



SCHOOL OF ECONOMICS AND MANAGEMENT

Department of Business administration

FEKH49

Degree Project Undergraduate level

HT 2023

Motivating Through Time

Understanding the Motivational Implications of Reduced Work Hours

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Acknowledgement

We would like to express our sincere gratitude to our supervisor, Olof Hallonsten, for all the support and guidance provided during the writing process. We are truly fortunate to have had you as our supervisor!

We also want to thank our friends and family who endured endless discussions throughout the writing of this thesis and consistently stood by us as support throughout the entire process.

Finally, we extend our heartfelt thanks to the individuals who made this study possible; everyone who willingly participated and whom we had the honour of interviewing. Thank you for your valuable insights and thoughtful reflections.

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January 8th, 2024

Abstract

Title: Motivating Through Time - Understanding the Motivational Implications of Reduced Work Hours

Seminar date: 2024-01-11

Course: FEKH49, Degree Project Undergraduate level, Business Administration, Undergraduate level, 15 University Credits Points (UPC) or ECTS-cr

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Key-words: Motivation, Self-determination theory, Work-life balance, Reduced work hours, Organisational culture

Purpose: The purpose is to investigate the impact of reduced work hours on motivational aspects such as work-life balance and well-being by using culture as a contextual concept to enhance understanding of underlying contributing factors

Methodology: Qualitative research, semi-structured interviews of six subjects in two different organisations. An abductive approach has been used with a social constructionist view.

Theoretical perspectives: Competing Values Framework is used to understand the cultural context and Self-determination theory to provide an understanding of the motivational aspects.

Empirical foundation: Two different knowledge intensive organisations with experience of reduced work hours, CEO and consultants at a consulting recruitment firm, and social workers at a municipal social office.

Conclusions: Reduced work hours can because of the nature of its impact on well-being and work-life balance be seen as an external reward that increases intrinsic motivation through inherent satisfaction and enjoyment, which opens the prospect of becoming self-determined. A prerequisite for this is a clan culture.

Sammanfattning

Examensarbetets titel: Motivating Through Time - Understanding the Motivational Implications of Reduced Work Hours

Seminariedatum: 2024-01-11

Ämne/kurs: FEKH49, Examensarbete i organisation på kandidatnivå, 15 högskolepoäng

Författare: Simon Engman, Felix Haglund, Erik Söderpalm

Handledare: Olof Hallonsten

Nyckelord: Motivation, Self-Determination Theory, Work-life Balance, Arbetstidsförkortning, Organisationskultur

Syfte: Syftet är att utreda den påverkan som arbetstidsförkortning har på motivationsaspekter, såsom work-life balance och välmående. Det görs genom att använda kultur som ett konceptualiserande begrepp för att öka förståelsen för de underliggande faktorerna.

Metod: En kvalitativ forskningsmetod, med semistrukturerade intervjuer av sex personer som kommer från två olika organisationer. Vi använder oss av en abduktiv ansats med ett socialkonstruktionistiskt förhållningssätt.

Teoretiska perspektiv: Competing Values Framework används för att förstå den kulturella kontexten och Self-determination theory används för att förstå motivationsaspekterna.

Empiri: Två olika kunskapsintensiva organisationer med erfarenhet inom arbetstidsförkortning. Dessa är en VD och konsulter på en konsultbyrå, och socialarbetare på ett kommunalt socialkontor.

Resultat: Arbetstidsförkortning kan av dess påverkan på välmående och work-life balance bli sedd som en extern belöning som ökar den intrinsiska motivationen genom en inneboende tillfredsställelse och åtnjutande, vilket öppnar upp möjligheterna för att bli självbestämmande. En tillsynes nödvändig förutsättning för det här är en "clan kultur".

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1 Introduction

In this study we aim to investigate how reducing work hours motivates employees, and what role culture plays in how this motivation takes place. In order to provide a clear perspective of these subjects we start off with a background covering a short history of work and motivation before moving on to problematize the current view of these areas. This leads us to our purpose and research question, and an introduction of our subjects of study.

1.1 Background

Throughout time, perception and meaning of work has changed drastically. Work was, in the Greek and Roman perspective, viewed as a burdensome task (Syed, 1972). The Hebrew perspective, on the other hand, considered work a consequence of the mistakes of their ancestors while also having some positive interpretations (Syed, 1972). Within the confines of the Catholic Church, human toil was regarded as an extension of God's energy. The rise of catholicism brought about a positive shift, depicting work as a means to attain virtue. A significant turning point in interpreting work is apparent in the writings of St. Thomas Aquinas, who was canonised in the 1300s, who validated work as both a duty and a right, and used it as a cornerstone for defining property. The rise of Protestantism and Luther's teachings in the 16th century introduced a fresh outlook on work by transforming its image from a source of social inequality, as observed in early mediaeval society, into a way of smoothing out the disparities. Luther highlighted that the most effective means of being a good human was involved in excelling in one's profession, eliminating the divide between secular and non-religious work.

The view of work, and the motivations behind why we work, have changed throughout history. Looking at more modern times in Sweden, just a bit more than one hundred years ago the average work week was around 55-60 hours per week (Arbetsmarknadsutredningen 2002, s. 19). The motivating factor for reducing the number of worked hours down to 48 hours per week at this time, the first reduced work hours (RWH) initiative, was related to safety at work (Arbetsmarknadsutredningen 2002, s. 19). Because many people at this time worked in the industry, long shifts were linked to work related injuries. In order to reduce this risk, shorter days were one of the main solutions introduced. While the 1920 RWH initiative was done to improve the safety at the workplace, the next RWH initiative in 1957 was mainly motivated through increased well-being because of more spare time (Arbetsmarknadsutredningen 2002, s. 20). We can at this point in time see a shift in why further reduction of work hours were implemented. With a trend of high economic growth and good public health, a discussion was raised whether incomes should keep rising, or a shift in priority should go towards RWH. Because of economic leeway, the one did not exclude the other which resulted in a 45 hour work-week while wages kept rising. Following this, a proposition came to light in late 1960s to reduce the total work hours per week down to 40. This was motivated by the want to have a more levelled workload between different sectors, since some collective agreements had already implemented the reduced work hours (Arbetsmarknadsutredningen 2002, s. 21). In 1973, this proposition became statutory and is in effect today. Shifting our focus to the present day, the topic of reducing work hours has perhaps never been given more public attention. In 2022 an organisation called 4 Day Week Global started a massive experiment with over 60 companies in the UK. Over 6 months they worked to reduce the amount of hours they worked over a week, and early 2023 the study was finished with reportedly an overwhelming success (4 Day Week Global, 2023; Bonnell, 2023). This

study, no matter the outcome, highlights that there is a very real interest in the modern corporate environment regarding reducing working hours.

As mentioned earlier, different religions and cultures have had different perspectives on work and how to motivate people to do it. This hints that culture is an important contextual factor for us to understand how employees become motivated. The culture in Sweden is broad and ever changing, putting it way outside of the scope of this study, however, the organisational culture present at specific firms is not. Organisational culture is a phenomenon that has remained one of interest for researchers as well as company management for several decades at this point, and the effects it has throughout organisations are still to this day investigated and discussed. This positions culture as one of the important talking points of any organisational management research and as such is often worth considering, either as a focus for the research or as a tool for providing substantial context to other findings.

1.2 Problematization

The amount of time we spend at work is not something that necessarily should remain fixed, as it has changed throughout history. This has come about due to changes in culture, prosperity and motivation in our society. Today the question has started to be asked once again, should we really work 40 hours a week, or could an introduction of reduced work hours in some capacity be done? This question is difficult to answer, as the effects of implementing reduced work hours is loosely explored. Something that is not really understood or well researched among these effects, are how reduced work hours actually changes the motivation of the employees and what role culture plays in implementing the changes. Therefore we arrive at our purpose and a research question for this study can be formulated.

1.3 Purpose and Research Question

Purpose: The purpose is to investigate the impact of reduced work hours on motivational aspects, such as work-life balance and well-being, by using culture as a contextual concept to enhance understanding of underlying contributing factors. This is done by studying two different organisations with varying degrees of reduced work hours. Based on this purpose, we will try to answer the following question:

RQ: How does reduced work hours impact employee motivation, if at all?

1.4 An introduction to the subjects of study

Our primary case Konsult AB consists of a recruitment firm where all four full time employees have been interviewed. RWH was implemented five years ago and is still in place to this day. They have a work week reduced from 40 to 30 hours, working 6 hours 5 days a week, and their salary is not affected by RWH.

Our secondary case is Social AB, a municipal social office where two social workers have been interviewed. Both workers work in small self-contained teams of approximately five people. They have previously had RWH, between the years of 2020 and 2021, for more than one year before it was removed by higher management. Their experience consisted of having their work week reduced from 40 to 35 hours, working 7 hours 5 days a week, and their salary was also not affected by RWH.

2 Theory

The following chapter presents previous research, theories, and definitions, relevant to our paper. Firstly, a tool to understand organisational culture is presented, the Competing Values Framework. Secondly, a historical overview of motivational theories is introduced together with more relevant theories. Thirdly, the concept of Reduced Working Hours is explored and lastly, our theoretical positioning is presented.

2.1 Competing Values Framework

For our study, Competing Value Framework (CVF) offers a helpful conceptualization of the culture present at both Konsult AB as well as Social AB. Culture is a broad term not sufficiently limited by adding organisational in front of it. Therefore instead of trying to properly define culture as a theoretical tool for later use we aim to place the organisations we study within the CVF and investigate how this interacts with RWH, both before and after an implementation. The CVF is currently one of the most popular ways of understanding organisational culture and was first developed by Quinn and Rohrbaugh (1981). This framework, initially intended to measure organisational effectiveness, has later been used extensively to map out and understand an organisation's culture (Hertnell, Ou and Kinicki, 2011; Lindquist & Marcy, 2016; Balandina, Obolentseva, Aleksandrova, Polyakova & Dulfan, 2018; Can & Koç, 2018; Beus, Solomon, Taylor & Esken, 2020; Boyd & Larson, 2022). Since the CVF was not initially intended to be applied to culture research it has been further expanded and modified to do just that, sometimes referred to as Organisational Culture Assessment Instrument (OCAI). Lindquist and Marcy (2016) provides a good basis for understanding the CVF which is based on the understanding that within each organisation there are several different values and that these often compete and contradict each other. For instance, within a single organisation there might be people, or departments that strive for stability or flexibility, values that are contradictions of each other and it is up to leaders to determine which of these values should be prioritised. This inherent competition between values and strategies are the foundation of the CVF, and how these are prioritised determines where in the matrix that an organisation ends up.

The CVF focuses on some of the key values that are used to map out and understand the larger culture present. The two main axis, as depicted in figure 1, are Flexible ↔ Focused on the y-axis and Internal ↔ External on the x-axis. This is meant to depict whether the organisation values being focused with stability and control, or if they value being flexible with adaptability and innovation. It further outlines if they are focused on the internal aspects such as the hierarchy, internal structure and workflow, or if they are more focused externally on the market, market share and competition.

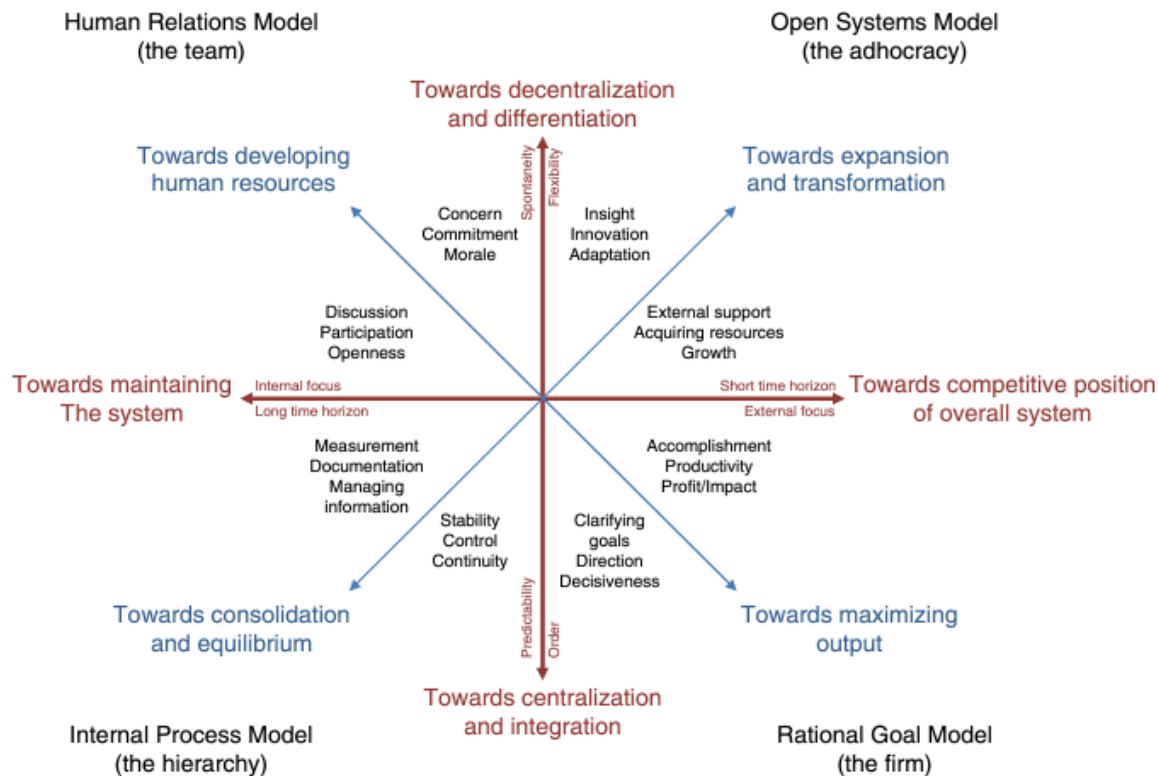


Figure 1: The Competing Values Framework with explanations of the kinds of focuses found in each quadrant (Lindquist & Marcy, 2016)

An important note that Quinn (1988; cited in Lindquist & Marcy, 2016) makes is that all of these aspects tend to be present in all organisations at all times, but the current values prioritised and uplifted by the organisation tends to characterise it into one of the four categories. As Quinn (1988, p.42; cited in Lindquist and Marcy, 2016, p.172) himself put it: “Real organizations [like people] do not fall neatly into one or the other of these four models. In fact, the models do not contain organizations, organizations contain the models, all of them. In every organization all four models exist.” With this note in mind it is still possible to make some assumptions regarding the organisation and its functions and aspects based on the framework. These theories or worldviews on leadership and management are presented in figure 2.

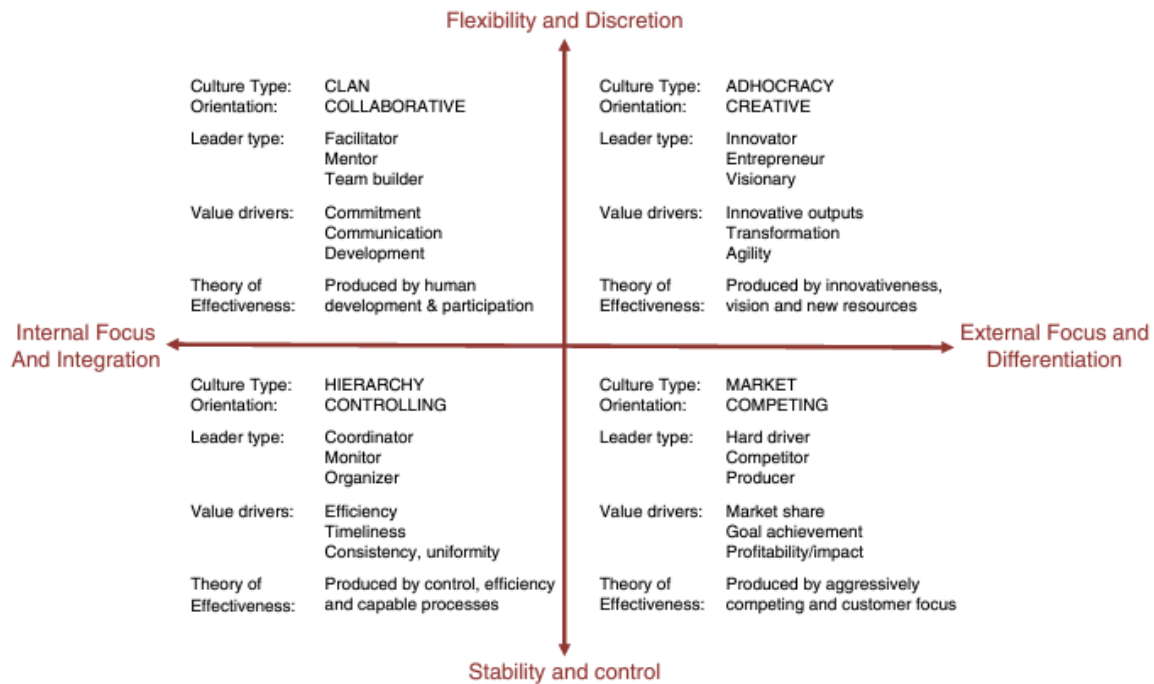


Figure 2: The different culture types with corresponding values and theories according to where in CVF they are (Lindquist & Marcy, 2016)

From figure 2 the CVF presents us with four distinct culture types *Clan*, *Adhocracy*, *Hierarchy* and *Market*. In both figure 1 and 2, the different values prioritised by the different culture types as well as appropriate leader types etc. are presented. From these *Clan* emerges with the driving characteristics of collaboration and developing the internal human resources. Contrasting this is *Adhocracy* which comes with a similar tendency towards flexibility but aiming this flexibility towards external factors, leading to a focus on developing new products and offerings. *Hierarchy* meanwhile exemplifies the controlling aspects, putting more emphasis on coordinating, monitoring and being consistent with an internal focus. And finally, *Market* carries a larger focus on the competition and customer focus.

The competing values framework is a highly versatile tool. Hertnell, Ou and Kinicki (2011) used it to do a meta-analysis of other studies of organisational culture. Following up on this Beus et al. (2020) used to do a similar meta-study of climate rather than culture, providing the clarification: “if climate is the “what” of an organization (i.e., what is seen and experienced), then culture is the “why” (i.e., the explanation for what can be seen and experienced).” (Ostroff et al. (2012) cited in Blues et al. 2020). Balandina et al. (2018) used CVF to assess corporate culture with a more statistical approach and used it to determine what the company needed to do in order to become more competitive. Lindquist and Marcy (2016) established that the CVF can also be used to understand public organisations and not just private corporate businesses. Boyd and Larson (2022) used the framework to understand the connection to a sense of community, and Can and Koç (2018) mapped out which tools of motivation work best for each of the different quadrants in CVF. From this overview it becomes clear that the framework presented by Quinn and his colleagues in the 1980s and later refined has become a useful tool for all kinds of different research related to organisational culture. Using this understanding of the framework along with the

contemporary support provided by studies such as Boyd and Larson (2022), Can and Koç (2018) and Balandina et al. (2018) we will place our own objects of study within this framework to provide a contextual understanding of their values and culture.

2.2 Motivation

The following subchapter will firstly introduce motivational theories in a historical context by presenting three historical motivational theories. This is followed up with a more thorough review of a modern motivational theory, the Self-Determination Theory (Deci & Ryan, 1985).

“To be motivated means to be moved to do something” (Ryan & Deci, 2000, p.54).

2.2.1 Historical Motivational Theories

Human motivational theory dates back to 1872 as Charles Darwin speculated around human emotions and motives to act, arguing the emotional evolution leading to reactions or energising actions, according to Ryan, Bradshaw and Deci (2019). The psychologist Abraham H. Maslow (1943) developed the theories of human motivation more than half a century later. He introduces the basic needs which include five sets of goals. Firstly, *the ‘physiological’ needs*, the need for food, water, warmth, and rest, the most basic needs for survival. Secondly, *the safety needs*, the need for security and safety giving people control in their lives. Thirdly, *the love needs*, the need for belongingness, love, and interpersonal relationships. Fourthly, *the esteem needs*, including the need for esteem for oneself as well as the respect from others. Lastly, *the need for self-actualization*, described as the desire to accomplish everything one is capable of. Maslow (1943) speaks initially of these human basic needs as if being in a fixed hierarchical order, the hierarchy of needs displayed in figure 3, where the underlying needs need to be fulfilled for the next needs to be motivational. This has been criticised throughout the years (Wahba & Bridwell, 1976; Nussbaum, 2006). However, Maslow himself addresses the hierarchical issue when developing his thoughts on the hierarchy of needs and states “it is not nearly as rigid as we may have implied” (Maslow, 1943, p.387).

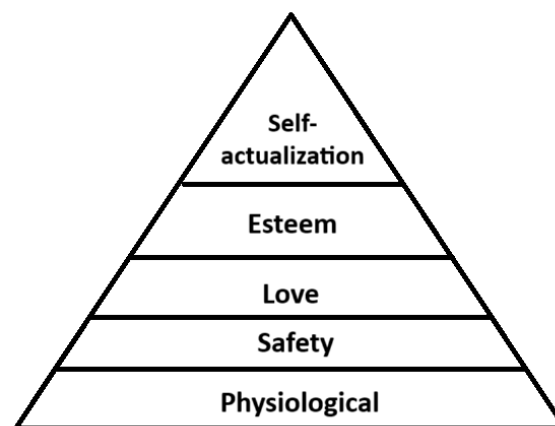


Figure 3: Maslow's hierarchy of needs (figure created by the authors)

Frederick Herzberg published together with his colleagues Mausner and Snyderman the motivation-hygiene theory in 1959, also known as Herzberg's two-factor theory (Herzberg, Mausner, & Snyderman, 1959). The theory, influenced by Maslow's hierarchy of needs according to Jones (2011), states that two different sets of factors are affecting job satisfaction and job dissatisfaction, and therefore they cannot be measured on the same continuum (Herzberg, Mausner, & Snyderman, 1959). The two sets of factors, according to the authors, consist of motivation and hygiene. Herzberg, Mausner, and Snyderman (1959) states that motivation factors are needed to improve job satisfaction, and a few examples of their motivation factors are the work itself, recognition, and personal growth. The authors further state that hygiene factors may decrease job dissatisfaction as they happen to relate to contextual factors rather than the content of the job itself, and a few examples are supervision, working conditions, and salary. Herzberg (1966) developed on the two factors by claiming that the motivation factors are intrinsic since they are satisfying the need for growth and self-actualisation, and the hygiene factors are extrinsic since they are influenced from the outside. The two-factor theory has been criticised in general for its methodology and not being conclusive (Peramatzis & Galanakis, 2022), and furthermore for the fact that both hygiene and motivational factors should be able to motivate employees if they are of equal importance to a person (Robbins & Judge, 2013).

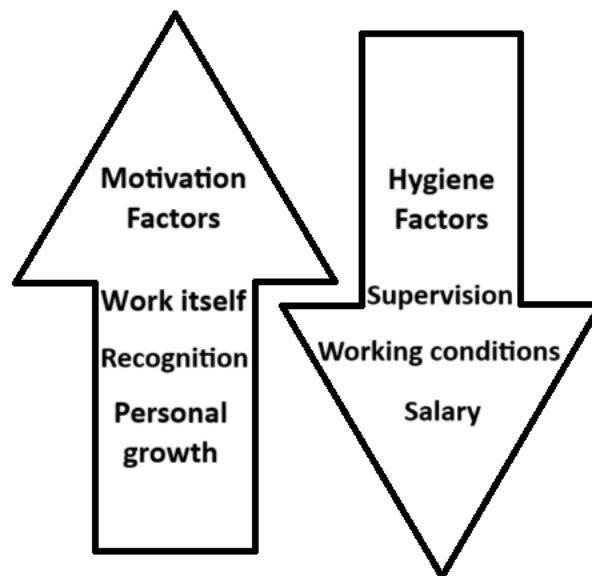


Figure 4. Herzberg's Two-Factor Theory (figure created by the authors)

Douglas M. McGregor (1960) put forward two different motivational theories, called Theory X and Theory Y. Simplified, the author describes how the theories represent two sets of assumptions, where Theory X describes how human nature may be viewed negatively assuming individuals are irresponsible and dislike to work, and Theory Y describes the opposite, how human nature may be viewed positively assuming individuals are creative, responsible, and exercise self-control, illustrated in figure 5. McGregor (1960) agreed with the work of his colleague Maslow (1943) on the hierarchy of need theory, and applied it to his own theories. By taking the five basic needs and categorising self-actualisation, esteem, and belonging into higher-level needs, and safety and physiological needs into lower-level needs, he

suggested that as Theory X only satisfies the lower-level needs it cannot further motivate people after the needs are fulfilled, and as Theory Y satisfies the higher-level needs it has the potential to continue to motivate as those needs cannot be completely satisfied. It is suggested by McGregor (1960) in Theory Y that employee productivity increases when aligning work with people's needs and motivation. This has been criticised as engaging in a seductive form of manipulation, as it potentially increases productivity from employees without necessarily increasing their pay, according to Sing (2019). However, the author continues with making a case for the relevance of Theory X and Y in the twenty-first century by stating how many modern organisations within the software industry have taken the Theory Y management approach, and Theory X still being relevant as sometimes employees of mentioned organisations call for clearer management direction.

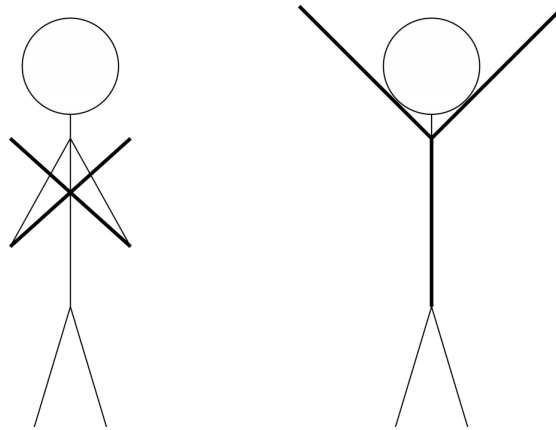


Figure 5. A person refusing to work, “Theory X”, and a person cheering the opportunity to work, “Theory Y” (Kurt, 2021)

The motivational theories of Maslow (1943), Herzberg (1959), and McGregor (1960), are grouped together in the classification of content theories (Shajahan & Shajahan, 2004; Luthans, 2005). Shajahan & Shajahan (2004) distinguish the classifications of content theories and process theories, which is further developed by Luthans (2005). According to Luthans, content theories focus on exploring the factors that drive individuals at work. He further explains that content theories involve and share common themes as identifying and prioritising the needs, drives, incentives, and goals of individuals to attain satisfaction, ultimately enhancing their performance effectiveness. Process theories, on the other hand, are oriented around how motivation takes place, and the concept of expectancy, referring to an individual's belief that a particular outcome can be the result of their actions. (Luthans, 2005). Consequently, process theories aim to describe how the goals and needs are accomplished as well as accepted cognitively (Perry, Mesch & Paarlberg, 2006). Out of the original process theories of motivation, the most modern one is the self-determination theory by Edward L. Deci and Richard M. Ryan from 1985 (Benke, 2019).

2.2.2 Self-Determination Theory

Self-determination theory (SDT) is a motivational theory developed by Deci and Ryan and further refined throughout the years (Deci & Ryan, 1985; Deci & Ryan, 2000; Gagné & Deci, 2005; Deci & Ryan, 2008;

Deci & Ryan, 2015; Ryan & Deci, 2017; Ryan & Deci, 2020). SDT approaches human motivation and personality, and highlights the possibility for personality development together with behavioural self-regulation from within (Deci & Ryan, 2000). In similarity with Maslow (1943), Deci and Ryan (2000) identifies a set of basic human needs, the three needs of *competence*, *relatedness*, and *autonomy*. Firstly, *competence* concerns the human need to build knowledge and master tasks. Secondly, *relatedness* describes the need of belonging and connectedness. Lastly, *autonomy*, the need to feel control of one's life and behaviour. In contradiction with Maslow (1943), hierarchy is absent among the three basic needs. Instead, the differences within individual personalities affect to what degree each need has been satisfied (Deci & Ryan, 2008).

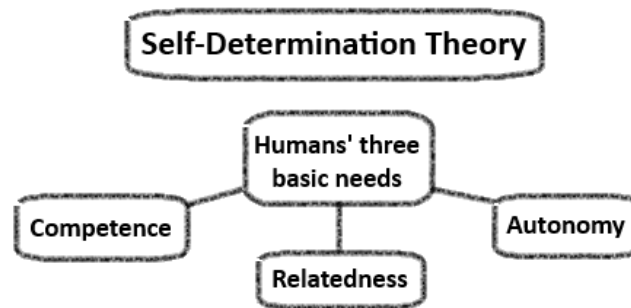


Figure 6. The three basic needs identified by the SDT model (figure created by the authors)

Additionally, a significant part of SDT centres around the distinction between different categories of motivation, determined by the underlying reasons or goals giving reason to act. The primary differentiation lies between intrinsic motivation, driven by inherent interest or enjoyment, and extrinsic motivation, driven by the anticipation of a separable outcome (Deci & Ryan, 1985).

Intrinsic motivation is seen as a pervasive and important form of motivation in humans (Ryan & Deci, 2000). Earlier descriptions of intrinsic motivation by the Deci (1971) describes it as the behaviour where it is within the individual the locus of control is located, and is a continuation of White's (1959) original acknowledgement of intrinsic motivation as organisms engaging in curious and playful behaviours without any reinforcement or compensation. Ryan & Deci (2000) further expand on the concept as something that not only exists within the individual, but also with the perspective of the relationship between individuals and activities, and different individuals are motivated by different activities. Within STD, the subtheory of cognitive evaluation theory (CET) has been developed by Deci and Ryan (1985) to further explain variability in intrinsic motivation by outlining specific factors. They state that the CET framework suggests intrinsic motivation are linked together with the three basic needs, strongly to autonomy and competence, and more uncertainty to relatedness.

Extrinsic motivation is understood in some perspectives as nonautonomous, however, SDT presents the contradicting idea of extrinsic motivation having a wide range of autonomy according to Deci and Ryan (1985). To better understand the variability, they introduce a second subtheory within SDT, the organismic integration theory (OIT). This expands on extrinsic motivation and develops four subcategories as seen in

figure 7, as well as arranges them on the self-determination continuum ranging from nonself-determined with amotivation to the left, self-determined with intrinsic motivation to the right.

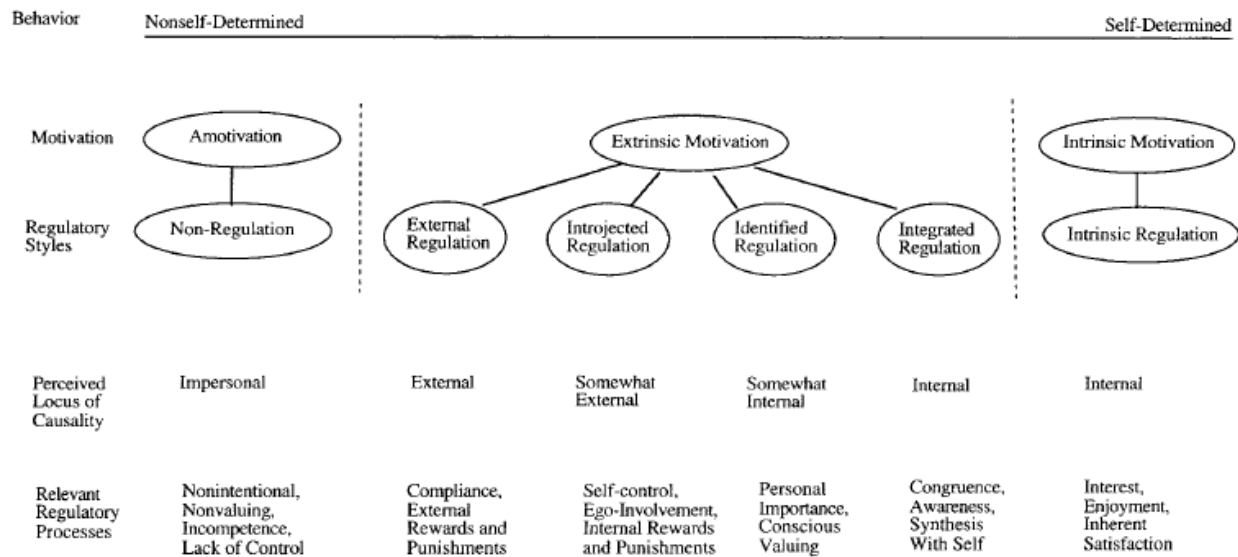


Figure 7. The Self-Determination Continuum Showing Types of Motivation With Their Regulatory Styles, Loci of Causality, and Corresponding Processes (Deci & Ryan, 2000)

The four types of extrinsic motivation cover the continuum in between, varying in autonomy of the regulatory styles, and are further described by Deci and Ryan (2000). Firstly, extrinsic motivation with external regulation solemnly satisfies reward contingency or other external demands. Secondly, regulation through introjection still mostly refers to having an external locus of causality, but not to the full extent. Thirdly, identified regulation in extrinsic motivation is more self-determined, thus autonomous, as it brings personal importance to the action, even though not fully integrated. Lastly, integrated regulation, which is most autonomous of extrinsic motivation, meaning to completely mentally absorb the internal values and needs. Extrinsic integrated motivation comes close to intrinsic motivation, with the distinct differentiation of being considered extrinsic due to the focus on separable outcome, as integrated motivation synthesises with self and intrinsic motivation gives inherent satisfaction, which can be seen in the relevant regulatory processes in figure 7 (Deci & Ryan, 2000).

Farthest left on the self-determination continuum amotivation is found, described by Deci & Ryan (2000) as the state of not having the intention to act, thereby being non-regulated. The OIT and the self-determination continuum are still being used today as the foundation for different modelling of motivational scales (Howard, Bureau, Guay, Chong, & Ryan, 2021; Bureau, Guay, Plamondon, Ratelle, Howard, & Gilbert, 2022).

A final aspect of SDT is that of mental health, best exemplified by how fulfilling the three basic needs across one's lifespan is a necessity to experience well-being (Deci & Ryan, 2000). Ng, Ntoumanis, Thøgersen-Ntoumani, Deci, Ryan, Duda, and Williams (2012) confirmed in a summary of multiple studies that regardless of culture, gender, or circumstances, experiencing satisfaction across the three basic needs reveal improved health and well-being within people. Furthermore, satisfaction across the

three basic needs has been proven maintaining and enhancing intrinsic motivations, as well as encouraging the internalisation of extrinsic motivation (Deci & Ryan, 2015).

2.3 Reduced Work Hours (RWH)

In more recent times, efforts have been made to research and investigate the effects on the employees because of reduced work hours (RWH). One of these recent studies suggests that by having more control over your own working hours, in having more of a choice in regards to how much work should be done and when to work, reduces the amount of stress and depression the individual will feel (Albrecht, Kecklund, Rajaleid & Leinweber, 2017). According to Albrecht et al (2017), the improvement in well-being is likely linked to the perceived increase in psychological sense of control that is achieved through reduced work-hours. This supports one of the aspects Deci and Ryan (1985) introduce in their self-determination theory; with increased autonomy a basic need is satisfied, resulting in an increased well-being. Through the extra time achieved by having more time from reduced work-hours, Schiller, Lekander, Rajaleid, Hellgren, Åkerstedt, Barck-Holst & Kecklund (2017) states that the surplus of time is spent on domestic tasks and recovering activities. Recovering activities included personal care, meals, rest, leisure time, social activities, own time and daytime sleep. While more time is spent on domestic tasks, the total workload over a day is lower when reduced work-hours are implemented (Schiller et al., 2017). This can be linked to what Barck-Holst, Hellgren, Nilsson and Åkerstedt (2020) found in their recent study, that there is a positive spiral of improved recovery when working with reduced work-hours.

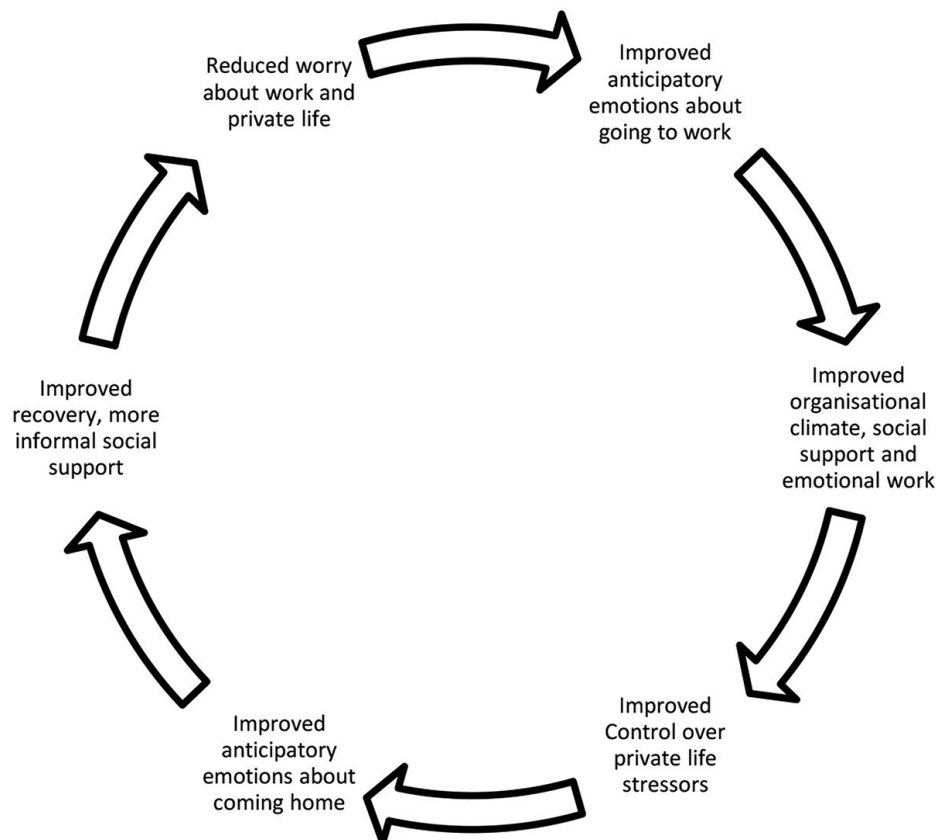


Figure 8. A positive spiral of improved recovery and improved work-life balance (Barck-Holst et al, 2020)

The figure above illustrates that by having more free-time, there is an increased recovery and reduced worry about work and private life. Because of this, there are improved anticipatory emotions about going to work, which leads to a better organisational climate. This in turn gives more control of private life stressors, resulting in improved anticipatory emotions about coming home. The cycle repeats itself as this further improves recovery. This can be seen as through the means of a better work-life balance, a positive spiral of improved recovery is achieved. The modern concept of work-life balance has the interpretations as suggested by Kirchmeyer (2000) as when individual balance is achieved through time, energy, and commitment being spread evenly between all of life's roles. Similar definitions has been made in more recent times, as Guillen (2020) expresses that work-life balance is the attempt to uphold a balance between the priorities of one's personal life and the demands of one's professional life, or as Sirgy and Lee (2023) defines work-life balance, as having the proportions of work and personal activities in life being under control. We chose to interpret work-life balance, based on these definitions, as the act of having a balance between work and personal life.

2.4 Theoretical positioning

As mentioned above, the implementation of RWH has impacts that can be directly linked back to Deci & Ryans (1985) Self-Determination Theory. It seems that RWH, as a tool for motivation, is hard to place neatly in a single box within SDT. When trying to understand the impact of RWH on motivation, there seems to be a complex interaction between intrinsic and external regulation that is so far unexplored. Our aim is to explore this interaction and how it relates to the existing SDT, with the understanding of intrinsic and extrinsic motivation, and locus of causality.

3 Method

The following chapter will display our methodological process starting off with presenting our methodological theory. This is followed up by describing our working process while addressing our decision-making. To bring this chapter to a close, our quality and limitations of the study will be discussed.

3.1 Methodological theory

We have chosen to conduct our research with a *qualitative methodology*, which emphasises the importance of words and the interpretations of them, rather than numbers and other quantified data analytics (Bell, Bryman & Harley, 2022). Due to the limitations of this study, such as the limited timeline and length of this paper, a smaller number of interviews were conducted, making a quantitative approach most fitting according to Bell, Bryman and Harley (2022). The authors emphasise how the *ontological position* of qualitative research is described as *constructionist*, implying the importance of the interviewees' interpretations of reality and how their interactions with each other affect their experience. This is our approach thus we are interested in how the interviewees are interpreting how RWH and work-life balance are affecting their motivational experience. As we further interpreted the interviewees' answers, we followed the epistemology of *interpretivism*, meaning we are trying to understand human behaviour, giving us an opportunity to come up with surprising findings (Bell, Bryman & Harley, 2022).

A key aspect to our research has been working with *abductive reasoning*. Abduction is described by Mantere and Ketoviki (2013; cited in Bell, Bryman & Harley, 2022) as the method of trying to select the best fitted explanation from data interpretations or competing explanations. Our abductive journey starts off with the gathering of previous knowledge on the subject of RWH, enabling us to create a semi-structured interview guide on the subject and conducting interviews. From there on it continues with us going back-and-forth between analysing the empirical material and finding resonating theories in the literature, which also can be described as an *iterative* strategy, according to Bell, Bryman and Harley (2022). The authors also bring up that abductive reasoning highlights our limited ability of rational thinking as researchers, and recognises the significance of building theory with cognitive reasoning.

3.2 Gathering of data

3.2.1 Selection process

Our selection process is in the form of *purposive sampling*, more precisely *critical case sampling*, as we focused on finding subjects of study relevant to the research question and the phenomenon of RWH, making it crucial to sample a specific case (Bell, Bryman & Harley, 2022).

Finding the subjects of study was a challenging task. After conducting our research on RWH we felt the field of research was lacking in the context of knowledge-intensive organisations, giving us an idea of where we wanted to search for our subjects of study. Since RWH in a modern context is a new phenomena, especially in Sweden where we primarily wanted to conduct our study, the amount of possible organisations to interview within our imagined scope was limited. Following a thorough

exploration of the publicly available information on what knowledge-intensive organisations have implemented RWH in Sweden, we decided to reach out to all private sector organisations found with more than ten employees, which was five organisations, through email presenting our study and theme. Unfortunately we got no positive response, making us reevaluate the necessity of the size of the organisation, and reached out through email to the remaining three organisations with less than ten employees where we got a positive response from one, Konsult AB. From the initial contact we learned that the organisation only had four full time employees, leading to us to expand from the private sector to also include the public sector. We contacted multiple social offices who either had implemented or experimented with RWH, as social work can be seen as knowledge-intensive to some degree (Finne, Ekeland, & Malmberg-Heimonen, 2022), and got a positive response from one, Social AB.

3.2.2 Interview process

Before our interview process we created a semi-structured interview guide, which can be seen as a somewhat structured list of themes or questions to be used in *semi-structured interviewing* (Bell, Bryman & Harley, 2022). The interview guide consisted of four fairly specific topics. Firstly, *introduction and background*. Secondly, *experience and effects*. Thirdly, *leadership and organisation*. Lastly, *expectations and future plans*. All topics included general questions concerning organisational structure, culture, motivation, and change, as we were open to which themes would generate the most interesting empirical findings. The questions were there to guide the interviews, but not necessarily asked in a specific order. Additional followup questions were allowed to happen in accordance with Bell, Bryman and Harley (2022) to develop interesting answers or clarify to avoid misunderstandings.

All of our interviews were conducted digitally through the communications platform Zoom with video and audio recording. Interviewing through video has both advantages and limitations according to Bell, Bryman and Harley (2022). They bring up several possible advantages, and four of them which had part in why we chose video interviewing are the following. Firstly, widening the geographical possibilities of sampling (Burkitt, 2004; cited in Bell, Bryman & Harley, 2022). Secondly, saving time and money for all parties. Thirdly, encouraging people through convenience, making them less prone to decline the interview (Seitz, 2016; cited in Bell, Bryman & Harley, 2022). Lastly, building rapport prior to the interview through i.e. emails (Lo Iacono et al. 2016; cited in Bell, Bryman & Harley, 2022). Some of the limitations brought up by the authors are access to the internet and computers, or the risk of interruption due to connectivity problems. Exposure to these risks were minimised as functioning computers and stable internet connection were secured on our part, and as all of our interviewees were used to working in a digital environment and with video meetings, the risk was minimal on their part.

As previously mentioned, all interviews were recorded, with approval from the interviewees. In addition, right after finishing each interview, they were transcribed digitally through speech-to-text software and corrected manually, saving us time as transcription is a time-consuming process according to Bell, Bryman and Harley (2022). They further describe transcription as a way to perform a deeper analysis of the empirical material, enhancing the quality of the study. The authors bring up the risk of recording and transcribing would make interviewees self-conscious or alarmed, this is however something we could more or less disregard as all of our subjects are used to the interview process from their working role.

During the interviews, the same person was always mainly in charge of leading the interview and asking most of the questions as the other two focus on followup questions, as well as picking up on non-verbal cues, which possibility is not significantly reduced compared to face-to-face interviews (Deakin & Wakefield, 2014; cited in Bell, Bryman & Harley, 2022). This was not decided in advance, but since it worked out well during our first interview we decided to continue in the same way during all of them. After our first interview which was with Andersson, the CEO at Konsult AB, our interview guide was altered slightly due to better understanding the conditions of the organisation, even though it was already semi-structured. The length of the interviews varied between 40-75 minutes, with an average of 56 minutes. Below is a table presenting the pseudonyms given to the interview subjects as well what organisation they belong to.

Name (Pseudonym)	Organisation (Pseudonym)
Andersson	Konsult AB
Bengtsson	Konsult AB
Carlsson	Konsult AB
Danielsson	Konsult AB
Eriksson	Social AB
Fredriksson	Social AB

Table 1. Summary of the interviewees

3.3 Empirical analysis

When analysing qualitative material, as was our task, Rennstam and Wästerfors (2018) describes three problems often arising, addressed by three activities. Firstly, *the problem of chaos*, addressed by *sorting*. Secondly, *the problem of representation*, addressed by *reducing*. Lastly, *the problem of authority*, addressed by *arguing*.

Our analytical process started after finishing the four interviews with Konsult AB with an initial sorting into preliminary themes, as we wanted to get an idea of the depth of our material. Sorting the material turns chaos into order and leads to a better overview, according to Rennstam and Wästerfors (2018). As we finished the last two interviews, the remaining material was sorted and as new discoveries emerged, the material was re-sorted into slightly different themes. According to Rennstam and Wästerfors (2018), it is important to be open to re-sorting and re-analysing your material, to possibly find a more original or fitting way to organise it. This process also includes diving further into the material, which is what we did when we divided the themes into subcategories to further make sense of our material. It is worth mentioning our interviews were held in Swedish as it was both our and the interviewees native tongue, and the empirical material was worked with in Swedish and translated into English as final measure.

The next step was to reduce our material. Reducing includes choosing among and within themes and categories, with the purpose of making the quantity more manageable, and to address the problem of representation (Rennstam & Wästerfors, 2018). We started the reduction by first deciding which of our themes was most relevant and fitting to our theories, and followed with choosing which of the subcategories to present within each theme. Those processes are called categorical reduction and illustrative categorisation, and may with advantage be combined according to Rennstam and Wästerfors (2018) if the researchers have an open approach, which was our case. During this process we continuously went back and forth between the theory and the empirical material in accordance with our abductive reasoning. Peermeting to our reduction process was the balance between making brutal stabs and deciding what was most interesting among the material, and always stop and hesitate to ask ourselves if we cut the right part, as Rennstam and Wästerfors (2018) describes it.

The final step is to address the problem of authority through theorising as empirically grounded argumentation (Rennstam & Wästerfors, 2018). Our argumentation and theorising process starts already in the sorting and reduction processes, as creating categories, subcategories, and other forms of labelling can be seen as theorising according to Rennstam and Wästerfors (2018). Even though it starts in the sorting and reduction processes, the authors emphasise that the main part of the argumentation happens afterwards. During our argumentation and theorising we try to first lay a foundation of the setting and the culture, to then continue bringing forward the material that highlights our possible contribution on motivation in RWH. For further details regarding our analysis, please see chapter 4, Analysis.

3.4 Quality and limitations of the study

Bell, Bryman and Harley (2022) states that the most important criteria for evaluating the quality of business and management research are reliability, replicability, and validity. However, replicability, or external reliability, within qualitative research is a difficult criterion to meet due to the impossible challenge of freezing a social setting and circumstance in time, and external validity is problematic as qualitative research often uses case studies and small samples (LeCompte & Goetz, 1982; cited in Bell, Bryman & Harley, 2022). Therefore, have we decided to follow a different approach, an alternative criteria for evaluating qualitative research suggested by Lincoln and Guba (1985; cited in Bell, Bryman and Harley, 2022) and developed by Guba and Lincoln (1994; cited in Bell, Bryman and Harley, 2022), *trustworthiness* and *authenticity*. In addition to quality, our limitations will be discussed during this chapter.

Trustworthiness is further divided into four criteria, *credibility*, *transferability*, *dependability*, and *confirmability* (Guba & Lincoln, 1994; cited in Bell, Bryman and Harley, 2022). Firstly, *credibility* within our study might be affected as we follow an interpretivist epistemology, leading to the risk of our interpretations of the interviewees' answers not necessarily being what they actually meant. Translating all the empirical material from Swedish to English is another aspect affecting credibility. But as we have shared our work with all our subjects, giving them the opportunity to confirm we have understood them correctly, the risk is lowered. This is known as respondent validation (Bell, Bryman & Harley, 2022). Secondly, *transferability* is generally difficult to ensure in qualitative research, as it resembles replicability. However, Lincoln and Guba (1985; cited in Bell, Bryman and Harley, 2022) encourage to

counter this problem using what is described by Geertz (1973; cited in Bell, Bryman & Harley, 2022) as thick description, meaning a rich amount of detailing the culture, which is what we are trying to do with mainly Konsult AB but also Social AB. Thirdly, *dependability* is created through embracing an auditing approach, meaning keeping records of all phases, as well as letting peers act as auditors, according to Guba and Lincoln (1994; cited in Bell, Bryman and Harley, 2022). We have been audited by peers on two occasions during the course of research and will be a final time at the end of our work, as well as keeping thorough records for any future auditing, trying to ensure dependability. Lastly, *confirmability* is described by Guba and Lincoln (1994; cited in Bell, Bryman and Harley, 2022) as showing how the researchers have acted in good faith by not letting personal values or theoretical inclinations affect the research. As this field of study was new to all the researchers, we did not enter it with any strong presumptions.

Authenticity brings up the matter of the impact of research on society and politics, and is the fifth criterion suggested by Lincoln and Guba (1985; cited in Bell, Bryman and Harley, 2022). They explain how it is up to the researchers to within a certain setting and without bias present contrasting viewpoints, giving the participants a chance to enhance their situational understanding and possibly change their circumstances for the better by engaging in action. For us as researchers to say that with this study we are making a wider social and political impact, as well as making a change for our participants' circumstances, would be slightly arrogant. Our aspiration is to evoke curiosity in anyone reading this paper to which it is of relevance, to think about their circumstances and possibly influence them.

During our research, there have been some methodical limitations. Accessibility to subjects has been a possible limitation within our limited scope, leaving us with six interview subjects. Having more time and resources could have led to a larger and richer empirical material. However, the content of our interviews were rich and of depth, leaving us sufficiently satisfied with our empirical material. Another possible limiting factor has been conducting all our interviews and working with our empirical material in Swedish while having all of our theoretical material in English. This gives the translated interviews a Swedish grammatical style or intonation. Our ambition however is that this has not affected our work significantly, as we consider ourselves to be academically fluent in both the Swedish and English languages.

4 Analysis

In this analysis we will act as guides through the process of implementing RWH that took place at the recruitment firm, Konsult AB, before moving on to investigating both the current culture as well as how RWH affects the culture. Finally, we will try to find the answers as to what truly is the motivation found in the effects of RWH at both Konsult AB and Social AB.

4.1 The story of the change to and from RWH

The story behind the implementation of RWH at the Konsult AB serves to showcase some of the main motivating factors influencing the decision makers behind it. Not only does this story provide insights in the why, but also the how and the most immediate changes that were necessary. Based on the retelling from Andersson, the CEO, who came up with the initial proposal, it becomes clear that the well-being of the employees was central in the decision.

“... and the origin was also that one of our colleagues had gotten exhaustion symptoms and was temporarily on sick leave and that, I believe, was what triggered the whole thought process for me, or made me want to do something...” - Andersson

“... since we had a pregnant woman, who was due then in February. ... She still had the last demanding months left of her pregnancy. She told us after [the implementation of RWH] that she had been talking to maternity care about permission to decrease work and go on part-time sick leave in order to cope. Since she didn't really have the energy to handle the walks with her dog that she needed or to cook her own lunch, instead it became shorter walks. She didn't have the amount of movement that she wanted and she didn't eat as well as she needed and she felt tired.” - Andersson

As seen in the above quotes from the CEO, the triggering event for them to implement RWH was a decline in employees' well-being. They also expressed that they had a background in working in a very demanding work: *“You were there earliest and you left last and so on”* and expressed in conjunction with the employee being burned out *“then I felt as if I couldn't handle seeing more [burn outs]”*. This feeling of not being able to see a further degradation of the well-being amongst their employees spurred the idea of RWH. Following this central theme of raising well-being, the process itself was conducted in a way to ensure that all of the current employees participated, allowing them to make their voices heard.

“We just lift all of it now. Then we boil it down and call it an experiment. And then we can start the process and test” - Andersson

“One challenge was when we implemented it we had to think about which fears you had yourself. What could become a problem based on your own perspective, but also all of the positives” - Bengtsson

“Everyone took part and could tune it and effect and got to adapt and come up with proposals, be a part of the project ... so it was actually the whole team that drove it forward” - Andersson

What becomes evident is that even though the idea of RWH came from a single source, the entire team participated in developing and driving the change. Everyone at the company took the proposed changes and weighed in with their own perspectives, allowing for and opening up a dialogue around it. This allowed the firm to quickly implement the changes they sought and almost immediately see the effects of them with regards to the pregnant woman.

“She didn’t need to be on sick leave for even a minute but instead she handled the last months of her pregnancy better than she otherwise would’ve, according to her. She was convinced that it was much, much better than she otherwise would have gotten for the journey. She would have been on sick leave and she didn’t have to with this way of working, instead she could come home at 3 and rest a bit on the couch, walk the dog and prepare a lunch box in peace and quiet, ... She got a whole other level of quality of life in those last months of her pregnancy.” - Andersson

Like the workers on Konsult AB, the workers at Social AB expressed a similar view in regards to the underlying reasons for introducing RWH.

“They noticed that it was extremely difficult to retain employees” - Eriksson

“We have a very high employee turnover rate, but also this risk for burn out that exists within social work ... This is kind of why they wanted to, due to this turnover rate, try and see if it halted the turnover rate if you had 35 hour weeks.” - Fredriksson

It becomes apparent that the main reason for the RWH at the social workers office was staff turnover rate according to both Eriksson and Fredriksson. Fredriksson also expresses the impression that social workers run a high risk of burnout, showing similarities to the kind of work done at Konsult AB. An interpretation of this is that by reducing the amount of work hours, the goal was to eliminate the risk of burnout and try to become a more attractive workplace to keep more of the staff for longer. In terms of the effects this had on the staff turnover, Eriksson had this to say: *“It worked too well and there was a sense of jealousy within the municipality”*, showing that RWH was effective in keeping staff motivated to stay at their office, while also hinting at a perceived reason for the removal of RWH by the municipality.

Looking at Konsult AB, some positive and desired effects of the changes came right away. As with any change, it came with several aspects that the employees needed to adapt to. In particular, Bengtsson hinted that they needed a new way of working that allowed them to perform more tasks in less time.

“We agreed that you had to become more effective but also have the opportunity to work more unbothered and find a different way to communicate. That you perhaps don’t run in and bother each other all the time.” - Bengtsson

Their coworkers echoed the same sentiment about becoming more effective and changing their priorities during the work-day.

“How do we enable you to have time to do what you have to in 6 hours? A clear ability to prioritise, shorten all of the meeting times.” -Carlsson

“If you have to press together a work-day into 6 hours, yes, then it gets quite tight. And it is not always easy to make it fit together ... this makes, well, the day can get quite hectic and perhaps it is hard to have time for the administrative work tasks.” - Danielsson

“The framework became the Teams chat. That was super important in order for everyone to feel that they could ask their question, get an answer, but not disturb someone else.” - Andersson

The challenges that faced Konsult AB are reverberated by one of the social workers.

“[There] was a certain stress there with the fact that [you] were expected to have time to do this much but now you only work 35 hour instead of 40” - Fredriksson

This quote highlights the need to further alter the way that work is done. To a certain extent, this also required the participants to reevaluate how they perceive work, and how they prioritise and approach their to-do lists.

Further complications arose in regards to the onboarding of new colleagues at Konsult AB. These are compounded by, in parts because of a complacency that grew over time where the follow-up regarding RWH started to slack, and in part due to the fact that no one had had the foresight to plan for how to onboard new colleagues into the current system.

“Then we had a different person as personnel manager that followed up all the time on a monthly basis, so you had a one to one where you sat down and, well, partly talked about how work was but also how you felt” - Carlsson

“It is important to continue to follow up and evaluate. To make sure that we still work in the manner that we said we should at the start. That you follow up with the new people, do they think it is working despite potential fears, to make sure that you work with this constantly a bit more.” - Bengtsson

“We never thought about the fact that we would eventually have to get new people involved in this [reduced work hours]. There the thoughts cracked a bit and sort of should we really continue with this.” - Andersson

“Perhaps we should have had a tighter follow up in the beginning [of onboarding]. You probably need to have a pretty clear walkthrough too regarding how others solve this [a shorter work-day] within the organisation, be allowed to work next to someone or copy someone's schedule.” - Danielsson

The experience conveyed here is that there was a very well executed follow-up scheme at the start of the change process, which over the years have faltered, which can seemingly be due to a complacency about

their current work processes. Follow-ups were also a bit lacking in the onboarding process of Danielsson, something explained by the CEO as a result of lack of planning for any kind of proper onboarding process. Further on the subject of proper follow-up to RWH the social workers also raised complaints about the lack of such things in the removal of their RWH.

“They chose to remove [reduced work hours]. What is interesting about that is that there has never been any, according to me, proper [follow up]” - Eriksson

The main focus behind the implementation of RWH at Konsult AB then can be seen as an attempt to improve the well-being of the employees, with very similar goals stated as the reasons behind the tryout period for the social workers. According to the interviewees, these effects were immediately apparent, but brought with them additional challenges regarding the daily work tasks to be performed. Therefore, it becomes of interest to further explore what it is that enables an organisation to implement RWH.

4.2 Culture that enables RWH?

It would be foolish to presume that any organisation can simply implement RWH without facing severe challenges. Therefore, with the aim of understanding underlying factors that have allowed for a successful implementation in our subjects of study, we look at the culture. First, the current culture as understood by the interviewees, and then secondly, a deeper dive into how RWH affects the culture present.

4.2.1 Current culture

In order for us to fully understand the situation at the interviewees' workplaces we first have to have a basic understanding of the environment that they work in. Throughout all of the interviews an open style of communication is mentioned and highlighted. This allows the employees to bring up issues they are facing, both with RWH and with prioritising work-tasks, to both their managers and their colleagues.

“And you are decent and open and dare speak about the feelings that are chafing. If you have created that culture, that opportunity, for everyone to have their voice heard and there are no crazy statements or thoughts or ideas” - Andersson

“We can talk about everything with everyone here I believe and we laugh and mess with each other and have fun” - Fredriksson

“Respect for everyone is very important but also to have an open climate where we can, well, tell each other off or have the courage to vent some opinions to make sure we see problems from different perspectives.” - Carlsson

“There is a very deep trust among the coworkers and for each other and an openness. You are, that all take part, no matter what role you have.” - Bengtsson

“When you actually sit down and do something then it is 100% focused. And then we solve it and do really well, and then you can do other stuff later. And there is an experience here at the office

too ... In a lot of processes we help each other to work together and so on so there is a qualitative environment here, truly it is.” - Danielsson

All of the interviewees emphasise the communal sharing of their beliefs, struggles and opinions on all sorts of issues. Eriksson went so far as to describe it as *“There is a bit of a Polish parliament sometimes”* which brings to mind a somewhat chaotic environment, but everyone has the ability to make their own voice heard. This perceived openness and ability to affect both coworkers and the organisation as a whole plays its own part in their control structure, as both organisations we have talked to give the impression that they don't have any overbearing structural control over daily tasks. This can be interpreted as the workers value collaboration and communication within their work-environments. A lot of the employees also talk about how this relates to the RWH, and how they have to work both individually but also as a team to stick to their working hours and not work overtime.

“I would say that it is very free. We help each other and have an open dialogue about it. Like an open book. We talk about all that is needed and everyone participates in most cases.” - Bengtsson

“I know that personally I tried to be super strict with leaving at 15.30. I would probably say that we tried to support each other with leaving at 15.30, for sure.” - Fredriksson

“We work a lot with self-leadership since we sit a lot by ourselves and need to control ourselves ... it takes a lot by each respective individual actually.” - Danielsson

“We have a very flat structure. ... And then we all have different responsibilities and roles but we [have] short decision paths and everyone is on that level together. So we make decisions together.” - Carlsson

“And our way of, well, take care about each other in this and to remind each other.” - Andersson

Consistently the interviewees bring up that they work hard in order to manage themselves, and that they reach out to their coworkers for assistance with doing this. This shows a high level of independence and autonomy for the employees. Notably, one of the key things that they needed help with controlling, at least in the beginning of RWH, was to actually stop working. The CEO Andersson at Konsult AB brings up that they appointed one employee as responsible for RWH and *“We called her the ‘6-hours police’”*. One interpretation of this is that even though they have such a high level of autonomy they requested more control, highlighting a competing value within the organisation. Despite this contradiction they return to communication and collaboration in order to solve their perceived issues. This not only reflects the inherent difficulties that were experienced with transitioning to shorter work days, but also how they chose to handle these issues.

4.2.2 The impact of RWH on culture

Mainly the employees at Konsult AB, but also the social workers, talk about how there is a shift in priorities regarding work with RWH. There is an increased importance to be able to effectively prioritise the work to get the most crucial tasks done in time. This to an extent also connects with the vast individual responsibility previously brought up in how they go about prioritising, since they have to do

that on their own and can't rely on management to do this for them. Furthermore, one of the main things that get lost in this prioritising is the social aspects, there is no longer any room for superfluous activities, described as "the fluff" by Andersson.

"And then I wanted it so that you got to work with that which is core. Which are the most important tasks during the day? And the rest, the fluff and that which is nice, that is not 'need to have'. That has to go in the chat and then it gets picked up some other time." Andersson

As mentioned, in large part due to the RWH increased reliance on prioritising crucial work tasks the social aspects of working at an office fall by the side. In all interviews the interviewee mentions that they have less time to talk to their colleagues and as such their team building falters. There are attempts to move some team building activities outside of the 6 hour work week, but the experience is that it is still not the same as it used to be.

"Yes, perhaps not goal oriented, but it was not these sidetracks sometimes when you lose focus a bit in the same way instead it was more. This is what has to be done. Yes, bang. Especially since I felt I had more energy and more time after work too, that I think made me able to retain my focus. The focus during work that is." - Fredriksson

"These kinds of things we also did with yoga, massage and we had done this before during the work-day. Then we took them out and put them before or after the work-day. Is this something you really want to have, or is it more just a break during working hours?" - Andersson

"But I don't stand at the coffee machine and talk for 15 minutes instead I take my coffee at the desk and just keep going and I can't sit in this meeting and discuss what we did over the weekend for 20 minutes before we actually start the meeting instead much more structure and effectiveness and of course, yes sometimes it's not super fun since you want to socialise with your colleagues but also this is why we put the social activities outside of the 6 hours in order for us not to become these robots." - Carlsson

"And then we decided that we wanted to have a 30 minute lunch instead of an hour. That was also voted through together, since no one really needed an hour. The need was bigger to get home by 3 instead of half past 3." - Andersson

It becomes clear that implementing RWH does not come without costs, the interviewees lament the fact that they have less opportunities to socialise with their peers. They see this issue as a direct consequence of their implementation of RWH only compounded and further exacerbated by the following pandemic, but not initially caused by it. While the workers value their communication and collaboration, an interpretation is that RWH forces the employees to sacrifice these parts of these values. Having less time to achieve the same result inadvertently leaves less time for the coworkers to socialise. This then raises the question as to what exactly it is that makes the participants in this study speak so highly of RWH, when it comes at these costs.

4.3 Why does RWH motivate workers?

The fact that RWH has a profound impact on the employees and their regular way of life has now been established. In order to understand how the motivation has been affected we look first at the employees well-being and secondly how it has altered their work-life balance. This provides us with an insight into how RWH helps to motivate the employees.

4.3.1 The improvement of well-being

All of the interviewed subjects expressed an increased well-being related to the reduced work hours. Even though these improvements were expressed in various ways, they seem to be of the same character. One phenomena that was highlighted by most of the interviewed subjects is that they felt increasingly rested and had higher energy levels while working with reduced work hours.

“Also this makes you feel better, you are more rested, you are happier and more alert and so on. It spills over a lot, but that would be the largest positive effect I notice.” - Bengtsson

“Then I experienced myself afterwards when you finished work, that I had more time for recovery after work” - Fredriksson

“Of course you feel good because of it and get a lot of energy because of it.” - Carlsson

The quotes from Bengtsson, Carlsson och Fredriksson indicate a perception of increased energy levels and that they are feeling more rested. As this perception is illustrated in various ways, it all insinuates the same thing. Why this is the case is explained by them as having more time outside of work to do activities which refills their energy. Coming home sooner from the workplace allows them to prioritise activities that increase well-being which they otherwise would not have time for.

“Of course I believe that if you are more alert, a bit happier you can come in with more energy to meetings if you feel good and have more free time and can focus on the stuff that makes you feel good.” - Carlsson

“But if you have time for these leisure activities and doing stuff for yourself and with the family and that gives a better well-being in my opinion” - Danielsson

“Life is a bit better, you have time for things.” - Bengtsson

Carlsson, Danielsson and Bengtsson make the point that the overall well-being is increased if more time can be spent on the family, hobbies and activities that make you feel better. One way of expressing this is that not only do they have more time for leisure, but they have a greater anticipation of leaving work. This directly correlates to the concept of work-life balance, and the interpretation is that all employees experience an improved work-life balance after the implementation of RWH. To build on this, many of the interviewees feel that by having more time to do such activities and having less hours at work, has reduced the stress they feel in their everyday life.

“I don’t have to stress in the morning. I can take it easy and drink that cup of coffee and plan out the day a bit” - Carlsson

“There is no stress in the morning for example. I can make sure that my kids eat breakfast before they get on the bus.” - Danielsson

“That you work out and things like that without feeling stressed after work”- Fredriksson

The reduced stress levels Carlsson, Danielsson and Fredriksson feel could be linked to what Bengtsson states in his quote:

“I sleep better, that I would say is the biggest since you get off work earlier.” - Bengtsson

All this can be interpreted as that the overall feeling of having more time for activities outside the workplace allowed by RWH, lowers the amount of everyday stress. This in turn improves the quality of sleep and their overall well-being. They express this feeling with words such as “advantages” and “upsides”, but an interpretation of this is that through increased well-being the workplace provides, with fewer work hours, they become more motivated.

4.3.2 Work-life balance and motivation

It is expressed by the interviewees how RWH improves their work-life balance, especially by those with families and children. Although these expressions take different forms and have various focus by different interviewees, they seem to have been of the same nature to a relatively large extent.

“... but it was to shorten the work-day in order to get home a little earlier everyday, pick up the kids from daycare, work out and so on. So it was in order to get an equilibrium, since this stress and I don’t have time to pick up from daycare stress. I don’t have time to go grocery shopping. I don’t have time to work out. I don’t have time.” - Andersson

Andersson describes how reducing the work hours makes it possible to be home earlier and how it affects the possibilities to be with your family, do chores or work out. Many of the interviewees expressed how it improved the family life by e.g. freeing up time to pick up children earlier from kindergarten.

“And it was there I saw the biggest difference since I could be home and greet the kids when they got home, I can cook dinner. I have a wife who commutes pretty far. Well, then I can fix the dinner each night, That is no issue.” - Danielsson

Many of the interviewees expressed that having RWH meant having more time with the family. This is exemplified by the above quote from Danielsson. An interpretation of this is that RWH results in the feeling of becoming a better spouse and parent. Having more time for activities that includes children, family or other leisure activities shows a change in work-life balance.

“But you have the time for these leisure activities and doing things for yourself and with the family and that improves the well-being in my opinion which makes you perform much better at work when you are there.” - Danielsson

“Yes, but I think that coming home at a reasonable time. Especially, I mean, perhaps you have children or maybe you have a time consuming hobby. To be able to come home and sort out all of that civilian that also happens when you are at work. ... That time did a lot and that did a lot too, well, with the mood, recovery, the psychological well-being.” - Eriksson

Danielsson and Eriksson further echoes the statement made by Andersson earlier, that the extra time they are allowed to spend with their families or simply performing the everyday chores they have to do greatly improves their recuperation and rest. These recovering activities, as well as the fact that the employees are allowed more time off from work results in what can be interpreted as them feeling like better people, better parents. This is exemplified by the fact that several interviewees, unprompted, bring up the fact that they get to spend more time with their children and families. This in turn allowed them to come into work the next day with more energy and focus, something that can be described as being more motivated. Carlsson also brings up the issue of performance at work in relation to RWH.

“So I imagine that if you feel good you perform better and if you don't have this stress over, well, but now I am the last one to pick up at daycare again or that you don't have time with what you want to do during your free time in order to feel good, well, then you won't perform. No, but when you work less hours and get more time to do the stuff that you enjoy and make you feel good, yes, but then I believe that you will also perform better.” - Carlsson

Carlsson expresses his belief that when he is more motivated he can also perform better at work. This is also something that other interviewees also hints at, although they are not as explicit in this belief as Carlsson.

“I would probably say definitely that I had, as I said, working out and then I also have a horse that I spend a lot of time with. But I would say more energy to do other stuff after work, more than just work, then this and then the day is over on repeat, instead just substantially more energy to do other stuff as well.” - Fredriksson

Fredriksson brings up an abundance of energy during the day, much the same way that Carlsson did. Although the difference is when they choose to express that this extra energy is utilised, Carlsson expresses it as if they have more energy during the work-day and Fredriksson after the work-day. The similarity here is of more importance, that there is more energy to go around during the day than exactly when they individually experience this abundance.

“No, I only see very positively on reduced work hours, but mostly not to measure performance in time but instead measuring performance depending on what you actually perform and not stare so much on the time. Ditch the stamp clock. That is way back in time.” - Carlsson

“[The important thing is not that] I have been at work today, instead it is in what I have accomplished during the day and so on.” - Bengtsson

“At the same time I actually still do what is expected of me, and I never miss a deadline. That is also important to keep in mind.” - Bengtsson

Carlsson and Bengtsson further point out that the focus has shifted in regards to what matters at the workplace. Previously, focus was put on being at the office for the specified amount of time. Now the focus is more result-oriented, what matters is performing your work well. This, in combination with the previously mentioned increased stress over having less time, results in an interpretation of an increased feeling of accomplishment in regards to work performance.

Overall the impression given by multiple interviewees is that they prefer RWH and that they prefer the performance measure to be more aligned with other aspects than time spent at work. All of the interviewees at this company have experienced a better work-life balance, a better overall well-being and they feel more motivated because of RWH.

5 Discussion

To summarise the findings from the analysis, the most important cultural aspects brought up are openness, collaboration and communication. Some of the social aspects have become harder to do due to the implementation of RWH, since it has led to an increased stress and need to prioritise the most crucial work tasks. However, this is offset due to the much larger benefits found in both well-being and work-life balance. Several subjects stated that they are much happier with RWH since it gives them time to spend with their families or doing other leisure activities that improve their mood. In the following chapters we will discuss these empirical findings in relation to the theories we have presented earlier.

5.1 How RWH improves Work-life balance

The workers at Konsult AB expressed that the culture at the company was very open and encouraged collaboration and development. With a focus on human development instead of being market oriented, orientation becomes internal instead of external. With a focus on human development, a community has grown where the workers can interchangeably off load each other if there is too high of a workload. Because of this developed diverse skill-set among the workers, the organisation itself can be seen as flexible. According to Lindquist and Marcy (2016) a culture that is defined by an internal focus and flexibility adheres well to the clan archetype present in CVF. Based on our analysis it becomes clear that at Konsult AB they highly value communication and collaboration, key values for the Clan archetype. Although RWH has put some of that in jeopardy, something that the interviewees express negatively, it also highlights just how important this has been to them in the past. What is common for both the social workers and the employees at Konsult AB, is the strong internal focus. In a knowledge intensive company, having a low staff turn-around is somewhat crucial for the organisation, since the value is in the people and not in the equipment. Employees from both organisations emphasised that the main reason for implementing RWH was because it would increase well-being. This can be seen as an attempt by both organisations, with internal means, of becoming a more attractive employer by investing in human development. There is however a difference in the cultural aspects between the two. While both organisations encourage collaboration, there is an inclination of more hierarchical structures and stability among the social workers than at Konsult AB.

Seeing as both of these organisations tend towards the internally focused archetypes, the stated reasons of improving employee well-being clearly justifies and explains the choice to implement RWH. Many of the interviewed expressed having higher energy levels as well as being less stressed. Furthermore, some were keen about expressing that they felt better when going to work with RWH. This can be linked to the spiral of improved recovery. Namely, by improving the anticipatory emotions about going to work as well as improving the organisational climate through RWH, an improved control over private life stressors are achieved. This in turn improves anticipatory emotions about coming home and improves recovery, resulting in less worry about both the private life and the work life. This then further improves the anticipatory emotions about going to work, creating a cycle of improved well-being as shown in the figure 9 below.

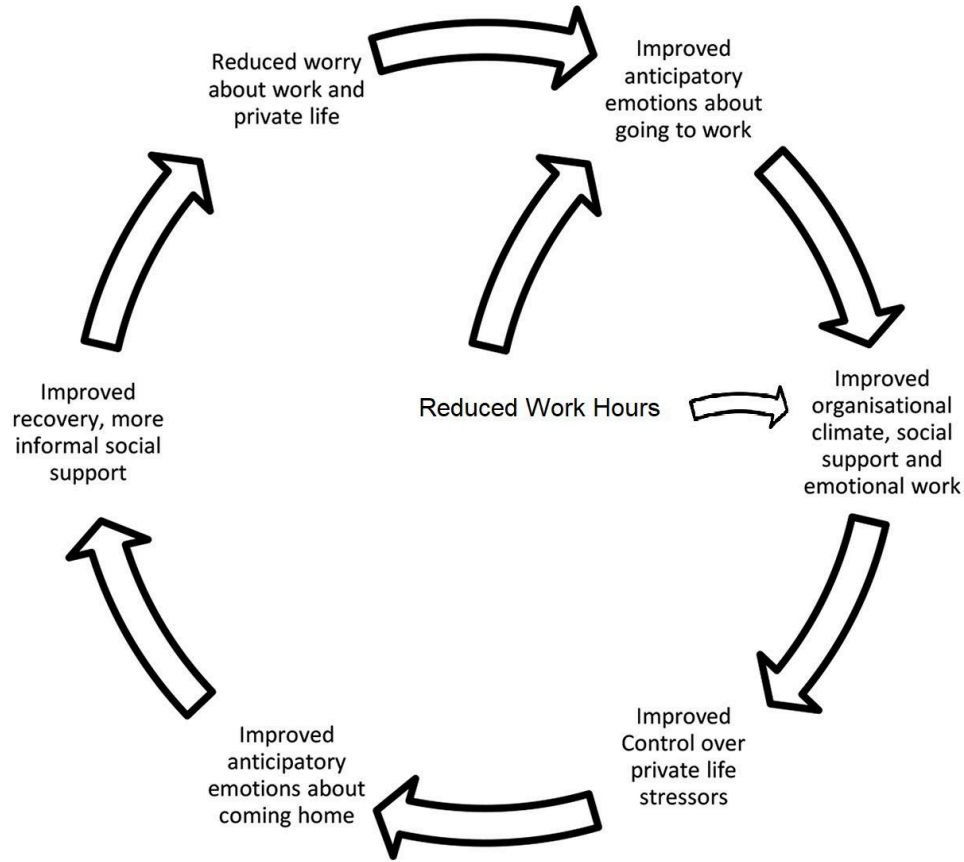


Figure 9: A visual representation of how RWH affects work-life balance, drawing on figure 8 (figure created by the authors)

To show this cycle of improved well-being and work-life balance we have used the same figure as before in the theory made by Barck-Holst et al. (2020) but with the addition of where RWH initiates this cycle of improvement. This illustrates how the interviewees of this study experienced that their well-being and work-life balance improved after implementing RWH which shows the focus on human development having its intended effects.

5.2 The road to Self-determination through RWH

Connecting this improved morale back to SDT, it becomes clear that the aspect of autonomy largely was already fulfilled. This can be seen in how the employees describe their work environment, and can directly be linked back to the Clan archetype. The fact that they are, and were, largely in control over how to structure their work-days and how to tackle each task is autonomy. However, RWH have given the affected even more autonomy over not just their working hours but their days, weeks and lives outside of work. There is also an interesting side effect from implementing RWH stemming from the increased need to prioritise the tasks handled during the work-day, leading to statements regarding a feeling of accomplishment at the end of the day. This helps the workers to fulfil another of the aspects in SDT, the competence aspect. The final aspect in SDT is that of relatedness, the sense of belonging, and this one is more complicated. For one, as the employees at Konsult AB complained about, it is clear that the

community, and thereby the relatedness to the social life at the office deteriorated in conjunction with RWH. This is in line with the effects related to the earlier discussion regarding the culture, that the sense of community at work lessened with the RWH implementation. Having less time to achieve the same amount of work will inadvertently lead to less time to socialise at the office, leading to the deterioration of the social avenues previously available. However, as is also shown in the analysis the sense of being a better person, a better parent or spouse increased during RWH. A way to look at this is that the sense of relatedness decreased in relation to the office or the work but increased in other areas of life. Another way to view this is that through RWH, work-life balance is improved as discussed earlier, and that results in an overall increase in the sense of relatedness.

Having RWH is expressed by many as something positive, and that it is something that improves their experience of their workplace. While some of the people were a part of the implementation, and some were not, it is clear that they all view it as a benefit their employers can give them. For the employees at Konsult AB this is less obvious, although among the social workers this is explicitly stated. One of the reasons that it is less obvious for the employees at Konsult AB is that they have a much more active role in the decision making process, but the decision they took was still for the company to give them this as a benefit. Thus, the perceived locus of causality for our subjects is that RWH is something given as a reward from an external source. With external meaning external from the individual, and not the organisation itself, in this case. While the reward is seen as an external factor, the motivation that the interviewees express is mainly centred around the fact that they feel they have more time for other things other than work. Their work-life balance, their overall well-being, satisfaction and enjoyment of their work is improved. All of this is directly linked to the intrinsic motivation rather than the extrinsic motivation, according to SDT (Deci & Ryan 2000).

5.3 Theoretical implications

According to the current self-determination theory, external rewards result in extrinsic motivation while internal rewards result in intrinsic motivation. The perceived locus of causality shifts within extrinsic motivation from external to internal, trying to explain how different regulatory processes may be fitted on the self-determination continuum. However, what is found in the empirical material suggests that RWH is seen by the employees as an external reward, something the employer can give them as a benefit, but increases the intrinsic motivation aspect. The clan-culture that is present is what enables employees to fulfil one of the aspects, autonomy, required for self-determination and it lays the foundation for RWH to improve work-life balance. Through an improved work-life balance the other aspects, competence and relatedness, of self-determination can be fulfilled, and the motivation inherently becomes intrinsic. The current theory of self-determination does not properly allow for intrinsic motivation to be caused by a reward with an external locus of causality, thus there is an opening to make an amendment to the current theory that would entail this. The amendment is based on how RWH is perceived as an external reward given to employees by the employer, but causes intrinsic motivation to increase and can thereby be seen as a contributing factor to the possibility of becoming self-determined.

6 Conclusion

6.1 Theoretical conclusion

RWH is shown as a basic external reward that the employer can give that improves numerous aspects of the workers well-being in a clan-environment, such as enjoyment and satisfaction. While perceived as an external reward, the effect is that the motivation is increased through intrinsic means. The clan-environment is what facilitates this phenomena to take place. It is thus possible to amend the SDT presented by Deci and Ryan to make it more robust. How this amendment is done, is illustrated in figure 10 below. An external reward that increases inherent enjoyment and satisfaction of the work, leads to intrinsic motivation and allows for becoming self-determined.

Therefore we conclude that RWH can, because of the nature of its impact on well-being and work-life balance, be seen as an external reward that causes intrinsic motivation to increase through inherent satisfaction and enjoyment. This opens up the prospect of becoming self-determined.

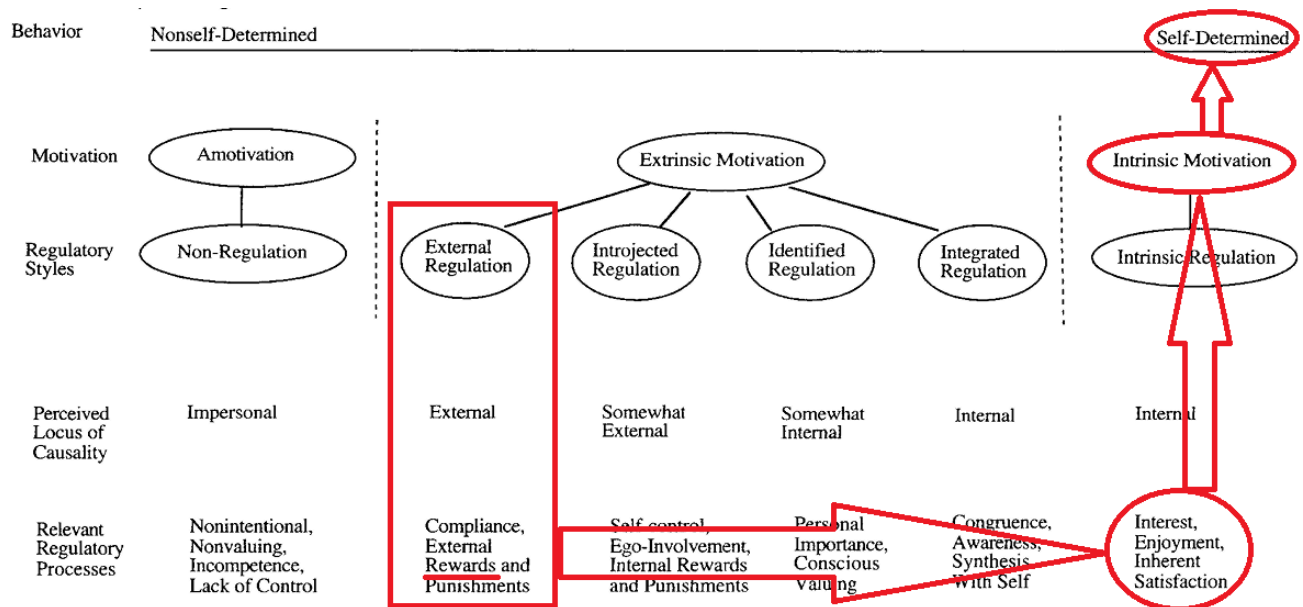


Figure 10: A visual representation of how external rewards increase intrinsic motivation, drawing on figure 7 (figure created by the authors)

6.2 Empirical Conclusions

RWH is a subject which has not received much attention in research publications. The articles are few and far between, and often have a focus on narrow topics. The context from which we have gotten our empirical data is small, knowledge-intensive organisations who have current or previous experience of RWH. A study, which looks at the motivational aspects of reduced work hours in such a context, has never been done before, making our empirical material an important addition within the subject. While

our conclusions can not be generalised to a wider context, because of the narrow conditions on the empirical data, they still offer a valuable insight into how RWH motivates workers in small knowledge-intensive organisations. In conclusion, although research on reduced work hours remains limited and primarily focused on narrow topics, our study adds value by exploring the motivational aspects of RWH within the unique context of small, knowledge-intensive organisations. While caution should be exercised in generalising our conclusions to broader contexts, the insights gained from our study shed light on the motivating factors behind reduced work hours specifically within the dynamics of this narrow setting, offering a valuable perspective for both researchers and practitioners within a similar context to this study.

6.3 Limitations and further research

As all studies, our study has been exposed to a few limitations identified by us researchers to take into consideration. Regarding our subjects of study, one factor worth considering is that the workers at Konsult AB had twice the amount of RWH compared to the workers at Social AB, giving them a different circumstance. This might have affected their outlook on some of the aspects regarding RWH. Continuing with our subjects of study, it is important to consider their context. As we bring up the organisational culture to enable RWH, we have to consider both our cases being located in Sweden, giving us a distinct cultural context, not necessarily replicable outside of Sweden. This goes for other contextual factors as well such as size and business areas. We have previously mentioned the limiting size of our empirical material, preventing us from drawing any broader and more general conclusions. Finally, When it comes to motivational science where trying to fit the empirical findings within one framework as we have done due to the limitational scope of this study, there is a potential risk of forcing it to fit the chosen framework, instead of adopting a broader theoretical perspective.

Suggestions for future research are therefore to conduct a more extensive study, including a larger number of organisations. This would give more validity, as well as to see if our conclusions are unique to this case or if they are more general. Conducting a larger study would also give the possibility to further examine if there are other motivational theories or strategies applicable to describe the effects of RWH. Another suggestion is to examine RWH in other contexts, as different cultures or larger organisations. It would also be interesting to study different kinds of RWH, as different amounts of hours are reduced, or having RWH during four days instead of five, to see if it is possible to quantify any difference in approaches.

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