by Bradley & Roberts (2004), which focused on the differences in job satisfaction between self-employed and non-traditionally employed individuals indicated a positive relation of both long working hours and high demands to job satisfaction among entrepreneurs who began to be self-employed more recently. However, longer self-employed individuals did not repeat these findings (Bradley & Roberts, 2004). While this could be seen as an indication of job demands being a potential challenge stressor, Bradley & Roberts (2004) emphasise that the direction of the relation in which demands, average weekly work hours and job satisfaction are related cannot be answered by their study.

Long working hours, also described as time pressure, were investigated as a separate antecedent in various studies, again yielding mixed results (Stephan, 2018). The results mostly showed a negative relation to well-being (Stephan, 2018), while the aforementioned findings by Bradley & Roberts (2004) and a second large-scale study by Millan et al. (2013) suggest a positive link between long hours and high job satisfaction among entrepreneurs. Simultaneously, actively taking time off from work was found to improve the well-being of entrepreneurs (Rau et al., 2008; Vesala & Tuomivaara, 2015 as cited in Stephan, 2018).

These insights indicate long working hours and high demands may meet the characteristics of a challenge stressor (LePine, Podsakoff & Lepine, 2005), which can have both positive and negative effects on the well-being of entrepreneurs.

Work meaningfulness

Standing out as a work-related stressor is *meaningfulness of work*, for which two out of seven reviewed studies suggested a non-linear, but instead inversed u-shaped, relation with well-being (Stephan, 2018). According to Fisher, Maritz and Lobo (2013), the positive relation between well-being and the level of meaningfulness which entrepreneurs attach to their work increases until it reaches a turning point, where extreme meaningfulness is associated with a state comparable to obsession and turns to have a negative effect. A second case study indicating the non-linear nature of how this antecedent relates to well-being was conducted by Spivack, McKelvie and Haynie (2014), who suggest that individuals who engage in entrepreneurship may show behaviour that resembles a behavioral addiction. Like other addictions, this can have negative implications for the entrepreneur's relationships and well-being (Spivack, McKelvie & Haynie, 2014).

Considering that both of these studies solely used qualitative data derived from a case study, more quantitative research is necessary to better understand the ambiguous relationship of meaningfulness of work and entrepreneurial well-being.

2.1.3.2 Personal characteristics stressors

Following the categorisation by Stephan (2018), the antecedents related to personal characteristics were grouped into the subcategories of “human capital” and “values and motivations” (Stephan, 2018, pp. 297), which are briefly discussed in this section.

Antecedents related to “personality traits” (Stephan, 2018, pp. 297), however, were excluded from this review, as these were considered more inherent and difficult to actively develop by entrepreneurs than e.g. element of human capital (Stephan, 2018).

Human capital

The subcategory of human capital looks at different personal characteristics which are formally acquirable, e.g. through professional experience or academic training (Stephan, 2018).

A lack of entrepreneurial skills, as well as a *lack of business skills* has been shown to be perceived as a stress inducing factor by entrepreneurs (Ahmad & Xavier, 2010; Vaag, Giæver & Bjerkeset, 2014). The study by Vaag, Giæver and Bjerkeset (2014), however, was not conducted with entrepreneurs from a variety of industries, but with self-employed musicians, which questions the applicability of its findings.

Education yields mixed results. Multiple studies indicate a negative relationship between job satisfaction and the education level (Carree & Verheul, 2012; Dawson, 2017) and skills (Kwon & Sohn, 2017). This may be explained due to a higher perceived financial (Stephan, 2018) or status-related opportunity cost (Kwon & Sohn, 2017). However, another study by Millan et al. (2013) suggests that having a higher level of education supports entrepreneurs in obtaining a more intriguing job, which in return increases their chances of high job satisfaction.

Lastly, the analysis of *entrepreneurial and leadership experience* and its relation to the well-being of entrepreneurs were also ambivalent (Carree & Verheul, 2012; Stephan, 2018), indicating the need for further research.

Values and motivations

In contrast to the positively related *intrinsic motivational factors*, *extrinsic motivational factors* showed to have a negative correlation with entrepreneurial well-being (Stephan, 2018).

This can be seen as an interesting insight. Entrepreneurial demands can be assumed to be the same independent of motivations, while entrepreneurs with intrinsic motivations appear to have better well-being. This suggests that certain intrinsic motifs for entrepreneurship equip entrepreneurs better to handle the entrepreneurial demands and stressors than extrinsic, financial motivations. This assumption is in line with findings by Carree and Verheul (2012). How these different variables are in fact connected would have to be subject to further research to be understood better.

2.1.3.3 Firm and financial characteristics stressors

Financial problems (e.g. Annink, Gorgievski & Den Dulk, 2016; Gorgievski et al., 2010; Lechat & Torrès, 2017; Wallis & Dollard, 2008 as cited in Stephan, 2018), *low financial income* (e.g. Anderson & Hughes, 2010 and Kwon & Sohn, 2017 as cited in Stephan, 2018), *job loss* and *job-related uncertainty* (Backhans & Hemmingsson, 2012; Hetschko, 2016) were all confirmed to be negatively related to entrepreneurial well-being in a total of twenty quantitative and qualitative studies (Stephan, 2018). In addition to the financial consequences, these stressors are suggested to also affect entrepreneurs in terms of their identity (Stephan, 2018). This highlights the difference in the extent to which firm and financial characteristics impact entrepreneurs in comparison to employed individuals (Backhans & Hemmingsson, 2012; Hetschko, 2016).

An antecedent which falls into the category of job resources rather than job stressors is the *obtainment of financial resources*. A study by Karlan and Zinman (2011) showed that receiving financial means (e.g. micro-loans) is related to increased work demands, which in return can be related to a small, negative effect on entrepreneurial well-being whilst yielding other positive effects. Another study, which is not identified in the review, found no relation to well-being and the obtainment of financial resources (Stephan, 2018).

Hence, the impact of the obtainment of financial resources on entrepreneurial well-being remains to be investigated further, as current research is limited in terms of the nature of resources received, its geographical scope and time scope.

2.1.3.4 Social stressors

Positive feedback received from customers stood out as a major source of entrepreneurial satisfaction and therefore well-being in the qualitative study by Lechat and Torrès (2017) and Anderson and Hughes (2010).

The positive support found in the intersection of the work-family domain are only investigated by three reviewed studies (McLellan & Uys, 2009; Nguyen & Sawang, 2016; Ugwu et al., 2016 as cited in Stephan, 2018). *Work-family conflict* has received more attention by researchers and was found to negatively correlate with entrepreneurial well-being by a total of nine studies, some of which only examined this relation among female entrepreneurs in particular (Stephan, 2018).

Arguments with employees and customers (Lechat & Torrès, 2017; Schonfeld & Mazzola, 2015), *control exercised by a partner* and *felt responsibility for employees* (Begley, 1994) were all found to be negatively related to entrepreneurial well-being (Stephan, 2018). Finally, the experience of *loneliness* is related to reduced well-being through burnout (Fernet et al., 2016).

This section has established the relevance of well-being in the entrepreneurial context and elaborated on the different work-related stressors as antecedents of entrepreneurial well-being. This sets the stage to gain a thorough understanding of recovery within the entrepreneurial context and its relation to well-being.

2.2 Entrepreneurial recovery

The previous section addressed the importance of entrepreneurial well-being and the potential negative effect of certain stressors within the entrepreneurial context. This highlights the importance of recovery occurring in the absence of such stressors (Roy et al., 1965; Demerouti et al., 2001). This section explores the role of recovery and recovery interventions in improving well-being, and how these concepts are related to entrepreneurial well-being. Finally, it investigates the different types of recovery interventions.

2.2.1 Role of recovery and recovery intervention

This section introduces the concepts of recovery from work and recovery interventions. Secondly, it establishes the relation of both concepts to well-being.

Recovery and recovery interventions

Studies in organisational psychology identify recovery from work as a crucial mechanism that facilitates individuals staying healthy and engaged when facing job demands (Geurts & Sonnentag, 2006; Sonnentag, Binnewies & Mojza, 2008). Craig and Cooper (1992) describe recovery processes as the decrease or removal of physical and psychological strains caused by job demands at work. Consequently, recovery interventions are the actions that can be taken to help achieve a state of recovery (Richardson & Rothstein, 2008; Verbeek et al., 2019).

Sonnentag and Fritz (2007) defined four fundamental recovery processes: PD, mastery, relaxation, and control. Multiple follow-up studies confirm that these processes are positively related to well-being (Fritz et al., 2010; Siltaloppi, Kinnunen & Feldt, 2009). The scope of this study only includes the role of PD within the recovery process, which will be elaborated on later. Firstly, it is valuable to address the importance of recovery in depth.

Recovery and well-being

The need for recovery can be explained by two frameworks: The Effort-Recovery Model (ERM) (Meijman & Mulder, 1998) and the Job Demands-Resources-Recovery-Model (JD-R) (Bakker et al., 2003; Bakker & Demerouti, 2007; Demerouti et al., 2001).

The ERM theorises that efforts resulting from job demands cause brief strain reactions that require a recovery stage where the individual is not exposed to those demands (Meijman & Mulder, 1998). The JD-R theorises that the elements of a work environment can be grouped into job demands and job resources (Demerouti et al., 2001). Section 2.1.2.2. established the positive albeit small effects of job resources in decreasing strain (Bakker et al., 2003; Demerouti et al., 2001; Kinnunen et al., 2011).

Job demands, on the other hand, are not inherently negative, but can turn into job stressors when meeting those demands require substantial effort from which an individual cannot recover sufficiently (Meijman & Mulder, 1998). This implies that when individuals are faced with job stressors, it becomes harder to experience recovery, even though they most need it (deCroon et al., 2004). Job stressors are defined as “the factors in the work environment that may lead to strain reactions such as negative arousal, physical symptoms, or psychological impairments” (Kahn & Byosiere, 1992, as quoted in Sonnentag & Fritz, 2015, p.73).

Research on recovery processes focuses on the benefits related to successful recovery from work-related strains (e.g. Meijman & Mulder, 1998; Bakker et al., 2003; Geurts & Sonnentag, 2006; Sonnentag, Binnewies & Mojza, 2008, Kinnunen et al., 2011). This is also true for research regarding recovery that has been specifically researching recovery among entrepreneurs (e.g. Gish et al., 2019; Weinberger et al., 2018; Williamson, Gish & Stephan, 2021). Within the entrepreneurial context, these benefits included enhanced “imaginativeness, creativity, and innovation in entrepreneurial activities” (Williamson, Gish & Stephan, 2021, p. 1314), efficiency (Weinberger et al., 2018) and opportunity recognition (Wincent, Örtqvist & Drnovsek, 2008). Additional insights into recovery processes for entrepreneurs highlight the difference between the effectiveness of recovery for first-time and for habitual entrepreneurs (Uy, Foo & Song, 2013). Drawing upon the research on entrepreneurial learning (Politis, 2005), first-time entrepreneurs have more difficulties experiencing recovery than experienced or habitual entrepreneurs (Uy, Foo & Song, 2013).

These benefits highlight the importance of recovery. The next step is to create an understanding of the different recovery interventions that can facilitate recovery.

2.2.2 Type of recovery interventions

Recovery interventions are the actions taken to help achieve a state of recovery (Richardson & Rothstein, 2008; Verbeek et al., 2019). Such interventions can be grouped into primary, secondary, and tertiary interventions (Richardson & Rothstein, 2008). Primary interventions are interventions taken by the organisation to reduce the sources of stress in the workplace (Murphy & Sauter, 2003). Secondary interventions are interventions taken by the individual before they cause concerning health problems (Murphy & Sauter, 2003).

Lastly, tertiary interventions are assisted programs accessed through (mental) health professionals (Arthur, 2000). The scope of this study will focus on secondary recovery interventions, considering these are the interventions individuals have most control over (Richardson & Rothstein, 2008).

Comparative studies on secondary recovery interventions helped group the various types of secondary recovery interventions into six categories, of which all six have beneficial properties for recovery (e.g. Murnieks et al., 2020; Richardson & Rothstein, 2008; Gunnarsson & Josephson, 2011; Uy, Foo & Song, 2013):

- Sleep (Murnieks et al., 2020; Querstret & Cropley, 2012; Sonnentag, Binnewies & Mojza, 2008).
- Relaxation practice, like mindfulness and meditation (Engel et al., 2019; Murnieks et al., 2020; Richardson & Rothstein, 2008).
- Physical activity (Gunnarsson & Josephson, 2011; Richardson & Rothstein, 2008).
- Social support, from friends, family and network (Ahmed et al., 2022; Gunnarsson & Josephson, 2011; Schermuly et al., 2021).
- Work-related intervention, like planning and goal setting (Gunnarsson & Josephson, 2011; Richardson & Rothstein, 2008; Smit, 2016).
- Leisure time, like hobbies and designating time away from work (Aldwin & Revenson, 1987; Gunnarsson & Josephson, 2011; Jex et al., 2001).

Having established the concept of recovery processes and interventions to enhance entrepreneurial well-being, the last section of the theoretical framework builds upon this concept by introducing PD as an impactful recovery process and its relation to well-being in the entrepreneurial context.

2.3 Role of psychological detachment in entrepreneurial recovery

The previous section highlighted the value of recovery from work as a mechanism to increase well-being (Geurts & Sonnentag, 2006; Sonnentag, Binnewies & Mojza, 2008) and has described the distinction between recovery processes and recovery interventions (Craig & Cooper, 1992; Richardson & Rothstein, 2008; Verbeek et al., 2019).

The following section will elaborate on PD as an important recovery process and its relation to well-being and job satisfaction, specifically within the entrepreneurial context.

2.3.1 Definition and role as a recovery process

Sonnentag and Fritz (2007; 2015) describe PD as a recovery process in which an individual can “disengage oneself psychologically from work when being away from the workplace” (Sonnentag & Fritz, 2015, p.74). The notion of PD is two-fold: it implies both not being involved in work-related tasks and not having work-related thoughts (Sonnentag & Fritz, 2015). Cropley and Zijlstra (2011) differentiate between two types of work-related thoughts: problem-solving pondering and affective rumination, where the former entails more positive and constructive thoughts and the latter implies more negative and worried thoughts. Whilst both hinder PD, it is mostly affective rumination that fosters prolonged exposure to strain (Cropley & Zijlstra, 2011).

PD is described as a fundamental recovery process in recovering from job stressors (Sonnentag & Fritz, 2007, 2015), linking it to the ERM (Meijman and Mulder, 1998) and the JD-R (Bakker et al., 2003; Bakker & Demerouti, 2007; Demerouti et al., 2001; Kinnunen et al., 2011).

Successfully unwinding psychologically from job stressors has been shown to improve general well-being and work-related performance (Sonnentag & Fritz, 2007; 2015). In relation to well-being, PD can improve sleep quality and reduce psychosomatic strains (Sonnentag, Binnewies & Mojza, 2008; Sonnentag & Fritz, 2007), reduce emotional exhaustion (Sonnentag, Binnewies & Mojza, 2010; Sonnentag, Kuttler & Fritz, 2010), reduce emotional instability (Fritz et al., 2010; Sonnentag & Fritz, 2007), and increase life satisfaction (Fritz et al., 2010; Sonnentag & Fritz, 2007). Ultimately, PD can lower the risk of suffering from severe burnout symptoms (Etzion, Eden & Lapidot, 1998; Sonnentag & Fritz, 2007). In relation to work-related performance, PD can improve work engagement and productivity (Fritz & Sonnentag, 2006; Kühnel, Sonnentag & Westman, 2009; Sonnentag, 2003).

2.3.2 Role within the entrepreneurial context

Having established the role of PD as a recovery process and its relation to recovery interventions, it is imperative to establish the role of PD within the entrepreneurial context specifically and understand how PD is hindered or supported. For reasons of scope, this thesis focuses on work-related stressors impacting PD.

Workload and *time pressure* are two work-related stressors with a strong negative relation to PD (Sonnentag & Frese, 2012). Both stressors increase one's tendency to keep thinking about work during non-work time by either acting on the urge to take work home or anticipate the high workload and time pressure of the following day (Bakker et al., 2003; Cropley & Zijlstra, 2011; Sonnentag & Bayer, 2005; Sonnentag & Krueger, 2006).

Two other types of work-related stressors with negative influence on PD are *role conflict* and *role ambiguity* (Potok & Littman-Ovadia, 2014; Sonnentag & Fritz, 2007; Sonnentag & Krueger, 2006). Role ambiguity can lead to unclear task divisions and a struggle to prioritise tasks which hinders PD (Potok & Littman-Ovadia, 2014; Sonnentag & Fritz, 2007; Sonnentag & Krueger, 2006). Lastly, role conflict or interpersonal conflicts have a strong negative relation to PD (Pereira & Elfering, 2014; Schulz et al., 2021). Instead, positive social support from coworkers can increase PD (Schulz, Schöllgen & Fay, 2019).

Lastly, one major focus in the literature is the complex role of *job involvement* as a stressor (Potok & Littman-Ovadia, 2014; Sonnentag & Krueger, 2006). In essence, job involvement seems to be negatively related to PD (Potok & Littman-Ovadia, 2014; Sonnentag & Krueger, 2006), as individuals with high job involvement closely identify with their job and spend more time thinking about it (Potok & Littman-Ovadia, 2014; Sonnentag & Krueger, 2006). However, individuals with high job involvement likely enjoy thinking about work and working on work-related tasks (Sonnentag & Bayer, 2005). Whilst this can lead to lower PD, research suggests that the negative effects on well-being can be compensated as such (Sonnentag & Bayer, 2005; Sonnentag & Krueger, 2006).

The abovementioned stressors can be related to strains on entrepreneurial well-being. Entrepreneurs are likely to work long(er) hours and have a high(er) workload (Aldrich & Martinez, 2001; Baron, 1998).

Additionally, entrepreneurs work in highly unpredictable and uncertain environments (Baron, 1998; McMullen & Shepherd, 2006). This makes it difficult for entrepreneurs to establish clear roles, making role and work boundaries more unclear (Baker, Miner & Eesley, 2003; Baron, 2008). However, following the research by Schulz, Schöllgen and Fay (2019), working with co-founders, coworkers or employees may have a positive impact on well-being. Thirdly, the fast-paced environment entrepreneurs work in requires them to finish many tasks in a short amount of time (Aldrich & Martinez, 2001; Baron, 1998). Additionally, it is more likely for self-employed individuals to have higher job involvement (Frese & Gielnik, 2014, as cited in Stephan, 2018; Taris et al., 2008) as their well-being is strongly tied to their venture's success (Wach, Stephan & Gorgievski, 2016). This results in a high involvement for their tasks and a drive to continuously work for their ventures (Ahmed et al., 2022; Taris et al., 2008). Whilst motivating, this can turn into e.g. workaholism (Oates, 1971; Wendsche & Lohmann-Haislah, 2017), obsessive work passion (Vallerand & Houliort, 2003; Wendsche & Lohmann-Haislah, 2017) and work-life conflict (Hamilton Skurak et al., 2021). Lastly, considering entrepreneurs experience setbacks or business failures as personal losses (Shepherd, 2003), they can experience increased rumination about negative situations in their business (Cropley & Zijlstra, 2011).

2.4 Deduction of research question

The theoretical framework shows the importance of PD as a recovery process for entrepreneurial well-being and job satisfaction, and showcases the potential complicated relation between these elements. Additionally, it explores how this process can be promoted through recovery interventions.

From the insights on entrepreneurial well-being, a better understanding of how entrepreneurs may support well-being is needed, considering the especially challenging work stressors they face (Wach et al., 2021). A way to deal with such stressors can be found in recovery processes from work (Geurts & Sonnentag, 2006; Sonnentag, Binnewies & Mojza, 2008). PD is one such recovery process that is seen as highly impactful (Sonnentag & Fritz, 2007, 2015). Relating the stressors faced by entrepreneurs to the stressors influencing PD (Sonnentag, 2010; Sonnentag & Fritz, 2007), it is evident that entrepreneurs face more difficulties to experience PD.

The authors assume this is especially true for early-stage start-ups, whom deal with their own set of challenges within the early stages of their venture, such as liability of newness, increased uncertainty and establishing legitimacy (Fisher, 2020; Politis, 2005). This thesis thus zooms in on the connection between PD and entrepreneurial job satisfaction among early-stage entrepreneurs as an addition to the established literature on PD.

Hence, to explore the relation between PD as a recovery process to foster entrepreneurial job satisfaction, the thesis asks the question:

How is psychological detachment related to job satisfaction among early-stage entrepreneurs?

To answer this main research question, the following sub-research questions were designed:

SRQ1. How do early-stage entrepreneurs perceive the effect of the most common work-related job-stressors?

SRQ2. What role does PD play for job satisfaction of early-stage entrepreneurs?

SRQ3. What influences the connection between PD and the job satisfaction of early-stage entrepreneurs?

SRQ4. What role do the recovery interventions undertaken by early-stage entrepreneurs play for their PD?

3. Methodology

This chapter describes the chosen research design. Secondly, the sampling and data collection method are elaborated on. Thirdly, the data analysis is explained. Finally, it concludes by critically reflecting on the methodological limitations and the ethical considerations.

3.1 Research design

The aim of this study is two-fold. Firstly, it aims to explore the relation between psychological detachment (PD), entrepreneurial well-being, entrepreneurial stressors and how that relation is influenced. Secondly, it explores the approaches that early-stage entrepreneurs take to recover from work stressors and how these relate to their mental well-being and job satisfaction.

Due to the explorative and inductive goal of the study, a qualitative research strategy was selected (Bell, Bryman & Harley, 2022). Unlike quantitative research, “qualitative research is more usually regarded as denoting an approach in which theory and categorisation emerge out of the collection and analysis of data” (Bell, Bryman & Harley, 2022, p.357).

The quantitative approach of examining the relations between pre-determined variables appears to dominate the entrepreneurial well-being research (Stephan, 2018). The qualitative approach, however, matches the explorative aim of this study to contribute findings which could represent the basis for future concepts on entrepreneurial recovery rather than testing previously established theory. Another way in which qualitative research is more suitable is its tendency to be participant-focused and suited to collect in-depth data rather than statistically testable “hard data” (Bell, Bryman & Harley, 2022, p.376). In qualitative research, the data shared by the research participants is less restricted by a pre-determined framework of expected outcomes (Bell, Bryman & Harley, 2022).

Moving on to the selection of the data collection method, semi-structured interviews emerged as the most suitable choice, while other qualitative data collection methods were ruled out. A case study approach, common in the entrepreneurial research context (McDonald et al., 2015; Stephan, 2018), was considered as an option for the research design of this study. However, this study’s goal and inductive perspective does not match the highly context specific nature of case studies and their outcomes (Bell, Bryman & Harley, 2022).

Ultimately, interviews were selected to answer the previously introduced research questions. Interviews for qualitative research are typically found on the spectrum between fully unstructured and semi-structured (Bell, Bryman & Harley, 2022). As opposed to fully-structured interviews, semi-structured interviews, are designed with only partly pre-determined questions, hence leaving room for spontaneous follow-up questions, facilitating deep insights and matching the explorative goal of this study (Bell, Bryman & Harley, 2022). This was judged most suitable for capturing each entrepreneur's individual experience and therefore optimally facilitates the answering of the research questions.

Lastly, this study follows a cross-sectional data collection design, as all data will be collected from participants only once and within a short and limited timeframe (Bell, Bryman & Harley, 2022). However, the data collected is rather longitudinal in nature (Bell, Bryman & Harley, 2022), as participants are free and even encouraged to report about current as well as past experiences from their entrepreneurial journey. While a cross-sectional data collection approach does typically not allow for causal conclusions on relationships between the researched variables, it contributes to the extraction of new suggested relationships which are then investigated in future, often quantitative, studies (Bell, Bryman & Harley, 2022; ed. Morin et al., 2021). Essential for cross-sectional studies to ensure replicability are the sampling approach and clear sampling criteria (Bell, Bryman & Harley, 2022), which are elaborated on in the following section.

3.2 Data Collection

As described in section 3.1, empirical data was collected using semi-structured interviews (Bell, Bryman & Harley, 2022). The use of semi-structured interviews granted the collection of in-depth answers (Bell, Bryman & Harley, 2022). The collection process, including the sample selection and interview process is elaborated on in this section.

3.2.1 Sample selection

To collect participants for this research, purposive sampling was used (Bell, Bryman & Harley, 2022).

This type of sampling is a form of non-probability sampling where “the researcher does not seek to sample research participants on a random basis, yet in a strategic way” (Bell, Bryman & Harley, 2022, p.388). The goal is to find participants relevant to the research questions being asked (Bell, Bryman & Harley, 2022). The following participant selection criteria were applied for this thesis:

- **The participant is a founder of an early-stage start-up.** The focal point of the study are early-stage entrepreneurs of a start-up in business between 0 and 5 years (Flavino Calvino, Carlo Menon, & Chiara Criscuolo, 2015). This subgroup is seen to deal with its own set of challenges within the early stages of their venture, such as liability of newness, increased uncertainty and establishing legitimacy (Fisher, 2020; Politis, 2005). Hence, it appeared most urgent to explore recovery in the context of early-stage entrepreneurs.
- **The participant currently works at the start-up.** This criterion is important since questions are based on the participant’s current perception of PD, recovery and job satisfaction. Including participants not currently working at the start-up they founded would force them to answer and reflect on the questions entirely retrospectively, introducing a risk of after recall bias (Colombo et al., 2020).

In addition, it is advised to guarantee a degree of variety in the obtained sample by ensuring participants differ from each other in ways that are relevant to the research question (Bell, Bryman & Harley, 2022). Within the context of this research, the dimension of prior start-up experience (Kollmann, Stöckmann & Kensbock, 2019; Uy, Foo & Song, 2013) is of particular interest and will be included in the subsequent data analysis.

Initial interest from participants was acquired through LinkedIn. A post was made in the LinkedIn group ‘Alumni – Masters Programme in Entrepreneurship and Innovation’ and on the thesis authors’ own LinkedIn platforms. In addition, the authors did outreach within their own professional networks and made use of snowball sampling to be referred to other potential participants (Bell, Bryman & Harley, 2022). Further contact with the final nine participants was established through e-mail and direct message. Considering the respondents agreed to participate in the study anonymously, their names were randomised. The overview of all participants is visualised in Table 1.

| Respondent | Gender | Age | Industry | Current location | Prior start-up experience | Years in business |
|------------|--------|-----|-----------------------------------|---------------------|---------------------------|-------------------|
| Anne | Female | 32 | Nutricosmetics | Berlin, Germany | No | 4 years |
| Hannah | Female | 26 | Life-coaching for entrepreneurs | Malmö, Sweden | Yes | 1.1 year |
| John | Male | 32 | Education | London, UK | No | 1.8 year |
| David | Male | 53 | HR | Vienna, Austria | Yes | 4.9 years |
| Paul | Male | 27 | Fast-Moving Consumer Goods (FMCG) | Malmö, Sweden | No | 2.5 years |
| Sarah | Female | 32 | Fashion | Copenhagen, Denmark | No | 8 months |
| Vincent | Male | 32 | HR | Malmö, Sweden | No | 9 months |
| Matt | Male | 43 | FMCG | Malmö, Sweden | Yes | 2,5 years |
| Allison | Female | 30 | Cosmetics | Lund, Sweden | No | 5 years |

Table 1 – Respondents

3.2.2 Interview process

A pilot interview was conducted to test the first interview guide and to test how a pilot respondent would react and interpret the questions. The pilot respondent approximated the sample selection criteria to best replicate the desired research setting. From a research perspective, the pilot interview helped understand whether the first interview guide allowed for in-depth and explorative empirical data (Bell, Bryman & Harley, 2022). From a practical standpoint, the pilot study helped estimate the duration of the interview and the order of the questions (Bell, Bryman & Harley, 2022). This pilot interview formed the basis for designing the final interview guide (Appendix A), aiding its flow's improvement, and supporting the reformulation of questions for enhanced data collection (Bell, Bryman & Harley, 2022).

The interview guide was built around the core concepts of the thesis that needed to be addressed during the interviews. Attention was paid to include open-ended, general questions to establish a relation of comfort between the interviewers and interviewees. Specific terminology related to job stressors, recovery and PD were avoided to ensure that the participants tell their own, authentic story (Goia, Corley & Hamilton, 2013) and answer in a way that is in line with their own frame of reference (Bell, Bryman & Harley, 2022).

The nine participants were interviewed in an online video setting (i.e. Zoom). Each interview lasted approximately one hour to one hour and half. The authors took turns in dividing the roles of being the principal interviewer and the note taker. All interviews were carried out in English to guarantee accuracy and avoid misinterpretations of the concepts or of translated questions (Bell, Bryman & Harley, 2022).

3.3 Data analysis

To allow for well-founded theory generation based on the collected data, the Gioia methodology (GM) (Corley & Gioia, 2011) was used for the data analysis. This method can be defined as “holistic approach to concept development that balances the (often) conflicting need to develop new concepts inductively, while meeting the high standards for rigor demanded by top journals” (Magnani & Gioia, 2023, p.1).

The first step of the GM includes first- and second-order analysis (Gioia, Corley and Hamilton, 2013). To generate first-order themes, thematic analysis (Bell, Bryman & Harley, 2022) was applied to the raw data collected through the semi-structured interviews conducted with the early-stage entrepreneurs. The thematic approach to data analysis is based on the researcher’s search for themes including e.g. repetitions, analogies, metaphors and ways in which interviewee answer’s differed or overlapped (Ryan & Bernard, 2003). Guiding the discovery of themes were the previously designed sub-research questions, which focused on the experience of typical work-related job-stressors and the role PD plays for the entrepreneurs’ job satisfaction.

From the 31 first-order themes, the analysis established nine second-order themes which were sorted into four overarching aggregate dimensions. All three levels of themes discovered throughout the research process are presented in Table 2. The themes relate to the existing theories and concepts stemming from the theoretical framework, in order to facilitate the induction of grounded theory, as a response to the often questioned rigorousness of qualitative research (Bell, Bryman & Harley, 2022; Gioia, Corley & Hamilton, 2013).

| 1st order theme | 2nd order theme | Aggregate Dimensions | Related SRQ |
|--|--|---|-------------|
| High workload as a blessing and a curse | Challenge work stressors | Dimensions of entrepreneurial work stressors | 1 |
| Sense of duty | | | |
| Increased strain through setbacks | Hindrances work stressors | | |
| Role stressors | | | |
| Expectations from clients and investors | | | |
| Time constraints | | | |
| Financial dependency and pressure | Positively perceived low PD | | |
| Acceptance of pervasive work-related thoughts outside working hours | | | |
| Inspiration from strategic work-related thoughts outside working hours | | | |
| Burden of operational work-related thoughts outside working hours | Negatively perceived low PD | | |
| Low PD as a source of work-life interference | | | |
| Understanding one's internal boundaries | Facilitators of PD | Finding balance between PD and job connectivity for higher job satisfaction | 3 |
| Learning with time, knowledge, and experience | | | |
| View on business failure | | | |
| Evolved sense of urgency | | | |
| Drive for self-development | Causes of job connectivity | | |
| Freedom to be in driver's seat | | | |
| Sense of purpose and impact-making | | | |
| Natural identity overlap between entrepreneurial identity and private identity | | | |
| Time with friends and family | Recovery through connection | Recovery Strategies | 4 |
| Support through friends and family | | | |
| Caretaking responsibilities | Recovery through self-care | | |
| Leisure activities including of artisanal pursuits | | | |
| Leisure activities including modern media entertainment | | | |
| Quality sleep | | | |
| Physical activity | | | |
| Mindfulness, meditation and breathwork | | | |
| Finding joy in work needed to be done | Recovery through work-related intervention | | |
| Managing of own workload independently | | | |
| Receiving external support through network | | | |
| Receiving support through co-founders and employees | | | |

Table 2 – Three level categorisation of findings

Lastly, the second and third steps of the GM lean into the findings and discussion chapter of this study, where findings were used to develop a grounded theory model and presented through the combination of second-order themes and overarching theme categories (aggregate dimensions) (Gioia, Corley & Hamilton, 2013). This presentation makes use of specific references to the collected data, often in form of quotations to underpin the statements made to summarise the findings (Gioia, Corley & Hamilton, 2013). This way, findings are shown in a connected manner, staying linked to the participants' experiences.

3.4 Limitations

Critically reflecting on the limitations of the research method emphasises that certain implications for the data analysis and the conclusion of the research need to be considered carefully. In the sections below, the limitations of the research design, data collection and data analysis are explained.

3.4.1 Research design

Despite being the most suitable data collection method for this thesis, the qualitative method comes with certain limitations (Bell, Bryman & Harley, 2022). In general, qualitative research is difficult to generalise and lacks transparency, making it harder to replicate and review (Bell, Bryman & Harley, 2022). To improve transparency and the possibility to replicate the study, the research method of this study is explained in a detailed manner and all findings are well-documented. In addition, qualitative research is often prone to subjectivity bias (Bell, Bryman & Harley, 2022). The authors limited this bias by conducting each interview together.

3.4.2 Data collection

Semi-structured interviews rely primarily on verbal accounts of behaviour, decisions, and reflections of the participants (Bell, Bryman & Harley, 2022). Hence, it is less likely to account for implicit features of the participant's social life and other matters the participant is unaware of or takes for granted (Bell, Bryman & Harley, 2022). As such, recollections of events may be skewed to the participant's own perspective and not provide a full picture. This must be considered during the data analysis.

Additionally, affect recall bias could have affected the study's results, as the interviewed entrepreneurs may wrongly recall their past experiences and respective emotions by either underestimating or overestimating those in retrospect (Colombo et al., 2020), which could have distorted the suggested role of PD for their job satisfaction and well-being.

Furthermore, semi-structured interviews are less flexible and follow a certain order to guarantee comparability in the questioning (Bell, Bryman & Harley, 2022). This can discourage the authors to explore themes or topics that arise throughout the interview. The authors limited this by leaving room for questions and additional reflections, and by using the probing technique to explore certain new themes or topics.

3.5 Ethical considerations

Diener Crandall (1978) established four ethical principles for the conduction of research, being the avoidance of harm, the provision of informed consent, the protection of privacy and the avoidance of deception. The adherence to these principles was accounted for and ensured in the following ways.

No harm to participants or others was done through this study, neither physically nor mentally and not through any negative personal or professional consequences (Bell, Bryman & Harley, 2022). The prevention of reputational harm and private or professional conflict was established by anonymising any personal or company specific data (in accordance with GDPR), which is particularly important for studies with small samples due to increased risk of traceability (Bell, Bryman & Harley, 2022; The Market Research Society, 2019). This procedure was also in line with the principle of privacy protection (Diener & Crandall, 1978). At the start of each interview, interviewees were ensured to make a fully informed decision regarding their participation by being read a consent statement (Appendix B). This statement explained the study's purpose and specified the usage, processing and storage of the provided data in adherence with both the Framework for Research Ethics (Economic and Social Research Council, 2021) and the MRS Code of Conduct (The Market Research Society, 2019). The explicit agreement was a prerequisite for any interviewee's participation in the study.

This process was simultaneously a measure to avoid misunderstandings with participants which could be judged as deception retrospectively and therefore served the purpose of ensuring maximal transparency and integrity (Diener & Crandall, 1978; Economic and Social Research Council, 2021; The Market Research Society, 2019).

4. Empirical findings

This chapter describes main findings emerging from the semi-structured interviews conducted with nine early-stage entrepreneurs. The findings are split into four sections including their respective sub-themes according to the found aggregate themes within the interviews: dimensions of entrepreneurial job stressors, ambiguity of psychological detachment (PD) in its relation to job satisfaction, finding balance between PD and job connectivity for higher job satisfaction, and recovery strategies.

4.1 Dimensions of entrepreneurial job stressors

4.1.1 Hindrance work-stressors

High impact of financial dependency and pressure

All entrepreneurs mentioned financial pressure, although the level of stress connected to it strongly differed between financially venture-independent and dependent entrepreneurs, with financial dependency being experienced as more stressful.

On one side, several interviewees mentioned constraints and the inability to e.g. pay for critical assets, like a lawyer, due to a lack of financial resources: *“I don't have the money to do that. I think that part is very stressful”* (Sarah). Sarah also highlights the dimension of financial dependency on the venture's success: *“I must get a visa to live here. I'm not making any money right now. (...) If I don't make this work, I can go home.”* While various entrepreneurs shared similar insights, Hannah summarises the experience of financial pressure when comparing her current and past venture when saying *“I am not financially depending on this business. (...) That is the big problem I had before in my businesses, which made my business super stressful and super much pressure. Because you're depending on it.”*

Increased strain through setbacks

Another common hindrance stressor was the level strain experienced through setbacks or changes which affected their business negatively.

For John, these setbacks relate to bottlenecks for venture progress caused by external stakeholders which he could not directly influence: *“For example, when this ghastly web app wasn't developed, right? I'm gonna kill someone if this thing doesn't get sorted.”*

Anne described the personal consequences of these new challenges and setbacks for herself as *“always firefighting, digging holes, and filling up holes, but digging the next one.”*

Paul especially struggles with the frequent rejection you face as an entrepreneur: *“You’re constantly confronted with no’s all around, right? (...) And when you’ve got a lot of no’s in a row, then at one point, it starts to become draining. (...) You work so hard, but often this work doesn’t pay off.”* Matt even explains how venture growth can create challenges for well-being comparable to setbacks: *“In every stage you go, there’s a new challenge (...). The challenges become severe and the challenges become bigger and then it means that the stress level and the stress factor becomes harder and harsher.”*

Expectations from clients, investors, and projects

Another strong source of stress was the involvement and expectation from investors and clients.

Anne reported of high pressure from investors that forced her to take difficult decisions, as she recalls: *“We had to let go half of the staff, because we were just reaching a point where we were not profitable, we were putting too much pressure from investors to cut costs.”* Anne felt a similar pressure when taking on too many projects: *“We need to start as many projects as possible. (...) At the very beginning, I remember having this feeling of getting a little bit overwhelmed”,* while Vincent shared his experience of pressure from clients: *“when you have a client, you have more expectations, so I would say that’s probably the more stressful thing--the uncertainty of what you deliver.”* In line with Vincent and Anne, Allison confirms this stressor when explaining that receiving *“stressful emails, mostly from clients (...) those are the most stressful moments.”*

Finally, Paul depicted a clear distinction between pressure from within or from external stakeholders: *“For me at least, (it) makes a difference in stress. If it’s like pressure from the outside or (...) when the pushing comes from within you.”*

Time constraints

Time constraints or time pressure was another common work-stressor in all interviews, frequently discussed alongside the importance of prioritising to handle this constraint.

Several entrepreneurs mentioned the lack of time to fulfill all their obligations: *“as an entrepreneur, there are always 1000 things that you could do, that you want to do, but the time is limited”* (Paul). Anne even highlighted the significance of time pressure as a source of stress, when explaining that for her *“the stress that I felt was always connected to time pressure, you know, never enough time.”* Allison reflected that prioritising, is a skill she had to learn, but which she now benefits from through regaining a sense of control in face of time constraints: *“It was very overwhelming at times, for sure. But I guess there comes a moment where now I'm much more in control. When it's stressful, I can prioritise. And then I still feel in control, although I can't do everything I would want to get done.”*

Role Stressors

Another discovered theme was the balance between role clarity and flexibility to mitigate stress from role ambiguity.

Hannah represents one example of the entrepreneurs who saw a big improvement (in her previous venture) once tasks were divided between the co-founders and connected to accountability: *“In the beginning, they were not defined and that was I think the biggest problem. (...) Then we did like a little agreement within the team and said, Okay, you're responsible for that, I'm responsible for that”*, which *“made it easier to work together.”* While this helped significantly, at times she noticed the need for role flexibility: *“We realise, This task is a bit too much on my side, then we also switched some tasks sometimes.”*

Vincent, however, explained that they were *“not at the stage where we want to have a clear CEO or CFO or CTO. (...) Since we're not going down the investor route right now, it didn't make a lot of sense to bring in that complexity”*, showing a different need for role clarity. Matt's case, however, illustrates the stressful side a lack of role clarity can have: *“Everything is stressful. (...) There are some areas that I have no skill set on them, but I have to develop the skill set. Because I don't have a choice.”*

Overall, most of the entrepreneurs had a mostly clear task and role division in place, but left some room for flexibility either to foster creativity or due to the changing demands of the venture, which was described as helpful in the operation and for the avoidance of additional stress.

4.1.2 Challenge work-stressors

High workload as a blessing and a curse

Regarding the challenge stressor of high workload, the interviews pointed towards a more complex and positive relation. Several entrepreneurs reported of high workload as a positive indicator for their venture and something that they wish for, while still acknowledging that high workload can create stress too when it gets too much.

Sarah explained she “*(hasn't) felt like it's enough work*” and that she “*want(s) it to pick up because I hate feeling not productive.*” She also made the connection of venture progress and performance to workload: “*I know that as soon as we get clients, our work is going to really pick up.*” John also shares the feeling of wishing for more work: “*I would be more than happy to do more and it's picking up pace. So that's a gratifying experience.*” Simultaneously, he acknowledges that having a lot of work can also be stressful, but still sees it as something desirable: “*If you talk to me again, in a year, I'll probably be complaining about it. But right now, I have been longing for that stage, because obviously, it's a healthy sign.*”

For Allison, high workload has already become business as usual: “*I'm quite used to it by now.*” She too describes how she perceives high workload as something positive: “*It's just a lot to do at the moment, which I think is a very positive sign. That's why for me, it makes sense to put in these hours.*” Additionally, she shares that she “*really like(s) to work and need(s) to work.*”

Vincent, however, faces yet another situation, as he would like to be working more, but is restricted through other responsibilities and therefore time constraints: “*It is sometimes the case where I personally do feel a bit like I wish I had a bit more time for the company. (...) But my circumstances are influenced by having a child.*” He explains that “*I am not working as much as I would like to*”, but at the same time considers the possibility of the adverse effects a higher workload can have: “*if you get overwhelmed and overworked, then perhaps your opinion changes. But, but right now, we're able to manage that.*”

Sense of duty

As a challenge stressor, sense of duty appeared to show two different dimensions for the interviewed entrepreneurs: a sense of duty to themselves and a sense of duty to involved stakeholders.

Regarding the first dimension, being in charge of the venture's progress and success, John explained that *"there's no excuse"*, for the work not getting done, while Hannah stated that especially in the beginning of her time as an entrepreneur she felt that *"if I start my business, that is my own venture, so I take my own responsibility and I have to drive this by my own."* Anne felt that *"since I am the one who was responsible for the project, I know best how to do it. And that needs to be done in the perfect way. We can't take any shortcuts."* All these statements showcase a sense of duty which was directed inwards which the entrepreneurs felt towards themselves and their own expectations.

The second dimension is a sense of duty which the entrepreneurs experience towards especially company stakeholders other than themselves, such as their co-founders and employees, as Anne shared: *"It's the sense of duty and the sense of responsibility that I am also a factor for their own well-being, professional well-being and also personal to some extent."*

Hannah, too, explained that while she could have asked for the help of her co-founders, she preferred not to, when saying that: *"I mean, I could have done it. (...) Each of us had their responsibilities. I mean, they had a lot on their plate as well. So, I didn't want to do it."* Paul added that: *"You also feel responsibility to shareholders, maybe to your customers, or your co-founders"* and *"also having this responsibility of people counting on you, people investing real money into your company, and based on stuff that we have said."*

All these different dimensions of the sense of duty were drivers of their own actions and a source of pressure which could be stressful, but which motivated them towards the completion of their tasks and responsibilities. Hence, the evident sense of duty was interpreted as a challenge stressor.

4.2 Ambiguity of psychological detachment in relation to job satisfaction

4.2.1 Positively perceived psychological detachment

Acceptance of pervasive work-related thoughts outside working hours

A fundamental outlook which emerged from all interviews was the general acceptance of work-related thoughts outside working hours as something the interviewees do not mind and even welcome, resulting in low PD that is positively perceived and will henceforth be described as 'job connectivity'. The findings reflect different dimensions within this acceptance.

Firstly, interviewees unanimously shared that the reason they welcome work-related thoughts in general is tied to the love for their job. This is summarised well by Hannah: *“I also talk about work all the time because I love my job. (...) I have my own business and talk about my own business all the time, because I love it, otherwise, I wouldn't have it.”*

Secondly, the acceptance of these thoughts stems from *“a state of responsibility”* felt by most interviewees towards their business, as reflected by Paul. Additionally, Paul shared that he sees benefits from these work thoughts and that he doesn't *“feel frustrated by it. I allow those thoughts, because it is something that I believe pushes me.”* This is echoed by Allison and Sarah, where Allison accepts work-related thoughts as being *“present in a very easygoing way, that's not a problem for me at all”* and Sarah *“actually let(s) it come.”* Moreover, Vincent also attests this acceptance to his close relationship with his co-founders: *“Building it off of with people I trust and people I enjoy being with, it never feels quite like a burden.”*

Lastly, the pervasiveness of these thoughts can be tied to a strong connection between their work self and their private self. David shared that he *“always”* thinks about work. Similarly, Hannah found acceptance of thinking and talking about work *“all the time”* because *“I realised my work is part of my life. (...) So, I'm gonna talk about it.”* However, she made clear that she is at ease with it, emphasising that *“I don't feel like it puts extra pressure in my life. I think it's a it's a positive thing to do.”* Matt recognises that being an entrepreneur is *“(...) is not a nine to five job. This is sleeping, eating, waking up and breathing with this concept, it's 24/7”*. Ultimately, Allison explains it as *“just something that comes with the job, and I see that as something positive.”*

However, most interviewees are aware of the limit this acceptance has, and that it is a fine line to balance. Vincent explained that *“it's not become a problem, (...) if you have it constantly happening; if it's a recurring theme, then you need to deal with that a bit more.”* Allison accepts *“I can't help but still feel this way”* and David notices *“It happened a lot last year that I've felt the urge to drop everything and get into work mode.”*

Inspiration from strategic work-related thoughts outside working hours

Another found theme within positively perceived low PD was a specific category of work-related thoughts of rather strategic nature which were perceived as desirable and inspirational, as the following interview excerpts showcase.

Allison shared that these thoughts can often help her take the time to figure out certain decisions: *“Now my work is much more strategic. So, oftentimes, I just need to decide which way to go. (...) And sometimes I can't decide right away. (...) And automatically that means that maybe it will come up in a moment, where I wasn't planning on thinking about it. But, for example (...), that's something that I think is also positive.”* John *“actually enjoy(s) it when it happens that you have these bursts of inspiration (...), you don't mind that it interferes with you being at the gym or talking with friends.”* Similarly, Sarah shares *“It's more an inspiring thought about the work, or like a positive thought (...) Like, Oh, maybe we need to actually do that or think about this for the company.”*

4.2.2 Negatively perceived psychological detachment

Burden of operational work-related thoughts outside working hours

Most interviewees shared the general perception of experiencing strain from thinking about task-based and operational work-related thoughts outside working hours, and show signs of negatively perceived low PD because of it. This is a contrast with their experiences relating to strategic work-related thoughts and how they perceive the consequential low PD more positively in the latter.

The negative perception associated is summarised well by Anne: *“It's non-constructive thoughts, like more running in circles (...) This to me is not something that could have a positive impact.”* Matt emphasises it is *“just pointless.”* Paul echoes this notion when saying *“the smaller and the more fragmented the thought or the kind of thing in my head; the less important it is. That is something I don't try to stress about. Or don't want to, let's say.”*

However, Allison improved at realising that certain thoughts just simply cannot be handled at the time she keeps thinking about them: *“I can't call people when it's not business hours. And I know I will have to do it the next day. And then I try to remind myself there's nothing you can do.”*

However, John understands this is not an easy process: *“Just focusing on the things that you can change... Well, it's a hard pill to, it's a bitter pill to swallow.”*

Low PD as a source of work-life interference

Lastly, the concept of work-life interference shows the conflicts that have happened in many of the interviewees' lives when they struggle to block out work-related thoughts, resulting in a negative perception of their low PD.

In general, all interviewees have experienced a degree of work-life interference they attach to allowing work-related thoughts outside working hours. This conflict has materialised in various ways.

Anne realises that *“At some point, I definitely dedicated too much time to work”*, but that it remains *“very hard for me not to look at anything work-related.”* For Paul, this conflict is seen more in a comparison to his peers and the trade-offs you make as an entrepreneur: *“You shouldn't compare yourself, but of course, you know, they buy an apartment or buy a car, they do nice vacations. Stuff that you as an entrepreneur who has an early-stage startup can't do. (...) It's something that goes on in the back of your mind. I'm like, Okay, how long do I want to continue this lifestyle?”*

For both Vincent and Paul, their work as entrepreneurs has blurred the boundaries of working on weekends much more, with Vincent *“working on weekends sometimes”* and Paul often *“working on the weekend, it was always around the business.”* For John, it went as far as to *“avoid relationships, (...) because I need to build up this business.”* Lastly, Sarah struggles with combining her job as an entrepreneur with seeing family and friends who live abroad: *“It took a year and a half to go home.”*

However, most interviewees have found balance between their work and their private life over the years. Paul states *“it (the business) takes the majority of the time, but at the same time, it also allows my private life to be under control as well.”* Hannah is *“generally very happy, (...) with my work-life balance.”* Nevertheless, Vincent shares: *“It's better than it was, but it still will always exist that you feel this guilt. (...) I think it's impossible to not feel that sometimes, you know, life is about compromise in different areas.”*

4.3 Finding balance between psychological detachment and job connectivity for higher job satisfaction

4.3.1 Causes of job connectivity

Freedom to be in driver's seat

One of the causes for job connectivity expressed in most interviews was the ability to make self-determined decisions as an entrepreneur, described as the freedom to be in the driver's seat.

John spoke of the ability *“to be the captain of your ship”* and *“to answer to none but Susan (i.e. his business partner), but on an equal footing.”* Vincent stated *“being in control of the work we do”* to be one of the factors affecting his job satisfaction as an entrepreneur. Paul mentioned *“freedom”* as a job satisfaction driver, and emphasised that *“that flexibility allows then to provide advantages that you wouldn't have when working somewhere else.”*

Another dimension of this freedom relates to the entrepreneurs' values and vision for their companies, which they can protect through their choices in terms of customers, as Sarah explains. Facing an *“incredibly rude”* client, Sarah decided that *“You know, we're not gonna work with them. (...) It's kind of a cool thing, when you're able to stay true to your values, because you get to control the company.”* Matt also focuses his experience of freedom on the decision-making process within his venture: *“I own majority of the company. So, it means no matter what, it's going to be my decision at the end.”*

Sense of purpose and impact-making

The most prominent theme was a sense of purpose and impact-making, referred to by all interviewees. Due to the large volume of purpose related statements, only the strongest were selected for this overview of the findings.

Anne describes the role of her job and the meaning it has for her in the following way: *“It's a super important part of my life, I need to feel useful and need to do something that makes me feel happy and motivated and enthusiastic when I wake up in the morning.”* This matches Hannah's experience: *“I can give this because (...) I'm also working with something that I'm very passionate about. (...) So even if you have hard times, you know this is for the greater good.”*

David also directly takes reference to the theme of purpose and impact when stating that *“the reason I get out of bed and optimise my life, is because I serve a higher purpose. (...) I want to serve people, because I want a better society.”*

Allison shares: *“I know that the overall vision of the company is also not to just make as much money as possible, but rather to do something meaningful and make a living out of it at same time. So yeah, that's a big driver for me.”* Sarah’s attitude matches the previous statements, as she too highlights *“the number one goal in starting a company is making an impact. (...) That’s what really drives me and keeps me going. (...) Doing what we’re doing can make a huge difference in the world. And that makes me so happy.”*

Matt believes *“We are the hope they are looking for. So if we give up what we are giving, then there is nothing left. (...) That's why we are in business in the first place.”* John highlights *“to be given the opportunity to put your talents to use to be able (...) to build your own thing.(...) To be able to be driving change in a way”*, is what driving him to be an entrepreneur.

Self-development

A third factor driving the entrepreneur’s positive perception towards low PD or job connectivity is the value they attach to their own self-development, which goes hand in hand with their role as entrepreneurs. Most interviewees mentioned the importance of developing themselves both within their venture and within their private life.

Anne describes the need to feel like she is *“continuously evolving”* and *“continuously learning new things.”* Both David and John agree that there is always more to learn, stating that *“I’m not going to stop because there is a lot more to learn”* (David) and that makes them *“realise that you’ve learned a lot and how far you’ve come”* (John).

Natural identity overlap between entrepreneurial identity and private identity

The last identified cause of job connectivity was the natural overlap of their identity as an entrepreneur and their non-work-related persona. Interestingly, while all interviewed entrepreneurs touched upon the identity overlap, they highlighted different dimensions of it, such as challenges but also understanding of it being part of the entrepreneurial occupation.

Hannah experienced this overlap as a learning journey: *“When I started as an entrepreneur, I was like, Oh my god, this is my life. My whole identity relies on the success of this company.”* Comparing this to the present she explained that *“after a while you realise, Okay, this is also just a job”* and summarises her new attitude towards her entrepreneurial identity as *“this is not my life, this is this part of my life.”*

Anne considers *“(her) job in general to be super crucial for (her) general balance and general happiness.”* David inherently questions the possibility of two separate identities *“How can I separate my work self from my personal self, and the other way around? (...) I am one person. The way I'm at work, I'm at home as well.”* John feels that *“the assumption is (...) there is a difference between the work and your personal life. And I disagree with that.”* He also discusses the close connection between his personal well-being and his work life: *“I mean, right now where we're doing well, my mental well-being is in pretty good shape. But if we ever go south, you know, that might change. (...) Because it is so closely tied to your life. And the dichotomy that usually exists between personal life and job doesn't necessarily apply as much in the entrepreneurial realm.”* He acknowledges that hence *“the potential for (a) negative spillover effect is of course greater”*, but also makes clear that he does not experience the overlap as negative, explaining that *“I'm enjoying, I enjoy what I'm doing. I really do.”*

Paul also stated that *“I think (...) as an entrepreneur, it is a bit harder to compartmentalize things.”* He adds: *“For me, every time we have success with (the company), I feel that it's also successful for my private self.”*

Allison literally mentions an overlap and simultaneously shares the positive perspective on it *“My work life and my private life overlap to a great extent. Even when I don't work, even during the weekend, during my off time, it's always present. But in a good way.”* She explains that *“I do think for sure, it's very related to the fact that it is just so close to what I do, and what is important to me, like my values. And then secondly, I do think it's kind of like when you're a founder. And it's probably necessary to have this additional attitude.”*

Sarah, however, highlights that *“there's that part of me that is like, worried about what people think about me, like, what am I doing? (...) So, it's like that reputation that I don't want to hurt”*, which improved significantly when she learned that *“all my friends in the industry were like, so impressed.”* Speaking about how this was a source of stress for her in the past, while she handles it better now, she concludes that *“it's a fine line.”*

4.3.2 Facilitators of psychological detachment

Understanding one's internal boundaries

As a facilitator of PD, the understanding of one's internal boundaries formed a common thread in all interviews.

For most interviewees, their understanding of their own boundaries helped them make more space for their personal life in general, regardless of the prevalent job connectivity. David learned to *“reduce my work and say, Look just close your laptop at six.”* Similarly, Hannah learned to *“force myself to include more personal life in my life.”*

Anne believes *“you just need to learn for yourself, what's stressing you, how stress materialised kind of when yourself, you can realise, Okay, here, actually, I'm stressed.”* When Matt noticed his work-related thoughts were becoming a source of burnout, he relied on his understanding of his limits to see his own warning signs: *“I understand my warning signals. I understand when I get to that level that I start burning out. (...) Then I know, I need to do something about it.”*

Learning with time, knowledge and experience

All interviewees reflected on how learning with time, knowledge and experience is as a strong facilitator of PD for them.

Anne highlighted this mindset as *“something you will learn throughout the way”* and that this is *“what brings me peace today.”* Hannah states: *“When I started as an entrepreneur, I was like, This is my life. (...) Now I just do it for fun. (...) I don't really feel that pressure anymore.”* Both for Matt and Sarah, this process was shaped through past experiences.

Sarah experienced this during her studies: *“I really saw during the master's programme, like the value of all my experiences, the value of all my skills and strength that I hadn't seen in myself before”*, whereas Matt relied on his previous business experience as a *“significant part”* of his mindset today.

View on business failure

The interviewees' view on business failure can be seen as a dimension that can support PD. This is reflected by their understanding that dealing with low points in their business is something they have limited control over and thus decrease the feelings of frustration in relation to the thoughts they have about it.

Anne learned to release the pressure on making a decision for her venture: *“I know that there's not just one way, there are different ways. And I strongly believe that there's no such things as good or bad decisions. (...) So, I think that's also probably a way for me to release a little bit of pressure on making a decision.”* Paul realises: *“I think it's always to kind of get up-- to get stuck in, There was a (bad) day or a (bad) week. But was it a (bad) year or something, you know? Or where do you see yourself in five years and so on. I think it's always important to be able to kind of see a bigger picture also.”*

Evolved sense of urgency

Lastly, the interviewees show an evolved sense of urgency as facilitator of PD by helping them to block out work-related thoughts more easily. Paul *“can immediately see how urgent it is, on what scale it impacts the business”* before he decides to *“make a decision to start a thinking process about it.”* Allison tries to *“rationalize it more (...) you're not gonna do that now, it can be done tomorrow.”*

4.4 Recovery strategies

All six categories of recovery established in the theoretical framework were recurring topics within all interviews. For all entrepreneurs, physical activity and time with friends or family stood out: *“It's really important to go to the gym”* (Paul), *“Sports, for sure, is the number one”* (Allison), *“Have a chat with my children, speak to friends, do something social”* (David) and *“Spending important time with my daughter”* (Vincent).

Additionally, the focus fell on interventions or support systems found within the workplace, with support through co-founders and employees seen as crucial: “*I don’t believe we’d be that far (without co-founders)*” (Vincent) and “*I always felt supported (by co-founder and employees)*” (Anne).

When probing into the way the established recovery interventions made them feel regarding their job satisfaction and PD, answers seemed to convey a wider meaning. A common reflection was how recovery interventions are seen as “*just something for me*” (David) and “*no pressure activities (...) I do it because I like it*” (Hannah) to “*make time for daily life*” (Allison), rather than conscious actions taken to detach from work.

5. Discussion and analysis

This chapter discusses the empirical findings in relation to the theoretical framework. The analysis aims to answer the sub-research questions in their presented order (see section 2.4). This way, the authors create an understanding of the main research question of this thesis, which is ultimately visualised in a suggested grounded theory model as a conclusion to this chapter.

5.1 Signs of clarity in the stressor jungle

This study started off from an status quo in the entrepreneurial research field, exploring the numerous stressors affecting the mental well-being of entrepreneurs (Stephan, 2018) who face particularly high job demands (Rauch, Fink & Hatak, 2018; Stephan, 2018; Williamson, Gish & Stephan, 2021; Wincent & Örtqvist, 2009; Wincent, Örtqvist & Drnovsek, 2008). The starting point of this research was thus to gain more understanding of what kind of stressors drive this increased strain on entrepreneurs while others may affect well-being positively to establish a context as to why the relation between work-related stressors and psychological detachment (PD) may be more difficult to grasp. A reason for this difficulty is seen to be due to a lack of understanding about stressors may actually be challenge as opposed to hindrance stressors (LePine, Podsakoff & Lepine, 2005).

Hence, the discussion of challenge stressors is presented more concisely than the analysis of found challenge stressors.

The findings recognised five hindrance stressors and two challenge stressors. The identification of the five hindrance stressors represents little novelty for the academic world, as these have been established through a range of previous studies, while challenge stressors are currently less researched (e.g Stephan, 2018). Therefore, the analysis focuses on the impact of challenge stressors.

Starting with **role stressors**, the findings are in line with current research's evaluation of **role ambiguity** and **role conflict** to be unambiguously harmful to the mental well-being of entrepreneurs (Stephan, 2018). However, this stressor appeared to be easily handled with the enforcement of clear roles with only a limited margin of flexibility.

The results therefore indicate a confirmation of role stressors to be hindrance stressors (Wach et al., 2021; LePine, Podsakoff & Lepine, 2005), yet, not the most significant, due to its easy management.

However, there were a range of other work-related stressors expressed to be major sources of stress, indicating that these too are likely to be classified as hindrance stressors. Bradley and Roberts (2004) and Millan and colleagues (2013) describe long working hours as a challenge stressor, suggesting a positive link between long hours and high job satisfaction among entrepreneurs, while other studies have shown a negative correlation (Stephan, 2018). The newly collected data does not indicate a disagreement with this notion. However, it points towards **time constraints** and **time pressure** as two predominantly negative and therefore hindrance stressors within the entrepreneurial occupation. Yet again, it appears that while this stressor is relatively prominent among all interviewed entrepreneurs, the prioritisation of tasks was found to be an effective technique to reduce the stress experienced through time constraints and pressure.

Another hindrance stressor is **external expectations from especially clients and investors**. This seems to stem from a differentiation between intrinsic motivations and external pressure. Hence, this suggests to examine the source of expectations as a hindrance stressor when coming from external stakeholders, whereas it may be a challenge stressor, i.e. in the shape of work meaningfulness (Stephan, 2018), when expectations come from within the entrepreneur. While meaningfulness is not discussed as a challenge stressor in this section of the analysis, its specifics are dealt with in detail as “purpose and impact making” in the discussion of causes of job connectivity in 5.3. Overall, these findings align with prior studies, such as Lechat and Torrès (2017) and Schonfeld and Mazzola (2015) who found challenges in relationships with clients to be negatively related to entrepreneurial well-being. Pressure from investors on the other hand could be related to financial characteristics (Stephan, 2018), as discussed in the context of financial dependency further on.

Furthermore, the findings revealed **strain through setbacks** to be a work-related stressor which has been accounted for through the lens of “coping” or “habitual approaches to dealing with challenging situations” (Stephan, 2018, p.302). All entrepreneurs described the negative emotions from frequent setbacks, such as client rejections, which reveals it as a hindrance stressor.

How well entrepreneurs can cope with these setbacks, has been previously found to be positively related to their mental well-being (e.g. Drnovsek, Örtqvist & Wincent, 2010; Patzelt & Shepherd, 2011; Uy, Foo & Song, 2013).

Lastly, a stressor related to firm and financial characteristics (Stephan, 2018), namely **financial dependency**, was confirmed as an additional significant source of stress, reflected in the comparison between venture dependent and - independent interviewees. This finding is in line with previous studies showing financial problems to be negatively related to well-being of entrepreneurs (e.g. Annink, Gorgievski & Den Dulk, 2016; Gorgievski et al., 2010; Lechat & Torrès, 2017), suggesting it as a hindrance stressor.

The stressor **workload**, often referred to as high demands (Stephan, 2018), has been clearly identified as a challenge stressor. While previous studies have predominantly found negative relations of workload with entrepreneurial mental well-being (Stephan, 2018), the two studies by Millan and colleagues (2013) and Bradley and Roberts (2004) indicated a positive relation of both long working hours and high demands to job satisfaction among entrepreneurs. In this context, this study's findings could be seen as an additional indicator of workload and working hours to represent a challenge stressor. As opposed to purely negative relationships for salaried employees in organisational research (e.g. Bakker et al., 2003; Kinnunen et al., 2011; Sonnentag & Frese, 2012), it can have a positive impact on entrepreneur's mental well-being. Hence, new evidence has been collected for high workload to be perceived as stressful but simultaneously desirable.

A second stressor, namely **sense of duty**, met the criteria of a challenge stressor. Despite being a source of stress, the pressure it caused appeared to be rather motivational for the interviewed entrepreneurs. While stress and impaired well-being from responsibility for other people has previously been suggested by Begley (1994), the notion of it representing a stressor with a positive effect for entrepreneurial well-being through e.g. its motivational effect is new to entrepreneurial research (Stephan, 2018).

To summarise, most efforts to grasp the relationship between the potential predictors of well-being have been based on the stressor-strain concept (Roy et al., 1965), which assumes a solely negative effect from stressors on the well-being of individuals, referred to as strain (Roy et al., 1965).

Wach and colleagues (2021) progressed this entrepreneurial research field by applying this concept to the entrepreneurial context. They refined the stressor-strain view through differentiation challenge stressors and hindrance stressors (LePine, Podsakoff & Lepine, 2005; Wach et al., 2021). Building on this foundation, this study suggests a classification of job-related work stressors as visualised in Figure 1. This classification could be used further to help explain the ambiguous relation between work-related stressors and PD in connection to job satisfaction.

| Challenge stressors | Hindrane stressors |
|---|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> •workload (incl. working hours) •sense of duty | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> •financial dependency •(strain through) set-backs •pressure from investors and clients •time constraints and pressure •role conflict/ambiguity |

Figure 1 – Classification of work stressors

5.2 Dimensions of entrepreneurial psychological detachment

An important element of this thesis was gaining a deeper understanding of the relation between PD and the job satisfaction of early-stage entrepreneurs. Research rooted in organisational psychological had so far established a dire depiction of the extent to which low PD has negative consequences for well-being and job satisfaction (e.g. Meijman & Mulder, 1998; Bakker et al., 2003; Geurts & Sonnentag, 2006; Sonnentag, Binnewies & Mojza, 2008, Kinnunen et al., 2011). However, applying the concept of PD within the entrepreneurial context requires a more nuanced understanding, considering the unique circumstances entrepreneurs face (Stephan, 2018). The way in which this thesis has been able to paint an initial picture of that nuance is described below.

What stood out from the findings was the dual interpretation entrepreneurs attached to PD and the way it impacts them. Whilst the literature mostly describes the negative impact of low PD and the associated work-related thoughts outside working hours (Sonnentag & Fritz, 2007), the entrepreneurs in this sample clearly make a distinction into what can be described as **negatively perceived low PD** and **positively perceived low PD**.

Firstly, the basis of these two perceptions lies at the distinction between the **type of thoughts** lingering outside working hours. On the one hand, operational thoughts are seen as unconstructive and troublesome, representing similar negative effects related to work-related rumination (Cropley & Zijlstra, 2011). On the other hand, strategic thoughts are seen as inspiring and pleasant, reflecting a new way of looking at problem-solving pondering introduced by Cropley and Zijlstra (2011).

Secondly, another layer behind these two perceptions is the place low PD plays in the lives of the entrepreneurs in general. On the one hand, the negative perception is driven by **work-life interferences occurring due to low PD**. All interviewed entrepreneurs admit they dedicated too much time to both their job and thinking about their job, and that this has negatively impacted their private lives to various degrees. In these instances, low PD has negatively impacted their private spheres and life satisfaction, aligned with Fritz et al. (2010) and Sonnentag and Fritz (2007). Moreover, the findings show a continuous increased risk of work-life interference due to low PD, confirming patterns described by Stephan (2018) and Hamilton Skurak and colleagues (2021).

On the other hand, the positive perception is driven by an **acceptance of work-related thoughts outside working hours**, which also is the most prevalent perception noticeable in the findings. This acceptance seems to be rooted in a deep job involvement typical for the entrepreneurial population, aligned with Potok and Littman-Ovadia (2014). Moreover, in Sonnentag and Bayer's (2005) research, job involvement is described to attenuate the negative effect of low PD through a love for the work being done, which clearly resonates in the findings described in this thesis. Additionally, this acceptance also shows reflections of entrepreneurs' close connection between work and personal identity as studied by Stephan (2018). A more in-depth analysis of this acceptance is provided in 5.3, where the causes of positively perceived PD are discussed.

In conclusion, this analysis showed entrepreneurs create a distinction where they see benefits and pitfalls to low PD. This distinction calls for a new perspective when talking about PD in the entrepreneurial context, where positively perceived low PD can be described as **job connectivity** to reflect the positive and welcoming role this low PD can play in the entrepreneur's life.

5.3 Fostering a healthy connection with work beyond working hours

As established in 5.2, entrepreneurs show a different connection between PD and job satisfaction and therefore well-being than commonly found for traditionally employed individuals, as largely researched in organisational psychology (e.g. Sonnentag, 2010; Sonnentag & Frese, 2012; Sonnentag & Fritz, 2015; Wendsche & Lohmann-Haislah, 2017). While this connection in the entrepreneurial context was analysed in 5.2, this section of the analysis explores potential factors which the findings suggest to both cause the positively perceived low PD or 'job connectivity' the entrepreneurs described, and to inherently support them in achieving PD despite prevalent job connectivity. Together, these two approaches foster a balanced connection with work beyond working hours beneficial for job satisfaction.

The findings revealed four causes of job connectivity. Firstly, **a sense of purpose and impact making** which the interviewees derived from their entrepreneurial occupation was a reoccurring theme all interviews. Stephan's (2018) review of antecedents of entrepreneurial well-being indicated how intrinsic motivational factors show a positive correlation with entrepreneurial well-being. This could suggest that certain intrinsic motifs for entrepreneurship equip entrepreneurs better to handle the entrepreneurial demands and stressors than extrinsic, financial motivations (Carree & Verheul, 2012). The entrepreneurs reflect this theoretical view in mentioning their sense of purpose as a key-driver and motivation.

This strongly evident sense of purpose also related to the second identified cause, which is the **natural identity overlap** of their entrepreneurial and their non-work-related persona. This identity overlap is not new to the entrepreneurial research and has been explored in detail by Shepherd and Patzelt (2018). It widely agreed that entrepreneurs see their identity reflected in their occupation (Shepherd & Patzelt, 2018; Wach, Stephan & Gorgievski, 2016) and have increased job involvement (Frese & Gielnik, 2014, as cited in Stephan, 2018; Taris et al., 2008). This puts them at a higher risk of low PD after work, compared to non-self-employed and which is reflected in all of the interviewee's experience. While entrepreneurs are prone to be connected to work even in their free time, this is something they perceive as positive. The findings show this is driven by sense of purpose and the reflection of their identity within their occupation as entrepreneur.

Another cause is the **freedom to be in the driver's seat** relating to the entrepreneurs' values and vision for their companies, which they can protect through their independent choices. This cause once more ties back to the characteristically high level of job involvement (Frese & Gielnik, 2014, as cited in Stephan, 2018; Taris et al., 2008). However, this often leaves the entrepreneur carrying the sole responsibility of their venture's livelihood, which can increase strain (e.g. Rauch, Fink & Hatak, 2018; Stephan, 2018).

It also became clear that the entrepreneurs share an appreciation and eagerness to learn through their entrepreneurial occupation and to therefore keep evolving, which was summarised as a **drive for self-development**. This can be related to the well-being antecedent of feedback, which is one of the motivating work settings of Hackman and Oldham's (1975) job characteristics model (Stephan, 2018) and connects to learning opportunities. Additionally, this drive can also be understood as a reaction to mitigate the strain experienced from a lack of entrepreneurial or business skills (Ahmad & Xavier, 2010; Vaag, Giæver & Bjerkeset, 2014). It can be concluded that the challenging nature of entrepreneurship offers opportunity for self-development, which appeals to the entrepreneurs' evident drive for self-development, which then ultimately results in job connectivity.

The findings reflected four facilitators that support entrepreneurs into obtaining albeit challenging PD: **understanding one's internal boundaries; learning with time, knowledge, and experience; view on business failure** and **evolved sense of urgency**. Important to note is that the authors see the four concepts as direct facilitators of PD yet do not classify them as recovery interventions, even though they are successful for recovery. Unlike the recovery interventions described in the theoretical framework and findings (Richardson & Rothstein, 2008; Verbeek et al., 2019), these facilitators reflect a development of skills applied from within rather than externally found sources of recovery.

Specifically, an **evolved sense of urgency** has been developed through taking a more rational outlook on decision-making to take more distance from their work during their free time and especially seems to mitigate the strain-inducing effect of job involvement (Stephan, 2018; Taris et al., 2008). For **view on business failure**, a shift in perspective when facing hardships from the more personal perspective described by Shepherd (2003) has been a way for entrepreneurs to psychologically detach.

Learning with time, knowledge, and experience reflects a similar pattern described by Kollmann, Stöckmann and Kensbock (2019) and Uy, Foo and Song (2013) where the more experienced entrepreneurs such as Hannah have found it increasingly easier to mitigate the pressure and detach. Lastly, **understanding one's internal boundaries** has a two-fold meaning. On the one hand, the entrepreneurs relate to this as ways in which they understand their own limits and warning signs. On the other hand, this understanding shows similarities with what can be described as work-related interventions rooted in the recovery literature (Gunnarsson & Josephson, 2011; Richardson & Rothstein, 2008; Smit, 2016).

However, aside for the dimension of learning with time, this thesis did not find major differences between the effectivity of the abovementioned causes and facilitators of PD for habitual entrepreneurs and novice entrepreneurs (Kollmann, Stöckmann & Kensbock, 2019; Uy, Foo & Song, 2013). The confidence in and effectivity of both the causes and facilitators stem more from a general mindset and a accrument of experiences among the entrepreneurs further along the stage of their venture (Politis, 2005).

In conclusion, this thesis found that entrepreneurs call on two distinctive factors to foster a healthy connection with work beyond working hours. Firstly, four notions inherent to being an entrepreneur reflect potential causes for an increased and accepted job connectivity. Secondly, entrepreneurs use four facilitators to expediate PD, despite this constant job connectivity. Together, these two factors assist in finding balance between job connectivity and PD to support job satisfaction.

5.4 A new perspective on recovery interventions

All six categories of recovery established in the theoretical framework were recurring topics within all interviews, such as physical activity, time spent with friends and family, and support from a professional network (e.g. Murnieks et al., 2020; Richardson & Rothstein, 2008; Gunnarsson & Josephson, 2011; Uy, Foo & Song, 2013). Hence, the findings regarding the types of recovery activities do not add novelty to the research on the types of recovery interventions and confirm what has been researched so far. However, unlike suggested in the literature by Uy, Foo and Song (2013), the findings do not reflect a difficulty to partake in recovery interventions and experience recovery among first-time and habitual entrepreneurs.

When considering what role recovery interventions play in supporting psychological detachment, the findings add novel meaning to the existing literature. The literature theorises that recovery interventions are conducted to and help achieve a state of recovery (Richardson & Rothstein, 2008; Verbeek et al., 2019). However, the predominant feeling associated with the described recovery interventions was more reflective of three additional dimensions: a need to carve out individual free time (i.e. recovery through self-care), a need to stay connected socially (i.e. recovery through connection) and a need to find support systems in the workplace (i.e. recovery through work-related intervention). The findings thus show that recovery interventions were primarily used to sustain the abovementioned three dimensions rather than seen as an active process to achieve PD and recover from work, with the first two dimensions showing the most importance.

The authors assume that recovery interventions thus go beyond improving job satisfaction through PD and instead play a more fundamental role in improving job satisfaction through work-life balance (Hamilton Skurak et al., 2021). In conclusion, this finding questions the theories regarding recovery interventions' relation to recovery processes and PD (Richardson & Rothstein, 2008; Verbeek et al., 2019). Additionally, this can be seen as further backing for the newly suggested job connectivity among entrepreneurs, which related to a lower need for entrepreneurs to psychologically detach and recover from work. The aim of the undertaken recovery interventions may hence differ compared to the organisational context of salaried employees (e.g. Meijman & Mulder, 1998; Bakker et al., 2003; Geurts & Sonnentag, 2006).

5.5 Grounded theory model

Based on the preceding discussion the grounded theory model illustrated in Figure 2 emerged. The model combines all newly suggested relationships and represents the foundation for the conclusion and implications for further research.

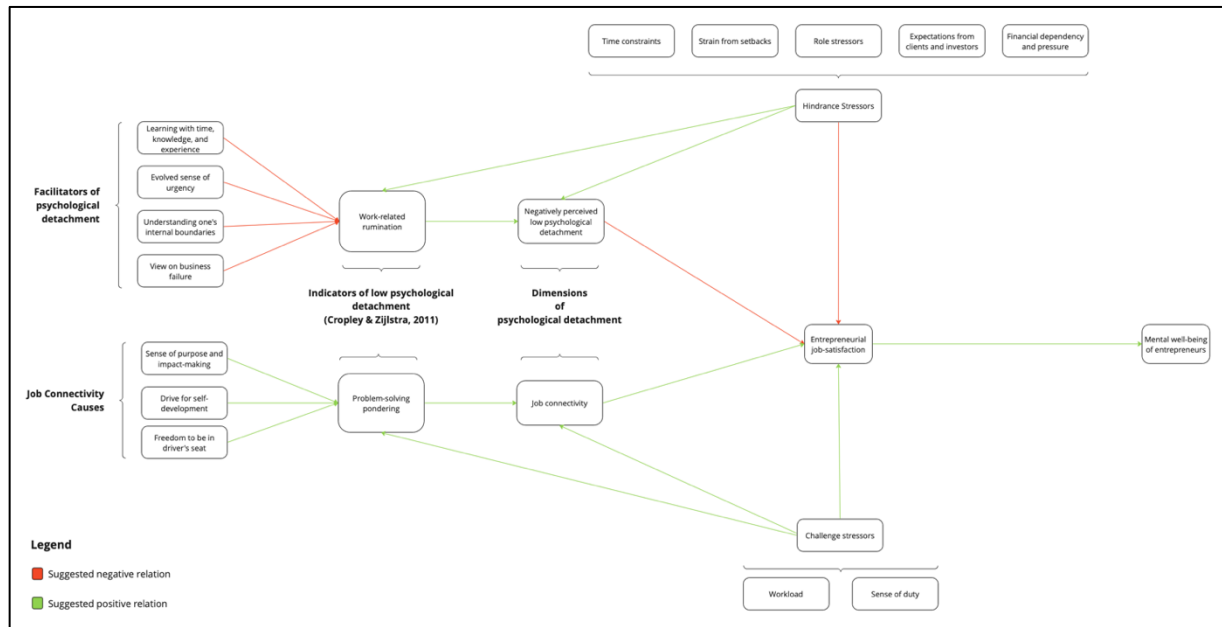


Figure 2 – Suggested grounded theory model

6. Conclusion and implications

As a concluding chapter, this chapter summarises the aim of the study and highlights the main research findings in support of the main research question. Secondly, it describes both the academic and practical implications of the findings. Lastly, it reflects on the limitations of the research process and ties these limitations to suggestions for future research.

6.1 Aim of the study and research findings

The main goal of this thesis was to explore the relation between psychological detachment (PD) and entrepreneurial well-being and job satisfaction among early-stage entrepreneurs. Within this relation, this thesis explored the impact of work-related stressors and what entrepreneurs do to recover from such stressors.

Based on the preceding analysis, the research question can be answered:

How does psychological detachment relate to job satisfaction among early-stage entrepreneurs?

Whilst confirming similar insights from the literature indicating a heightened risk of impaired PD among entrepreneurs (e.g. Stephan, 2018; Wach et al., 2016), this thesis saw how entrepreneurs attach a dual meaning to PD and hence experience a dual effect on their well-being through job satisfaction. Therefore, contributing to a more nuanced understanding of PD and its relationship to job-satisfaction in the entrepreneurial context. On the one hand, reflective of Sonnentag and Fritz (2007), entrepreneurs face a negative effect on job satisfaction through prevalent low PD which causes work-life interference (Hamilton Skurak et al., 2021). This negative effect is heightened by affective rumination (Cropley & Zijlstra, 2011), which entrepreneurs describe as operational and unconstructive thoughts. Hence, this dimension of low PD represents a risk or ‘fire’ for the entrepreneurs and their well-being. On the other hand, entrepreneurs attach positive value and even welcome low PD as a natural state of being an entrepreneur. This perception implies a deep enjoyment of low PD, supportive of their job satisfaction (Sonnentag & Bayer, 2005), turning it into ‘fuel’ for entrepreneurs. This positive effect is induced by problem-solving pondering (Cropley & Zijlstra, 2011) in their free time, which entrepreneurs describe as strategic and inspiring thoughts.

The entrepreneur's positive outlook on low PD prevailed in the findings. Hence, this thesis suggests introducing a new perspective when talking about PD in the entrepreneurial context. In this perspective, positively perceived low PD can be described as job connectivity to reflect the positive and welcoming role low PD plays in the entrepreneur's life. Hence, although entrepreneurs are shown to live with increased job connectivity (i.e. low PD), this does not have a negative effect on their job satisfaction, but rather is suggested to support it.

This duality between PD and job connectivity and its effect on job satisfaction calls for a deeper understanding on how job satisfaction is maintained. This thesis found that entrepreneurs call on two distinctive sets of factors to foster a healthy connection with work beyond working hours. Firstly, four notions inherent to being an entrepreneur reflect potential causes for an increased and accepted job connectivity: a sense of purpose derived from the venture, close overlap between their personal identity and their work identity, the freedom to be in the driver's seat and a drive for self-development. Secondly, entrepreneurs use four facilitators to support PD, despite this constant job connectivity: evolved sense of urgency, different view on business failure, prior learnings and understanding of one's limits. Together, these two factors assist in finding balance between job connectivity and PD to support job satisfaction.

A similar duality has been explored within the challenge stressors and hindrance stressors framework (LePine, Podsakoff & Lepine, 2005; Wach et al., 2021). This thesis used this lens to understand what kind of impact work-related stressors such as workload, time pressure and role ambiguity have on the relation between PD and well-being. Interestingly, challenge stressors such as workload and the emerging concept sense of duty foster job connectivity and have a more positive impact on job satisfaction, whereas hindrance stressors bring about negatively perceived low PD and have a negative impact on job satisfaction.

Lastly, this thesis set out to understand the role that recovery interventions play in fostering PD. However, the predominant feeling entrepreneurs associated with the researched recovery interventions was reflective of a need to carve out time for themselves, friends or family to directly support their work-life balance (Hamilton Skurak et al., 2021) rather than an active process to recover or achieve PD. This questions the theories regarding recovery interventions' relation to recovery processes (Richardson & Rothstein, 2008; Verbeek et al., 2019). Ultimately, this could signal additional support for the concept of job connectivity among entrepreneurs, as it results in a reduced need to psychologically detach and recover from work.

For entrepreneurs, recovery interventions may therefore serve the aforementioned different dimensions, compared to their purpose in the organisational context of salaried employees (e.g. Meijman & Mulder, 1998; Bakker et al., 2003; Geurts & Sonnentag, 2006).

6.2 Implications of the research findings

This thesis has relevant academic and practical implications on how understanding the relation between PD and job satisfaction within the entrepreneurial context is crucial for fostering job satisfaction and well-being among early-stage entrepreneurs.

The findings generate new insights into the research field of PD in the entrepreneurial context. It supports the research by e.g. Stephan (2018) and Wach and colleagues (2016) indicated a heightened risk of low PD and continued strains on well-being and job satisfaction for entrepreneurs. However, it introduces a new understanding of PD studied in the entrepreneurial context, where one dimension of low PD is welcomed and enjoyed to an extent it can support PD. By introducing the concept of job connectivity, or positively perceived low PD, it challenges the negative outlook on low PD introduced by Sonnentag and Fritz (2007). Secondly, the distinction made between operational thoughts and strategic thoughts and their different effect on how low PD is perceived sheds a new light on the concepts of affective rumination and problem-solving pondering introduced by Cropley & Zijlstra (2011).

In addition to the academic implications, the findings show practical value. Firstly, it paints a more hopeful picture for nascent entrepreneurs trying to find a balance between work and life outside working hours. Rather than fighting against low PD, entrepreneurs can still support job satisfaction and ultimately entrepreneurial well-being through job connectivity. Secondly, it offers an understanding on how entrepreneurs can leverage certain processes or skills and facilitators to support job satisfaction despite low PD or job connectivity.

6.3 Limitations

A few limitations apply to the study and its findings which require consideration. One relating to bias which could have affected the reliability of the data, while the second addresses the question of data representativeness, ultimately also linked to reliability limitations.

Firstly, desirability bias may have affected the reliability of the collected data, as the interviewed entrepreneurs may have been inclined to paint a more positive and socially desirable picture of the entrepreneurial experience than reflective of reality (Bell, Bryman & Harley, 2022). This could also be connected to cultural ideals within entrepreneurship (Brattström, 2022) and certain expectations attached to their identity as entrepreneurs (Shepherd & Patzelt, 2018).

Secondly, the study did not find indications for differences between e.g. solo vs. non-solo entrepreneurs (Schulz, Schöllgen & Fay, 2019) and prior start-up experience (Kollmann, Stöckmann & Kensbock, 2019). However, considering the small sample size, there is a possibility that actual differences within the heterogenous entrepreneurial population (Wach et al., 2021) regarding their experience of PD and work-related stressors exist, but were not found here. Ultimately, the small sample size of only nine entrepreneurs was sufficient for the qualitative research design and exploratory goal of the study, however, it limits the representativeness of the findings for the whole population of early-stage entrepreneurs (Bell, Bryman & Harley, 2022).

6.4 Recommendations for further research

This study contributed to the field of research on PD and well-being among entrepreneurs by delivering new support for the distinction between hindrance and challenge stressors (LePine, Podsakoff & Lepine, 2005), as well as new suggestions for a low level of PD with positive implications for entrepreneurial job satisfaction and therefore well-being, introduced as job connectivity. However, it is important to highlight that in line with the study's aim and respective research design decisions, these new findings merely represent a starting point and further research is necessary both to further explore and confirm its findings and suggested conclusions.

Firstly, further studies following a quantitative research strategy are recommended to confirm the newly suggested relationships between the identified work-stressors, negatively perceived low PD, job connectivity, type of thoughts and job satisfaction as visualised in the suggested grounded theory model in section 5.5. It would further address previously outlined limitations linked to the rather small sample size of nine entrepreneurs.

To additionally address the limitation related to desirability (Bell, Bryman & Harley, 2022) and recall bias (Colombo et al., 2020), triangulation (Denzin, 1970) with data from entrepreneurs, but also co-founders and close personal contacts such as life partners is recommended for both further qualitative and quantitative studies in this field.

Lastly, while this study collected longitudinal data, it did not specifically investigate the impact of negatively perceived low PD and job connectivity on long-term time scale, as Wach and colleagues (2021) suggest in the context of PD among entrepreneurs. This raises the question of the long-term impact of permanent low PD or job connectivity and calls for exploration by future research.

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Appendix

Appendix A: Interview guide

Demographic Information

- What is your name? (*Fill in*)
- What gender do you identify as? (*Fill in*)
- How old are you?
- How did you found your company?
 - FUQ: What does your company do?
 - FUQ: Is this the first venture you founded?
- How long have you been in business with your company?
- How many co-founders do you have?
- How many employees do you currently have?

Job demands and Job stressors

Workload and time pressure

Q1: Can describe your typical workday?

FUQ: How do you experience these different tasks? (F.e., motivating, stressful, etc).

FUQ: Are there any daily tasks that you experience as particularly stressful?

FUQ: To what extent are your job responsibilities and tasks defined clearly?

Q2: How do you feel about the amount of work on your plate as a co-founder of your company?

FUQ: How often does it happen that you do not take a break or take a break late because of a high amount of work? Can you give an example?

FUQ: How does that make you feel?

Q3: Do you sometimes feel like there is too little time to finish your work during the day?
How do you feel about this?

Job involvement and meaningfulness

Q4: What kind of role does your job play in your life?

FUQ: How personally involved are you with your job?

FUQ: How would you describe the relationship between work and personal life?

Role conflict and social support

Q5: What does your relationship with your co-founders, colleagues and employees look like?

FUQ: To what extent do you receive support or help from your co-founders, colleagues and/or employees?

FUQ: To what extent do you seek support or help from your co-founders, colleagues and/or employees?

Work-life interference

Q6: Has your work ever been a source of conflict in your personal life? Can you give an example?

Q7: How many hours per week do you approximately spend working? How do you feel about this? Is this an issue for you?

Recovery Interventions

Q10: What do you do (to unwind) in your free time when you had a stressful day?

FUQ: How does that make you feel?

Q11: What do you do (to unwind) during work-time when you are having a stressful day?

FUQ: How does that make you feel?

Q12: What role do other people play for your ability to unwind?

FUQ: How? Who? Why?

Psychological Detachment

Q13: When you are not at work, do you still think about your work? How do you feel about this? Is this an issue for you?

Q14: What kind of strategies do you have that help you disengage with work when not being at work?

Psychological Detachment and Recovery Interventions

Q15: When you are engaging in a leisure activity/recovery intervention, how often do you still think about work?

FUQ: How do you feel about this? Is this an issue for you?

FUQ: When this happens, does it distract you?

FUQ: When this happens, do you find ways to deal with it in the moment?

Well-being

Q16: How satisfied are you with your job as an entrepreneur?

FUQ: What influences your job satisfaction?

Q17: In general, how would you describe your mental well-being?

FUQ: Has this been consistent or rather varied over time?

Appendix B: Consent Statement

Thank you for wanting to take your time and participate in this interview. As you know this interview will focus on entrepreneurial well-being, work-related stress and how you as an entrepreneur cope with that. In the first half of the interview, we will talk about work-related stress, and in the second half of the interview we will focus on the ways in which you recover and unwind.

Before we start, we would like to read a statement to ask for your consent:

“I have been given information about this master’s thesis and discussed the research project with Gemma Gisy and Marie Derycke who are conducting this research as a part of a Master’s in Entrepreneurship & Innovation supervised by Diamanto Politis.

By giving consent to this research, I am agreeing to participate in the research **anonymously** as it has been described to me. I am aware that this interview will be recorded and I understand that the data collected from my participation will be used for thesis publications, and I consent for it to be used in that manner.

I understand that my participation in this research is voluntary, I am aware that I am free to refuse to participate and I am aware that I am free to withdraw from the research at any time.”

Do we have your consent to start with the interview?