



“YOU WANT TO DO YOUR OWN STUFF BECAUSE THERE IS  
A TEAM THAT NEEDS YOU.”

An extensive multiple case study on motivational self-management in a  
self-directed work team

Master's Thesis  
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**Abstract**

This thesis explored the topic of self-management of motivation i.e. how employees in the contemporary work environment manage their motivation to work. The research design was an extensive multiple case study based on semi-structured interviews of eight individuals in one self-directed work team. The study asked how these motivational self-management methods are linked to autonomous or controlled motivation, based on the Self-Determination Theory by Deci & Ryan (2000), and with what potential outcomes.

The motivational self-management methods and processes of knowledge-workers in team-based organizations had not been studied previously, and overall little empirical research has been done on self-management of motivation in any discipline. Studying these methods and processes is important for society, as being better able to self-manage one's motivation has the potential to increase one's wellbeing and productivity, especially if it happens through autonomous motivation (Gagné, Forest et al., 2015). As the job-design in the knowledge-intensive sector has been changing to favor flexibility and autonomy of employees (Hornung, Rousseau et al., 2010), these employees also have the increased responsibility of managing one's motivation without constant top-down orders.

The thematic analysis showed that the participants of this study self-manage their motivation in the following ways: work and environmental control, scheduling by disposition, increasing task enjoyability, creation of meaning, procrastination, enforcing self-discipline, thinking about material rewards, self-rewarding, seeking positive affirmation, visualizing progress, avoiding negative feelings, and acting out of dependency and responsibility. The motivational self-management methods of increasing task enjoyability and creation of meaning are linked to autonomous motivation, while procrastination, enforcing self-discipline, thinking about material rewards, and avoiding negative feelings can be tied to controlled motivation. The study argues that previous studies of self-management of motivation have given an overly static picture of motivational self-management. Thus, the main contributions of this study include the dynamic and flexible nature of motivational self-management in the context of a self-managed team and the role of self-reflection in this process. The practical implications of this study highlight the importance of HR practices emphasizing personnel development and person/organization-fit when recruiting.

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**Keywords** motivation, motivational self-management, self-directed work team

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# 1. INTRODUCTION

Life management, time management, life coaching - these buzzwords are trendy and timely, and seem to be at the core of every successful person's life. However, what is often overlooked is how these all relate to one aspect, namely directing and energizing goal-oriented behavior. In other words, these buzzwords all relate to motivational self-management. In this thesis I examine the motivational self-management of employees in self-directed work teams. How do these hip buzzwords translate into the everyday activities of employees who must manage their own work motivation in order to be successful?

More specifically, I will study the methods and processes that employees use to energize and direct their goal-oriented behavior, especially when it feels most challenging. For this thesis, motivation is defined as the forces that energize and direct goal-oriented behavior, which aligns with most definitions of motivation (Reeve, 2005). The Merriam-Webster Dictionary defines the verb "to manage" as "to handle to direct with a degree of skill; to succeed in accomplishing". Thus, the self-management of motivation is defined as personally and skillfully handling or directing the motivation of oneself in order to succeed in accomplishing the work or other activities needing to be done.

This topic is especially important in this day and age where self-directed work teams are becoming a standard way to organize project-work in the knowledge-intensive sector and hierarchies are dissolving to ensure that responsibility is spread throughout the organization. While the increased freedom to choose how and where to work can be a blessing and improve work well-being, it also has its challenges. (Hornung, Rousseau et al., 2010) With the increased freedom comes also the heightened responsibility of managing one's work autonomously. In other words, these self-directed employees and teammates must be able to energize and direct their daily working behavior without constant top-down orders and constraints.

This thesis is concerned with exploring the methods and processes that individuals use to energize and direct their goal-oriented behavior in everyday situations, especially when it feels most

challenging and they are lacking the motivation to continue. I will focus not only on exploring how individuals manage their motivation, but also on whether it is possible to categorize these methods and processes into those that produce *autonomous motivation*, where an action is performed through volition or choice, and those that result in *controlled motivation*, where actions are directed by external and internal rewards and punishments (Deci & Ryan, 2000). Different types of motivation can be seen to differ in quality and in resulting outcomes. As I will discuss further, autonomous motivation tends to result in greater well-being and better work performance than controlled motivation (Blais & Brière, 2002; Gagné, Forest et al., 2015).

For this thesis I will be using a universal motivation theory called the Self-Determination Theory to analyze the findings. The Self-Determination Theory (Deci, Ryan et al., 2001) sees the individual as a holistic being under the constant influence of many forces. Deci & Ryan (2001) explain that this theory takes both the individual and their physical and social environments into account when explaining motivation, and it also differentiates between types of motivation (e.g. autonomous and controlled) according to underlying motives for behavior. Thus, it seems a very suitable framework for guiding the analysis and interpretation of the methods and processes of the self-management of motivation in the contemporary workplace. It is fruitless to uncover methods for motivational management without understanding what these methods mean. The Self-Determination Theory will help explain the findings, and thus aid in drawing relevant conclusions.

Discovering what self-management methods individuals use to induce or sustain motivation in work environments and whether these methods can be seen to be associated with autonomous or controlled motivation will shed light on the psychological mechanisms behind motivational fluctuations. Empirically studying these motivational self-management techniques, which have to date not been greatly researched in the organizational setting, will deepen our understanding of how individuals regulate their motivation to work, and thus make it possible for others to learn and acquire these techniques. This is important for society, as being better able to self-manage one's motivation has the potential to increase one's wellbeing and productivity (Blais & Brière, 2002; Gagné & Deci, 2005; Gagné, Forest et al., 2015). On a more personal note, I am interested in the psychological mechanisms behind why people do what they do, and in exploring new motivational self-management methods for use in my daily life.

A great amount of research has been done on how the work environment can be changed to fuel motivation and especially work engagement in employees, a state which is characterized by motivational fulfillment (Hakanen, Schaufeli et al., 2008). Research in the field of organizational psychology has shown how the employer/workplace can fuel the autonomous motivation of employees by increasing the fulfillment of the three psychological needs of autonomy, relatedness, and competence (Baard, Deci et al., 2004; Deci, Ryan et al., 2001). In practice fulfilling these psychological needs means helping the employees feel effective and successful at work; providing them enough authority and flexibility so that they can engage in their work volitionally; and helping them feel socially accepted and connected.

For example, in a study done by Gagné, Forest et al. (2015), it was found that organizations which focus on fulfilling the needs of competence, autonomy, and relatedness of employees have employees with high levels of autonomous motivation. The results of this study also show that autonomous motivation is positively related to outcomes such as affective commitment, performance, personal initiative, effort, and decreased emotional exhaustion and turnover intentions (Gagné, Forest et al., 2015). In short, there is wide consensus among researchers that autonomous motivation leads to more positive outcomes than controlled motivation, and that the organizational environment can fuel the autonomous motivation of employees through increasing the feelings of autonomy, relatedness, and competence.

A key gap in current literature is the lack of consideration for what individuals themselves do and can do to, firstly, regulate their motivation and, secondly, sustain higher levels of autonomous motivation and lower levels of controlled motivation. There is a need to explore the various methods and processes that individuals use to regulate motivation. Little systematic theorizing or empirical evidence on methods to self-manage motivation exist to date.

Thus, the research questions for this thesis are as follows:

- How do employees in self-directed work teams in a Finnish SME manage their motivation to work?
- How are these methods linked to either autonomous or controlled motivation?

I will structure the thesis in the following way. First, in the literature review, I will explore motivational self-management in terms of the changing work environment, previous studies, and the nature of motivation itself. After the literature review, I will introduce the interview-based extensive multiple case study approach of this study. Then I move on to findings, discussion, and finally to the conclusion.



## **2. MOTIVATION IN THE CONTEMPORARY WORKPLACE**

In the following literature review I will first discuss how the contemporary changes in job design are impacting the need for self-management of motivation. Next, I will explore the different reasons for why motivational problems occur according to previous studies and theories. I will then describe what has already been researched about motivational self-management strategies. Finally, I will finish off by discussing the Self-Determination Theory, a motivation theory that provides a framework on what motivation is, how it is elicited and maintained, and how it can take many forms with differing outcomes.

### **2.1. Increased Employee Autonomy**

In the increasingly hectic and mentally taxing work environments, employees benefit from an ability to meaningfully cope with the pressures and yet remain productive (Leiter, Hakanen et al., 2013). This is especially important as the nature of job design in the knowledge-intensive sector is changing to favor more self-directed work. Responsibility is spread throughout the individuals of the organization, and control has given way to flexibility.

One way this is shown is through the increase in self-directed work teams (SDWT), which are teams comprised of individuals with different talents and skills working together towards a common goal without typical managerial supervision (Bishop & Scott, 2000). Druskat and Wheeler (2004), found that 79% of the Fortune 1000 companies deploy “autonomous”, “self-directed”, or “empowered” teams, and this number is not seen to be decreasing (Druskat & Wheeler, 2004). Both Bishop and Scott (2000) as well as Druskat and Wheeler (2004) agree that the trend is towards more flexibility for the individual to tailor his/her work to match personal needs, and since organizations are increasingly taking a team-based design, this tailoring frequently occurs in a self-directed work team. In other words, the hot issues in the knowledge-intensive sector are team-based organizations and employee autonomy.

The Finnish Institute of Occupational Health released a publication in 2012 on the current situation of the Finnish workforce. The results of their wide phone-interview study showed that more than

a third of all work done in Finland is conducted in a team-based fashion, with team-based project-work being especially common with the Y-generation (25-34 year olds) and in the knowledge-intensive sector. The report showed that 35% of employees are part of more than one project at a time. The report deduced that when projects set the rhythm of work life, work itself becomes more and more defined by short-term goals, continuous change, and increased individual responsibility. In addition, self-development in order to keep a competitive edge is becoming an integral part of this contemporary job design. The Finnish Institute of Occupational Health expects project-work to increase in the future. (Työterveyslaitos, 2012) In other words, the organizational environment in Finland is also becoming more team-based and self-directed.

This increased individual work flexibility is also a result of the increasing popularity of a bottom-up approach to work design, characterized by flexibility, agility, collaboration, team-driven processes, and the ability of individuals to tailor their own way of working. This is in contrast to a traditional top-down approach, which perceives job design as a management concern and acts on the premises of inflexibility, bureaucracy, overall control, and imposed processes. (Hornung, Rousseau et al., 2010; Spek, Postma et al., 2012) This increased individual responsibility to manage one's work also leads to new challenges. With less managerial interference, an individual must be able to manage one's motivation to work in order to be able to stay productive.

It seems that employees, primarily knowledge-workers, are nowadays expected to be experts in working in self-directed work teams. Do all of these employees possess these skills required to thrive in the new work environment, and if so, how do they do it in practice? It seems to me that increasing employee self-governance is a two-edged sword: those who have the necessary personal and interpersonal skills will benefit from the new design, while those who are less adapted will have a harder time managing their motivation and thus productivity. In any case, I believe the increased self-dependence will have made it necessary for every employee to use some sorts of motivational self-management strategies, either consciously or subconsciously. Next, I will further explain why motivational self-management strategies are needed.

## 2.2. Reasons Behind Motivational Problems

Have you ever felt that you do not want to do something? You are not alone; this feeling seems to be familiar to everyone. The fact is, work just cannot be exciting or fun all the time. This feeling is called amotivation, defined by Deci & Ryan (2000) as a lack of intention and motivation. Deci & Ryan (2000) explain that amotivation can greatly hinder work performance. While amotivation refers to a complete lack of motivation, it seems safe to assume that its less-severe states, such as declined motivation, could also lead to problems with motivational management.

Vroom (1964) was the first to explain lack of motivation in the organizational setting (Vroom, 1964). He postulated that if you do not expect that your effort will result in an outcome that leads to a reward, or if you place no value on the reward, you will not have the motivation to put forward any effort. For example, if an employee does not care about receiving a yearly bonus, he/she will not do the work necessary to receive it. Or, if the employee does not believe that his/her efforts are sufficient to receive the yearly bonus, he/she will not attempt to achieve this outcome. Many empirical studies have been conducted on the basis of Vroom's (1964) Expectancy Theory, and many variants of expectancy theories have emerged, perhaps most notably the Theory of Planned Behavior (Ajzen & Fishbein, 1988), which has accumulated studies for many decades. For example, one study examined the entrepreneurial intent of university students in Romania. The results showed that if the students perceived that they had personal control over the success of their venture and also placed value on it, they were more likely to start a business and become entrepreneurs. (Shook & Bratianu, 2010) This shows the importance of both believing that you have control over an outcome *and* valuing the outcome.

Legault et al. (2006) investigated the primary reasons for amotivation in an academic setting, and their findings had similar features to the Expectancy Theory of Vroom (1964). The researchers uncovered four main reasons behind academic amotivation: ability beliefs, effort beliefs, value placed on the task, and characteristics of the task. Ability beliefs refer to the belief that one has the ability to complete a task, while effort beliefs involve the belief that one has the necessary energy and stamina that the task requires. The value placed on the task refers to how important the task is to oneself personally or within the academic environment, and the characteristics of the task are

concerned with how exciting, stimulating or, on the other hand, boring or repetitive the task is. In other words, if one does not believe he/she has the competence or energy to complete the task, or if the task seems un-meaningful or tedious, amotivation may result. (Legault, Green-Demers et al., 2006) These dimensions of amotivation in the academic setting can also be easily reflected into the work environment to explain reasons behind declined motivation.

Some other dimensions can also be seen to be precursors of motivational problems in organizational environments. For example, a quantitative study conducted by Tremblay et al. (2009) showed that a lack of perceived organizational support and a negative work climate were found to correlate with amotivation of employees. What this means is that if the organization is found unsupportive or the overall atmosphere is perceived as cold, motivational problems are more likely to occur. In addition, the study found that work strain was positively correlated with amotivation. (Tremblay, Blanchard et al., 2009) Interestingly enough, it seems that amotivation in organizations is not solely elicited by the characteristics of the work task, but also by the surrounding work atmosphere and the overall feeling of support (or the lack thereof). Although the strenuousness of the work itself, be it through tedious, un-meaningful, difficult, or particularly draining tasks, can produce motivational problems, so can the external environment (Tremblay, Blanchard et al., 2009).

Declined motivation, in short, results in difficulties with starting, continuing, or completing a certain task, and it is clearly a problem in the fast-paced, competitive, and achievement-oriented organizations of today. However, while declined motivation calls for a need to find ways to self-manage motivation, this is not the only situation where these methods and processes are needed. It is just as important to be able to sustain a certain level of motivation to prevent it from declining. Thus, self-management of motivation is not only needed when motivation is declined, but also in preventing this motivation from declining in the first place. Next, I will describe how lack of motivation can be managed.

### **2.3. What we Already Know About Motivational Self-Management Strategies**

Even if we do not want to complete a certain task, we usually do not have a choice. Work must be done, and fleeting cries of “I don’t want to” are not respected in the workplace. Thus, we need some strategies of overcoming this declined motivation. In this chapter I will first discuss how motivation has been explored in the workplace. Examples for this include job-crafting (Tims, Bakker et al., 2015), a concept used to describe how an employee can align work with his/her interests and thus increase motivation, and the Self-Leadership Theory (Manz, 1986), which describes how employees can influence their own work motivation through making self-initiated changes in how they do their work and how they think about their work. Afterward, I will discuss how the self-management of motivation has been studied in other settings, such as the academic environment and the health sector. Finally, I will assess these different concepts and empirical studies.

Not many studies have been done on how individuals themselves can manage their motivation in the work environment. Instead, many studies have been done on how the work environment can be changed to regulate the motivation of employees (Baard, Deci et al., 2004; Deci, Ryan et al., 2001; Gagné, Forest et al., 2015). For example, in a study conducted by Baard, Deci et al. (2004), it was found that managers can induce autonomous motivation in employees by acknowledging the subordinate’s feelings, listening to their viewpoints, and supportively encouraging them to create their own ways to handle problems. In other words, the employer can increase employee motivation. However, not many studies have been done on how individuals themselves can regulate their own motivation, especially not in work settings.

Although few empirical studies have been done on how individuals can manage their motivation in the workplace, some theories and concepts on this topic exist. The first concept that I will explore is job-crafting, which involves employees making changes to their jobs in order to balance job demands and job resources according to personal abilities and needs (Tims, Bakker et al., 2015). In a study conducted by Tims et al. (2015), it was seen that by increasing social and structural job resources, increasing challenging job demands, and decreasing hindering job demands, individuals could better align their jobs with their own preferences, motives, and

passions. According to an earlier study by Tims, Bakker et al. (2012), job-crafting was found to increase work engagement (i.e. motivation), employability, and performance.

In other words, one can fuel motivation via job-crafting through personally choosing the content or amount of tasks to be done, through altering the social relationships at work in terms of amount and intensity, or through developing oneself professionally in order to increase the feeling of work competence (Tims, Bakker et al., 2012). For example, let's say an employee is especially good at graphic design and also enjoys it. He would benefit from crafting his job so that he has other graphic designers physically close to him at the office in order to discuss glitches, the latest graphic design software, and the ability to delegate tedious reporting tasks to another employee so that he can focus on perfecting his Photoshop designs. Through the improved work engagement, his productivity would likely increase and the company would then also benefit, according to the study by Tims et al. (2015).

However, while job-crafting offers many ideas for how employees can craft their work environments to facilitate motivation, it does not shed light on how employees spontaneously manage their motivation to work in everyday situations, especially when it feels most challenging. Even an employee in well-tailored, job-crafted environment will experience moments of declined motivation.

The second organization-based theory that I will discuss is the Self-Leadership Theory (Manz, 1986), which covers many dimensions of motivational self-management and focuses on the organizational environment. It provides behavioral and cognitive strategies that individuals can implement at work to achieve better outcomes. In other words, self-leadership is concerned with directing yourself to achieve work outcomes through making conscious, self-initiated decisions and changes in what you do, how you do it, and how you think about it. The theory has been most extensively tested in the academic environment, for example through self-leadership questionnaires being administered to university students (Houghton & Neck, 2002). In this study by Houghton & Neck (2002), students rated how much they used the different behavioral and cognitive strategies stated in the questionnaires.

The results of Houghton & Neck's (2002) study in turn showed that these behavioral and cognitive strategies can be divided into three categories: behavior-focused strategies, natural reward strategies, and constructive thought pattern strategies. The behavior-focused strategies, such as self-goal setting, self-observation, self-reward and self-punishment, are concerned with increasing self-awareness and thus better aligning one's actions with the desired outcomes. For example, an employee might reward himself with a coffee break (self-reward) after completing a certain amount of reports (self-goal setting), or refrain from taking one if he has not reached his own goal (self-punishment). He might also observe himself losing concentration and aimlessly surfing the Internet, and then steer himself back to the task at hand (self-observation).

Natural reward strategies focus on increasing the positive features of the task and decreasing its unpleasant aspects. For example, an employee might have fun playing with the colors and animations in his PowerPoint presentation, or think about how the subject he is writing about is actually useful to his own personal growth. Constructive thought pattern strategies involve tools such as mental imagery, positive self-talk, and analyzing one's belief system. (Houghton & Neck, 2002) These are complex strategies that involve a great deal of self-analysis. To provide an example, an employee might always feel that the feedback his boss is giving him is negative, when in fact the employee merely distorts the feedback to be closer to what he expects to hear. Thus, the employee will need to analyze his belief system and replace the assumptions that lead to this distortion by more positive ones (such as "Maybe I'm actually capable of doing this correctly"). Mental imagery, in turn, involves seeing oneself succeeding in a task, quite like athletes have been known to do before starting a competition. Thus, Self-Leadership Theory covers many of the aspects that I too wish to address with my study.

However, much of self-leadership research is conceptual with sparse empirical studies having been done in the organizational environment. The Self-Leadership Theory is more normative than descriptive, and is grounded in several classical theories, most notably those involving self-regulation (Carver & Scheier, 2001) and the Self-Determination Theory (SDT) (Deci & Ryan, 2000). The Self-Leadership Theory conveys what *should* be done to achieve better outcomes in the organizational environment, but not what individuals do in practice. Thus, there is a need to

uncover the real methods that knowledge-workers in the contemporary workplace use to manage their motivation on a practical rather than theoretical level.

After having covered some theories and concepts on motivational self-management in the organizational environment, it is time to turn our attention to what has been studied on these motivational self-management methods in other settings. Some quantitative studies on motivational self-management have been conducted in the school environment. One is that by Schwinger et al. (2007), where the researchers had German 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> -grade high school students provide self-reports on their use of motivational self-regulation strategies. The most prevalent strategies used include enhancement of situational interest, enhancement of personal significance, mastery self-talk, performance-approach self-talk, performance-avoidance self-talk, environmental control, self-consequating, and proximal goal setting. What do these heavily theoretical concepts mean? Enhancement of situation interest involves making the situation more game-like, or making the task more entertaining or fun, while enhancement of personal significance means looking for relationships between the task and one's own life. For example, let's assume Tom is studying for a biology exam. He might try to learn the different cell types by making himself flash-cards, or he might think that learning about the human body will better his understanding of his own physique, something he is very interested in. Mastery self-talk would involve Tom challenging himself to learn as much as he can, and performance-approach self-talk involves Tom thinking that it is extremely important to get good grades. Performance-avoidance self-talk deals with Tom not wanting to look like a fool in front of other students. Environmental control means eliminating distractions and choosing to work at a time when it is easy to concentrate. Self-consequating means Tom allowing himself to have a break or eat a sandwich after working for a certain amount of time, and proximal goal-setting involves him breaking the work down into smaller, easy-to-handle segments. Clearly, Tom's name could be replaced by a knowledge-worker's, as these motivational strategies can be undoubtedly utilized in the organizational environment.

This study, however, did not give students a chance to elaborate on new methods to self-manage motivation, as all the methods were pre-defined and were merely to be rated in amount of usage (Schwinger, von der Laden et al., 2007). What is interesting to see is that the methods correspond



heavily with the strategies defined by the Self-Leadership Theory (Houghton & Neck, 2002), both containing elements typically included in the concept of self-regulation. This shows that there is indeed some consensus in the field of motivational self-management across disciplines. The motivational self-management method of performance-avoidance self-talk was, however, not mentioned by the self-Leadership Theory. This might be due to the theory's normative nature. Doing something in order to not look like a fool in front of others is probably not a healthy or advisable motivational strategy in the long run, but according to Schwinger et al. (2007), it does occur in practice.

Similar studies have been done in the health sector. One study was conducted by Hartmann-Boyce et al. (2016), where the researchers created a taxonomy of motivational self-regulation strategies for weight management from previous research, including methods such as goal-setting, rewards, and self-monitoring. The strategies used in the taxonomy were very similar to the motivational self-management methods described by the Self-Leadership Theory and in the academic environment. The researchers then translated the taxonomy into a questionnaire to identify strategies used by individuals (Hartmann - Boyce, Aveyard et al., 2016). This study was also quantitative, and thus did not leave room for the discovery and capturing of new processes.

However, the most comprehensive portrayal of motivational self-management methods in the health sector has been derived through a systematic review. Some of the researchers who conducted the taxonomy study reviewed qualitative studies on cognitive and behavioral strategies on weight management (Hartmann - Boyce, Boylan et al., 2017). Interestingly enough, the qualitative overview unveiled new motivational self-management methods that their previous taxonomy could not capture, namely re-framing and self-experimentation. Hence, the qualitative approach seems to be effective in uncovering new motivational self-management methods, as I will attempt to do in this study.

The most prevalent motivational self-management methods in the systematic review by Hartmann-Boyce et al. (2017) included restrictions, self-monitoring, scheduling, professional support, weight management aids, reframing, self-experimentation, goal-setting, stimulus control, and rewards. I have already described most of these self-management of motivation methods when explaining

the studies by Houghton & Neck (2006) and Schwinger et al. (2007), which brings to attention that the ways self-management of motivation is studied across settings appears to be similar. The self-management of motivation methods of professional support and weight management aids are nonetheless specific to the weight management study. Some motivational self-management methods, such as self-experimentation, restrictions, and scheduling are more debatable. Self-experimentation seems very connected to self-observation and the cognitive thought pattern strategies described in the Self-Leadership Theory, and restrictions and scheduling to self-punishment and environmental control. Overall, there seems to be quite some overlap between these self-management of motivation methods.

All in all, it seems that the self-management of motivation methods are quite similar across settings and theories, with methods such as goal-setting, rewards, environmental control, and reframing the situation being clearly depicted by all the studies. Some self-management of motivation methods are named differently but represent the same phenomenon (such as rewards, self-rewards, and self-consequating). Only a few self-management of motivation methods were specific to a domain. For example, self-punishment seems to be clearly linked only to the study by Houghton & Neck (2002). However, self-punishment can take many forms (Houghton & Neck, 2002), so it can be seen to overlap with restrictions and environmental control conveyed by the studies by Schwinger et al. (2007) and Hartmann-Boyce et al. (2017). Performance-avoidance self-talk was conveyed to be an independent motivational self-management methods only by the study by Schwinger et al. (2007), and professional support and weight management aids only by the weight management study (Hartmann - Boyce, Boylan et al., 2017). Overall, it appears that basic human behavior is theorized to contain similar self-regulatory elements across situations. This might, however, also be due to the lack of consideration for the context in these primarily quantitative studies. I will later compare my findings to these previously done studies and reviews.

Nonetheless, motivational self-management has not been studied empirically to a great degree, and even less so qualitatively or in the work environment. Except for the systematic review of qualitative studies done by Hartmann-Boyce et al. (2017), all of the studies listed above have been quantitative and in the form of questionnaires. The different strategies have been listed, and the participants have rated them in amount of usage. Thus, new strategies have not been unveiled.

Also, the studies on motivational self-management in the work environment either skirt around the topic, such is the case with job-crafting, or are normative and conceptual, as is the research about self-leadership.

The similarity of methods across settings is likely due to the fact that all of the afore-mentioned studies have been grounded in well-known self-regulation theories such as Ajzen's (1988) Theory of Planned Behavior, the models of self-regulation devised by Carver and Scheier (2001), or the Self-Determination Theory (Deci & Ryan, 2000). In my study, I will also use the Self-Determination Theory to guide my data collection and analysis. However, it seems that the similarity of the strategies across disciplines in the previous studies might also be due to the fact that motivational self-management methods have been shared and generalized across settings, but the context has remained superficial. Perhaps using a heavily contextual and qualitative approach in my study will result in self-motivational methods being discovered which are specific to contemporary knowledge-workers.

What is noteworthy is that both job-crafting (Tims, Bakker et al., 2012) and the Self-Leadership Theory (Manz, 1986) are not theories on motivation. They are both grounded in motivation theories such as the Self-Determination Theory ((Deci & Ryan, 2000) and self-regulation theories (Carver & Scheier, 2001), and utilize these theories to help explain how motivation can be fueled in the workplace. However, they do not in themselves offer a framework for exploring motivation.

Thus, in order to be able to understand the meaning behind motivational self-management methods, we need to take a more comprehensive look at motivation from its core. It is important to understand how motivation can take different forms with differing outcomes, and how motivation is elicited and maintained. This I will explore in the next chapter.

## **2.4. How Motivation can be Theorized**

In order to be able to understand the motivational self-management methods I intend to uncover with this study, I will need a motivation theory to guide me in the process. This theory must be holistic enough to take both the individual and the environment into account when explaining

motivation. This is because especially in the organizational environment, the individual is constantly under the influence of both outer and inner forces. In addition, the theory has to be able to differentiate between types of motivation, because for the purpose of this thesis it is not sufficient to merely say that motivation does or does not exist; it is the quality of motivation I feel to be an integral part of the understanding of the motivational self-management methods and processes.

There are many motivational theories, with some of the most notable early ones being Maslow's Hierarchy (1943), Hull's Drive Theory (1943), and Murray's Theory of Psychogenic Needs (1938). Maslow's Hierarchy stipulates that lower order needs (such as food and shelter) must be satisfied before higher-order needs (such as a need for beauty or self-actualization) can be fulfilled (Maslow, 1943). However, Maslow's Hierarchy (1943) does not differentiate between types of motivation. According to the Drive Theory, individuals act to maintain equilibrium (Hull, 1943). If homeostasis is disrupted, there will be a drive to fix it, such as drinking when thirsty. While the drive theory addresses needs at a physiological level, Murray's Theory of Psychogenic Needs addresses them at a psychological level (Murray, 1938). According to Murray (1938), there is an extensive list of psychological needs which drive individuals to act, such as greed, dominance, power, etc. However, neither the Drive Theory nor Murray's Theory of Psychogenic Needs differentiate between types of motivation (Hull, 1943; Murray, 1938). The theories by Murray (1938) and Hull (1943) also appear to focus more on the individual than his/her environment. The aforementioned theories are overarching theories on motivation, and are not specific to the organizational domain. One theory that is work organization-focused is called the job demand-resources model (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007). This motivation theory focuses on how intrinsic motivation can be increased through job design. However, since this theory focuses primarily on job-design, it appears to neglect the individual's social and physical environment. (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007)

To review, all the motivation theories listed above either are not holistic enough to account for both the individual and his/her environment, or do not differentiate between different types of motivation. I believe these factors are crucial in order to properly understand the self-management of motivation. A universal motivation theory called the Self-Determination Theory (Deci & Ryan,

2000), developed by Richard Ryan and Edward Deci and brought to its current form in 2000, does fulfill these aforementioned requirements. This theory is being increasingly used in the field of work and organizational psychology, and it is a motivation theory which I find most appropriate to use in this study.

The Self-Determination Theory seems most suitable for the exploration of the self-management of motivation for several reasons. First of all, this universal theory of human motivation has been developed over several decades and is based on empirical research. The Self-Determination Theory, although not specifically designed for the organizational environment, is unique as it takes both the individual and his/her environment into account when explaining the quality and level of motivation. It can thus be used to explain how the dynamic processes and interplays between the individual's environment and the individual themselves affect the quality of motivation and the resulting adaptive or maladaptive outcomes. (Kinnaefick, Thøgersen-Ntoumani et al., 2014) In other words, the Self-Determination Theory sees the individual as a holistic being under the constant influence of many forces. The Self-Determination Theory takes both the individual and their physical and social environments into account when explaining motivation. It also differentiates between types of motivation according to underlying motives for behavior. Thus, it seems a very suitable framework for guiding the analysis and interpretation of the methods and processes of the self-management of motivation in the contemporary workplace.

The foundation of the Self-Determination Theory (SDT) rests upon the assumption that human beings are active, growth-oriented individuals who are predisposed to engage in interesting and enjoyable activities, to use their capacities fully, and to integrate their experiences in a relative unity. What this means is that we are not seen as passive creatures waiting for disequilibrium before acting, as the drive theory stipulates, but rather we act out of our own will, striving to learn and grow. According to the Self-Determination Theory, motivation can range in both level (i.e. amount) and quality. The different qualities of motivation are divided into amotivation, controlled motivation, and autonomous motivation. (Deci & Ryan, 2000)

The SDT postulates that autonomous and controlled motivation differ in terms of their underlying regulatory processes, and by the experiences that are accompanied by them (Gagné & Deci, 2005).

The difference between controlled and autonomous motivation is not a black-and-white dichotomy. Instead, the degree of autonomous versus controlled motivation can be seen to range along a continuum, with perfectly autonomous motivation on one end, amotivation on the other, and controlled motivation in between. Figure 1 demonstrates this continuum.

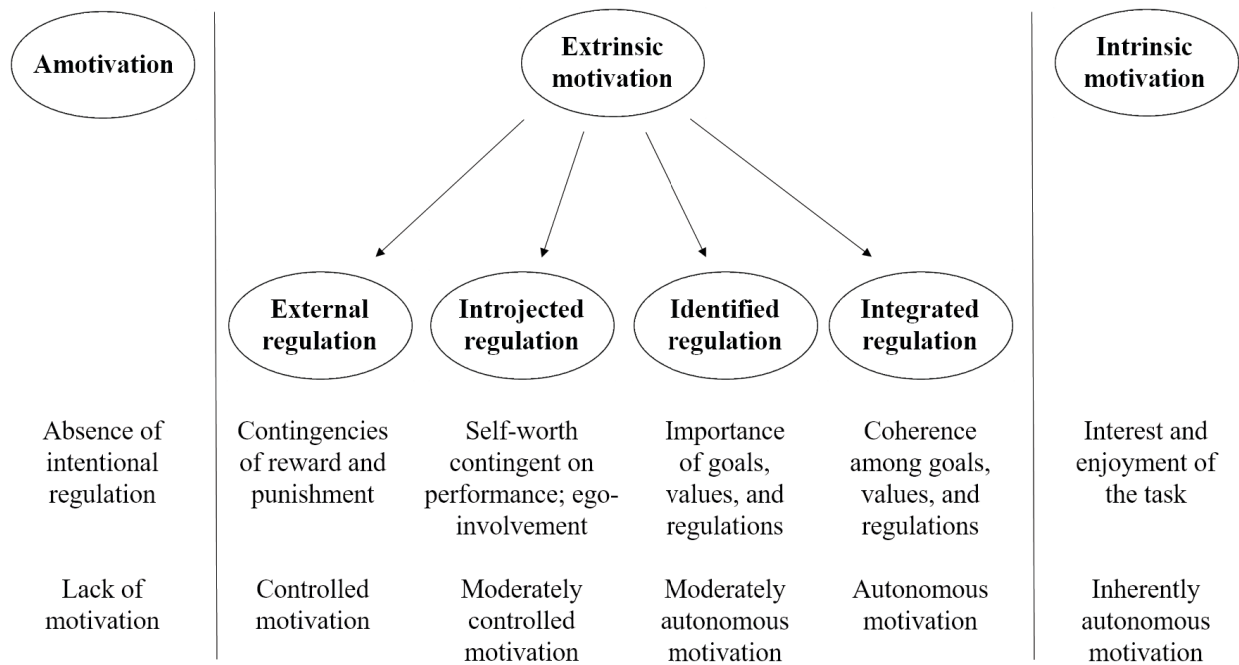


Figure 1. The Self-Determination Continuum (Gagné & Deci, 2005)

Figure 1 shows amotivation, which is not self-determined; the types of extrinsic motivation, which are self-determined to a varying degree; and intrinsic motivation, which is self-determined by nature. Also shown are the degrees to which each type of motivation is autonomous as well as the nature of each type of motivation's regulation (i.e. reason to engage in a task).

In autonomous motivation, a person performs an activity out of volition or choice. Autonomous motivation can be divided into three sub-categories: intrinsic motivation, integrated regulation, and identified regulation. In *intrinsic motivation*, an activity is performed because it is inherently enjoyable or interesting. For example, I train in powerlifting because I thoroughly enjoy doing so. An individual motivated by *integrated regulation* performs an activity because the underlying value of the behavior is entirely in sync with the important values that the individual feels to be an

integral part of his or her self. For example, a child might work hard on homework because he/she feels that doing well at school is an essential part of who he/she is. *Identified regulation*, the least autonomous of these three sub-categories, refers to when an individual performs an activity because he/she accepts and identifies with the underlying behavior or its goals, out of a sense of personal importance. For example, an employee motivated by identified regulation performs a work task because he/she realizes its importance for team performance. To conclude, a person who is autonomously motivated gets satisfaction from the work itself, because it is enjoyable or interesting, or because its goals are perceived as personally important or congruent with one's values, not only from the rewards that can result from it. (Deci & Ryan, 2000)

In controlled motivation, an activity is performed with a sense of pressure or for instrumental reasons. Controlled motivation is divided into introjected regulation and external regulation. *Introjected regulation* occurs when an individual adopts external standards of social approval and self-worth without completely identifying with the goals of the behavior. In other words, external expectations are valued more highly than the actual goals of the task. For example, an employee would make a profit for the company to avoid feeling like a "bad" employee and person, not so that the company would succeed and there would be sufficient work in the future. An individual motivated by introjected regulation might also work overtime or keep answering work emails at home in order to avoid feelings of self-criticism and unworthiness and to achieve a feeling of self-worth. In general, when an individual motivated by introjected regulation is able to meet the adopted standards, he/she feels self-worth and self-esteem. If he/she is unable to reach these standards, self-criticism and other negative feelings result. An individual motivated by *external regulation*, on the other hand, is motivated by threats of punishments or by material and social rewards. This type of behavior is non-self-determined as it is regulated by the social environment. An employee motivated by external regulation might work only with the yearly bonus in mind. (Deci & Ryan, 2000; Gagné & Deci, 2005)

The Self-Determination Theory also states that the three psychological needs of competence, relatedness, and autonomy are essential for the quality of motivation. In other words, these needs must be satisfied in order for motivation to be autonomous. (Deci & Ryan, 2000) According to Deci & Ryan (2000), the need for competence means that one must feel competent in their work,

i.e. the feeling that you know what you are doing. This is best explained through an example from my own life. I enjoy powerlifting, and I could say I am autonomously, perhaps even intrinsically, motivated to do it. One reason I enjoy it so much is that I feel that I am especially good at it, and I advance constantly. The next psychological need, relatedness, is linked to feeling part of a group or otherwise connected to other people in a fulfilling way. To take my example of powerlifting again, this need is fulfilled by me feeling that I am part of the overall powerlifting community and a valid member in the gym. The last psychological need of autonomy relates to the need to feel that you volitionally engage in the activity, that you are in control of what you are doing, and that you can dictate both what you do and how you do it. This can also be explained through my powerlifting example: I decide myself when I go train, what I do while training, and how I do it, within certain constraints and overall guidelines. Most importantly: I train because I choose to train.

Overall, these psychological needs can be found crucial for the autonomous nature of motivation in any activity, both in leisure and work. Van den Broek et al (2016) conducted a meta-analytic review of studies conducted in the organizational environment, and found that psychological growth, internalization, and well-being are incrementally predicted by the fulfillment of the psychological needs of competence, relatedness, and autonomy. In addition, it seems that the quality of motivation gets better (i.e. more autonomous) the more the needs are satisfied (Van den Broeck, Ferris et al., 2016). Overall, there has been great interest in the field of organizational psychology in how the employer/workplace can fuel the autonomous motivation of employees by increasing the fulfillment of the three psychological needs of autonomy, relatedness, and competence (Baard, Deci et al., 2004; Deci, Ryan et al., 2001).

Other studies have also been done on autonomous motivation in the work environment. The focus has been on how autonomous motivation is linked to these three psychological needs, and what outcomes it produces. Gagné et al. (2015) recently conducted an extensive empirical study testing the relationships between different types of motivation in the organizational setting and their cognitive and behavioral outcomes. The researchers developed a Multidimensional Work Motivation Scale from the Self-Determination Theory, which was given to employees in nine countries. The results show that autonomy-supportive work environments, i.e. the organizations



which focus on fulfilling the needs of competence, autonomy, and relatedness of employees, have employees with high levels of autonomous motivation. The results of the study also show that autonomous motivation is positively related to outcomes such as affective commitment, performance, personal initiative, effort, and decreased emotional exhaustion and turnover intentions. Controlled motivation was not positively related to these outcomes. The results interestingly show that identified regulation in some sub-samples was more highly correlated with performance than intrinsic motivation, aligning with Stenius et al. (2016), whose study demonstrated that identified regulation was the best predictor of knowledge sharing in expert work. This suggests that in terms of work performance, internalizing the value of a task might be more beneficial than making the task more fun. (Gagné, Forest et al., 2015)

Other empirical studies have also been performed on the outcomes of autonomous motivation in the organizational environment. Blais and Brière (2002) similarly found that employees acting through autonomous types of motivation tend to have greater job satisfaction, less absenteeism, and better psychological and physical well-being than those acting through controlled motivation (Blais & Brière, 2002). Stenius et al. (2016) also found that autonomous motivation, in particular identified regulation, predicted knowledge-sharing in organizations (Stenius, Hankonen et al., 2016). In summary, there is wide consensus amongst researchers that autonomous motivation results in more positive outcomes than controlled motivation.

The contexts of these previously mentioned studies have, however, remained superficial. Overall, the Self-Determination Theory has been primarily studied in the organizational environment through quantitative empirical tests, perhaps missing aspects a qualitative study could unveil. The study by Gagné et al. (2015) stated only the following demographic characteristics of the participants: language, country, tenure in organization, age, gender, and educational background. The organizations are not described. On the contrary, the study by Stenius et al. (2016) defines the context more precisely as being large public sector expert organizations in Finland and placing the behavior specifically to work meetings. This is, however, rather unusual. Blais and Brière (2002) also describe the context with outer attributes: language, country, and type of employment. The hierarchies, job-designs, roles of management, and other intricate details of the organizations under scrutiny have largely been over-looked. The lack of qualitative studies using SDT in the

organizational environment has perhaps resulted in some missed context-specific findings and over-generalizations. I believe, as do many others, that human action can only be properly understood in context. In this study, I will focus on the context and hopefully produce some valuable and specific results for the knowledge-intensive, team-based organizations under scrutiny.

To get back to the research question, what is important for this thesis is how individuals can overcome declined motivation in general, as is seen in the figure 2 below.



Figure 2. How methods for motivational self-management can overcome declined motivation.

After these motivational self-management methods are discovered, it would be insightful to see if they can be linked to either autonomous or controlled motivation and, conjunctly, whether the techniques used fulfill (or thwart) these three psychological needs, as portrayed in figure 3.

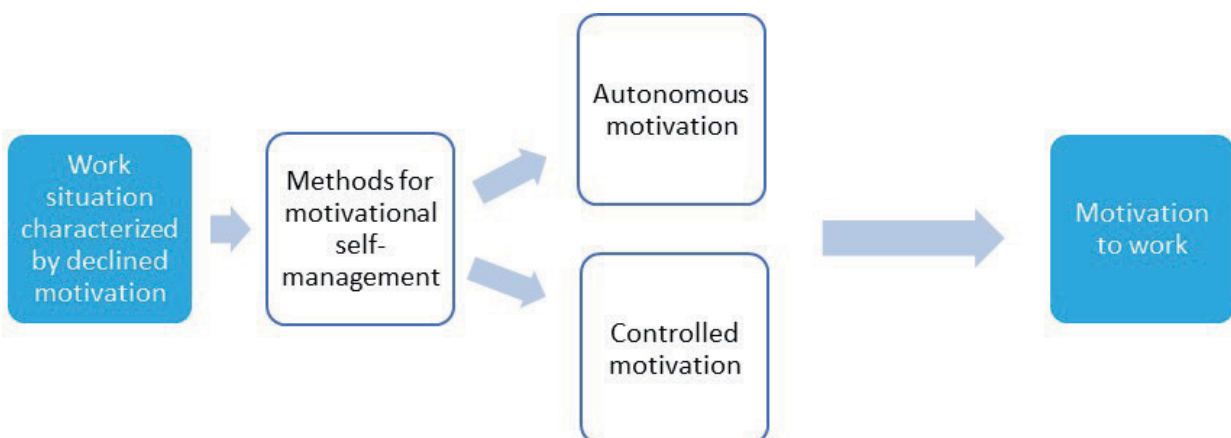


Figure 3. How motivational self-management methods can result in either autonomous or controlled motivation

There are various reasons for why it is important to use a motivation theory such as the Self-Determination Theory for answering the research questions at hand. Firstly, it would be fruitless to merely capture the methods and processes that employees use to manage their motivation without understanding the meaning and especially the potential impact of these practices. As has been widely studied, autonomous motivation is linked to various positive outcomes such as individual well-being and increased productivity, while controlled motivation has been linked to negative outcomes (Blais & Brière, 2002; Gagné, Forest et al., 2015; Stenius, Hankonen et al., 2016). For example, an employee using only controlled ways of motivating oneself (such as completing a task only in order to not appear worse than his/her colleague, or prizing himself or herself with a can of beer after a hard day's work) can ring warning bells; controlled motivation, particularly introjected regulation, has been correlated with workaholism and burnout (Mudrack & Burke, 2006). On the other hand, according to Gagné and Deci (2005), an employee who completes a task because they conceive the work to be meaningful to his/her personal development can be seen to be less at risk of negative outcomes. Furthermore, the quality of work and productivity is often influenced by the quality of motivation (Gagné & Deci, 2005). Thus, being able to link these motivational self-management methods to autonomous and/or controlled motivation via the Self-Determination Theory will allow me to analyze the cognitive behaviors and potential impact of these methods.

Hence, the Self-Determination Theory, with its different types of motivation and their respective outcomes, makes it possible to understand the meaning and impact of the motivational self-management methods and processes I am studying. In other words, the Self-Determination Theory allows for the motivational self-management methods to be categorized into those more beneficial to the well-being and productivity of the individual (i.e. linkage to autonomous motivations) and those less beneficial for the well-being and productivity of the individual (i.e. linkage to controlled motivation).

In addition, processes and experiences are best understood within theoretical frameworks, such as SDT. Theory and practice are linked, and thus one cannot be understood without the other. The Self-Determination Theory has been shown to be very relevant to understanding behavioral patterns, especially in the physical activity domain. (Kinnaefick, Thøgersen-Ntoumani et al., 2014)

The theory's ability to link the environment and the individual in the understanding of motivation makes it also appear very suitable for use in the organizational environment. Thus, in this thesis I will be using the Self-Determination Theory as a framework upon which to reflect and understand the behavioral patterns of the self-management of motivation of the individuals I study.

Now that we have accumulated a foundation of theoretical and empirical knowledge about motivation and its management, it is now time to move on to the study at hand. In the next chapter I will explain the methodology associated with exploring how individuals in self-directed work teams manage their motivation to work.

### 3. METHODOLOGY

This methodology chapter will start with restating my research questions. I then move on to explaining my epistemological views and the general approaches I take to researching this topic. Next, I explain in detail how the data collection will take place, and how the findings will be analyzed.

To recap, my research questions are as follows:

- How do employees in self-directed work teams in a Finnish SME manage their motivation to work?
- How are these methods linked to either autonomous or controlled motivation?

I will be using a critical realist approach to theorize motivations, experience, and meaning of this topic. In general, I am in agreement with Maxwell (2012) in that entities exist, independently of being perceived and of our theories about them. I also believe that theories refer to real features of the world. (Maxwell, 2012) In terms of the research question at hand, I believe that the methods and processes for the self-management of motivation actually exist, and my role is to explore and identify what they are and thus how motivation is managed. Thus, I also plan to use the Self-Determination Theory to explain my findings as I believe that this theory refers to real features in the world. The critical realist approach is in line with other qualitative studies using the Self-Determination Theory (Kinnaefick, Thøgersen-Ntoumani et al., 2014; Moran, Russinova et al., 2014).

Although I believe that there is a truth that exists independently of our perception of it, my worldview is not as objective as positivism. Rather, I believe that there is a truth that exists, but there are also many perspectives of it. Thus, in line with the thoughts of Maxwell (2012), I do not agree that it is possible to attain an objective or certain knowledge of the world, as phenomena can be explained in alternative but nonetheless valid ways. Theories are grounded in a certain worldviews and perspectives, and hence all knowledge is incomplete, partial and imperfect. (Maxwell, 2012) This is why I believe a qualitative approach is so useful in exploring the self-management of motivation, as it allows for different perspectives to be voiced, and through a

conversation a mutual understanding to hopefully be met. In addition, I acknowledge from the beginning that I am not objective in analyzing my findings. I am subjective in both my data collection and in analyzing my findings, as I will do both from my own worldview and perspective. This might impact what I am most partial to or concerned with in terms of the data collection and analysis. In other words, my point of view or standing is reflected in the analysis in a way that the motivational self-management methods that I use in my daily life, such as achieving a sense of control or seeking out positive feelings, are particularly pronounced.

I have chosen a qualitative approach for studying how individuals manage their motivation to work. This is because investigating the underlying psychological mechanisms governing the self-management of motivation requires a contextual and holistic understanding of human behavior. These methods and processes are influenced by a myriad of factors, such as the environmental setting and the personality of the individual. Sometimes these motivational strategies are not even consciously known by the individual, or they may be dynamic in nature and prone to fluctuations. Because of the aforementioned reasons, a quantitative study would likely yield only superficial, typically static results. Hence, a qualitative method seems most suitable for this study as it answers questions of why or how a phenomenon occurs better than quantitative research methods (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994). The goal of this thesis is to understand and identify the varying methods and processes associated with the self-management of motivation. Both changes and processes can be seen to be best captured via qualitative methods (Kinnafick, Thøgersen-Ntoumani et al., 2014). Due to the typical characteristics of qualitative research and the research questions at hand, I believe a qualitative approach works best for this study.

In addition to the aforementioned reasons, there are also other factors which caused me to choose a qualitative approach to this study. The self-management of motivation has not been researched to a great degree quantitatively nor qualitatively. Ghauri and Grøhaug (2005), authors of a research methods book for business studies, state that when prior insights on an issue under scrutiny are modest, as is the case with self-management of motivation, qualitative research is particularly relevant (Ghauri & Grønhaug, 2005). The few studies that have been done in the field of motivational management have been pre-dominantly quantitative. The qualitative approach has the potential to uncover something that the quantitative approach cannot capture, or to provide a

better understanding of issues that have remained unclear in quantitative studies. An open-ended, exploratory approach without pre-determined confines would make it possible to reveal something new and previously undiscovered.

### **3.1. Case Study Approach**

I will implement a case study approach to this study. More specifically, the nature of the case study will be an extensive multiple case study. According to Eriksson and Koistinen (2014), an extensive case study is used to study certain phenomena and to look for common properties or patterns across cases. The goal is to add something new to existing theory or models, or to develop new theoretical concepts or ideas. The focus of an extensive case study is more on theoretical concepts than understanding the inner world and perspectives of the individuals in the cases. (Eriksson & Koistinen, 2014) Studying and understanding the self-management of motivation methods of individuals is best done as an extensive multiple case study; in effect as many “mini-cases” as Eriksson & Koistinen (2014) describe. This way, the phenomenon of self-management of motivation can be widely explored and common properties (i.e. motivational self-management methods of individuals) between cases can be analyzed. Furthermore, theory on the use of motivational self-management methods in the contemporary work environment can be built and elaborated upon (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2015). This is much needed, as there are many gaps in this field of research. Thus, the extensive case study seems most appropriate for exploring these methods and processes.

In line with the typical number of cases used in extensive case studies (Eisenhardt, 1989), I have framed this study to include eight team-members of one self-directed work team within a Finnish SME in the knowledge-intensive sector. Thus, the case context will be the self-directed team, and the unit of analysis (i.e. cases) will be the individuals within the team. The individuals in this team can be seen as cases as they all have their own inner worlds, perspectives, and hence their own distinct ways of self-managing motivation. I selected these cases because they allow me to explore and understand how different individuals use self-management of motivation processes and techniques in the same environment and setting. Perhaps through first understanding how these particular cases function, it will be easier to extend this field of research to other knowledge

workers in the future. Although in this study I am more focusing on richness of findings than generalizations, I believe the findings from the individuals of this one team could provide a direction for further research.

In addition, the extensive case study -approach I will be using is descriptive instead of explanatory. According to Eriksson and Koistinen (2014), a descriptive case study is used to provide a thick and multidimensional description or story of a case. This does not mean that my goal is to provide a general account of the self-motivation methods of individuals in my case team. Instead, I will link the description to previous literature and theory and use my findings to elaborate theory, particularly in terms of the Self-Determination Theory. The goal of this study, however, is not to explore *why* individuals use particular methods to manage their motivation, but rather describe *how* they use these methods.

I am focusing on exploring the phenomenon of motivational self-management through an extensive multiple case study -approach, which of course has the disadvantage that I cannot elaborate upon the individual cases in as much detail as in an intensive case study (Eriksson & Koistinen, 2014). Eriksson and Koistinen (2014) explain that the extensive case study approach has been criticized as oversimplifying, context-overlooking, and resulting in mechanical analysis. I will overcome these factors by paying close attention to keeping the empirical data and analysis contextual, and in not drawing unjustified conclusions. As most previous research on motivational self-management methods has been quantitative and context has been only briefly mentioned, I believe focusing on context could yield something previously undiscovered. Thus, in this thesis I will focus on context and theory-building, and approaching the topic as an extensive case study seems appropriate.

The case context is a self-directed work team called “Solution Delivery” in an SME in the knowledge-intensive sector in Helsinki. This company provides energy management technology for the maritime industry and was founded in Finland. It has offices around the world including major harbor cities such as Singapore, London, and Miami, and naturally its official corporate language is English. The company currently has around 100 employees in different roles varying from data analysts to salesmen and mathematicians.



What is especially interesting is the way the company is managed. I conducted an interview with the human resource director of this company in the fall of 2015 for a “Strategic Human Resource Management” – course at Aalto University. For now, I will call the HR director by the pseudonym Anna. According to Anna (2015), the company management has some general guidelines from which they do not deter. She told me that first and foremost, the employees must feel that they are not in danger of being fired or treated unfairly. They must also feel that they belong to a group and that they are respected by their colleagues and superiors. The employees must have a chance to develop themselves or advance in their careers, and they should also feel that they are doing meaningful work. Anna (2015) stated that the company management can fulfill the needs of employees by implementing extensive information and knowledge –sharing platforms, encouraging job-crafting, providing fair treatment for all personnel, and creating an organizational atmosphere where the feeling of belongingness is maximized. Clearly, the Self-Determination Theory would call the organization autonomy-supportive.

According to the human resource director (2015), employees are assigned to tasks according to their know-how and interest. The employees doing similar tasks form an informal team, and together they meet and discuss what each has been doing. One person in this team is usually in charge of communicating to the rest of the company, but this role is also mutually decided. The teams themselves can be thought of as onion-like: there is a core team, which belongs to a bigger team which, in turn, belongs to an even larger team, such as a department. Thus, the employees conduct self-directed work and function in self-directed teams. Informality and flexibility are key ways of functioning. (Human Resource Director, 2015)

In terms of hierarchy, Anna (2015) sees that the organizational triangle where management is placed at the top and the workforce at the bottom has turned upside-down during recent years. What this means in practice is that employees and their know-how is viewed as the most important resource of the company. The role of the management team is to support and give feedback to employees and to provide the best possible tools for the work. Thus, this case company has implemented the contemporary job-design changes I discussed previously: more autonomy and flexibility for employees, and the shifting of top-bottom control to bottom-top sovereignty

(Hornung, Rousseau et al., 2010). The new role of management in this company is shown in the figure 4 below.

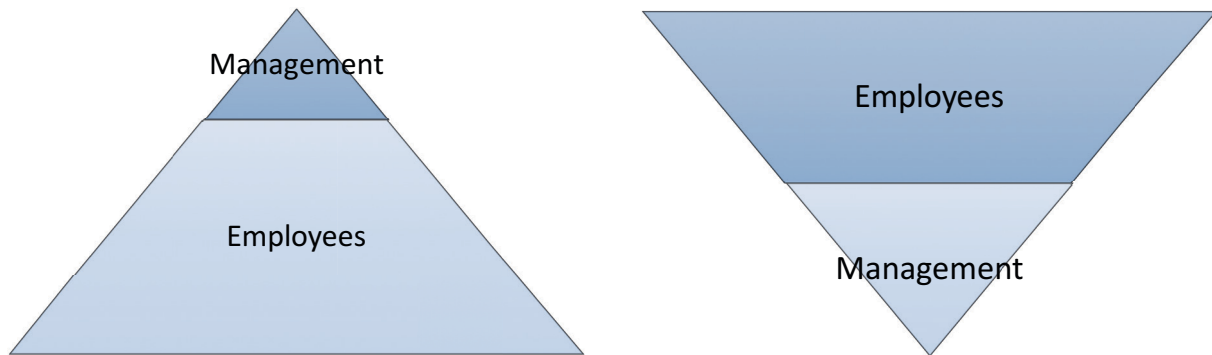


Figure 4. The new role of management

These employees have a lot of autonomy to decide how they work, and also plenty of responsibility for managing their own motivation. Thus, this company offers the perfect case environment to study how this form of job design influences the self-management of motivation.

### **3.2. Data Collection**

I chose to acquire data primarily through interviews because it allows for the exploration of the deeply cognitive and personal phenomenon of self-management of motivation. My research question is best answered through one-on-one interviews. This is because it is a personal and potentially sensitive topic, which an outsider cannot witness. I also wrote down brief ethnographic observations when I was in the case company, recording the overall work atmosphere.

I interviewed eight knowledge-workers at the end of April, 2017. These employees were all from the same self-directed work team called “Solution Delivery” in the operations-sector of the company. I chose this particular team because they are a very representative self-directed work team and all team members have some degree of routine work. The team consists of a team leader,

eight team-members physically in Finland, and a few members in London. I interviewed the team leader and seven team-members, all of who are physically in Finland. This allowed me to compare how different individuals act in the same context, how the sanctions/rewards of the organization guide these individuals, and whether and how individuals in the same context find different ways to manage their work motivation.

The group of interviewees can be considered heterogeneous, as all team-members work in different tasks in self-directed ways, and the team consists of men and women of different ages and ethnicities. The flat hierarchy permits (and forces) them to autonomously decide how to do their work. The interviewees ranged from project managers to systems engineers to data scientists; all had their own area of expertise. I viewed this heterogeneity as a positive aspect, as it allowed me to uncover a wide array of motivational self-management methods of individuals working in the same context. Despite the heterogeneity in work tasks, the interviewees nonetheless sit at the same table, work together towards a common goal, and have a formal meeting once a week to discuss what each has been doing. In addition, the team leader acts as a coordinator, bringing everyone together and taking care of communication.

I chose to conduct eight interviews as it seemed an adequate amount to find patterns, similarities, and differences in the self-management of motivation in a pre-confined context. In addition, the team that I was interviewing only had nine members physically in Finland. One team-member was not available for interviews. Doing interviews from other teams or from team-members from a different country would have caused the results to not be an accurate representation of the motivational self-management methods of the particular team I used in my case study.

The company's human resource director, who I have worked with previously, granted me access to the organization by contacting the COO on my behalf. After I had gotten their blessing, they suggested a few teams I could do the interviews in. I then myself contacted the team leader of one of these teams, and he agreed to introduce my thesis topic to the team-members at the weekly meeting. After my topic had been introduced, I was able to directly contact the team-members. This whole process of planning the interviews took about two weeks. Fortunately, the team members seemed very keen on participating in the interviews, and after I had contacted them

directly the process sped up considerably. I ended up doing all of the interviews within a one-week period, as this was most practical for the interviewees. It also allowed me to get a glimpse of the motivational self-management methods of all the individuals at one particular point in time.

I chose a semi-structured interview approach as it makes it possible to systematically compare interviews, while at the same time remaining flexible and not restricting answers (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2015). In addition, I, the interviewer, made use of cues and prompts to help and direct the interviewee into the research topic area in order to be able to gather more in-depth or detailed data (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994). Rather than keeping myself neutral or uninvolved, I took on the role of an active interviewer, as coined by Holstein and Gubrium (1997). As it is never possible to derive perfectly untarnished answers as the interview session is a dialogue between two people, I used this to my advantage and intentionally set the general parameters and activated the narrative production by provoking responses (Holstein & Gubrium, 1997). This is not to say that I led the interviewees to certain answers – I merely actively guided the conversation, prompting to explore and explain, in order to derive more meaningful answers in respect to the research question. In practice, I asked follow-up questions when relevant themes arose, changed topic when the conversation was going in the “wrong” direction, and balanced the use of direct and indirect questions in order to get to the core of the issue. These aspects are very important when identifying motivational self-management methods, as these methods are often not transparent or even consciously known to the interviewee. A thorough, relaxed conversation with appropriate follow-up questions was required to shed light on these techniques.

Each individual interview lasted between 20 and 60 minutes. The length depended greatly on how adept the individuals were at reflecting on their own work habits; those with a greater proficiency at self-reflection had the shortest interviews, as we were able to get to the core of the issue quickly. I conducted the interviews in the meeting rooms of the case company, as they offered a quiet, fairly neutral atmosphere. The interviews were all in English, as the company is very multicultural and has English as the official corporate language. In addition, the team that I interviewed had three non-Finnish members.

In terms of the interview structure, I began with general questions on the nature of the interviewee's work and how it is structured in terms of the work day and work week. I then asked the interviewees whether they ever feel a lack of motivation, and then proceeded to asking them to describe common situations or work tasks where they feel this, and how they would overcome the lack of motivation in these situations. When making the interview template, I was first tempted to provide the interviewees with situations where one would normally feel a lack of motivation (such as a particularly tedious task), but I later found this too leading. Thus, I rather asked the interviewees to explain work tasks and situations of their own, in order to keep the uncovered methods and processes as genuine as possible. I primarily took a factual approach to the interviews, meaning that I used the conversations as a way to uncover empirical data that answers my research question. The semi-structured interviews were recorded and manually transcribed word-for-word.

A possible challenge with the interviews was the fact that I was asking about a cognitive, possibly subconscious phenomenon that the interviewees have not necessarily thought of previously. Thus, the success of the interviews depended greatly on how proficient the interviewees were at self-reflection, and there is indeed a great difference between individuals in their ability to do this. To overcome this challenge, I assisted the interviewees in thinking about their work habits by asking enough follow-up questions and guiding the conversation until we were at the core of the issue. Thus, I believe every interview offered valuable insight into the self-management of motivation processes and methods, although some interviews offered a more elaborate description than others.

### **3.3. Ethical Considerations**

While this research topic may not be deemed the most sensitive phenomenon to study, it is nonetheless deeply personal. This is why it was especially important for me to ensure that the interviewees wanted to do the interview and have consented to it themselves, instead of being coerced into it by the human resource director or the team leader.

When exploring how lack of motivation is overcome, I had the potential to stumble across some sensitive issues concerned with how the interviewee feels about his/her work, and how prevalent the lack of motivation is. Feelings of shame or embarrassment could also possibly result from

speaking about a personal issue. Thus, I took this into account when conducting the interviews and doing the analysis. It was important to ensure total confidentiality throughout, especially since the organization is quite small and informal. My relationship to the company is also personal and this is known to most of its employees: My partner is currently working there, and I see the human resource director on a regular basis outside of work. Thus, I had to convince the interviewees that everything they tell me will stay between us. I did my best to establish trust by being open about myself and my role, as well as welcoming questions directed at me. This hopefully resulted in honest and genuine responses from the interviewees. I also tried to take the role as a learner instead of an academic expert in order to create a more relaxed atmosphere.

While I took a factual approach to both the data collection and analysis, I recognize that my interpretations play a large role in what data I perceive to be a fact or knowledge, and how I analyze it. The interview is an interactional setting where the interviewees can be seen as active subjects. They do not create meaning alone, but in an interaction with the researcher, who further interprets the findings. (Hirsjärvi, Remes et al., 1997) Meaning is created together between me and the interviewee, but I am the one who makes the ultimate decisions on how to code the data, and what I think is important and relevant. Thus, I had to pay careful attention to consistently and systematically handling the data throughout the research process, and also to recognize the subjectivity of my analysis.

### **3.4. Data Analysis**

I aimed at starting to manually transcribe the interviews within a couple weeks of them taking place, in order to have the issues fresh in mind. The filler words and such were left out, as they were not relevant in terms of my research question. Although I started pre-analyzing after each interview, the more systematic analysis started only after all of the interviews had been transcribed.

I used thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) to identify processes and methods of self-management of motivation in the interviews. This analysis tool can be used to identify, examine, and report patterns (“themes”) within data. These themes, according to Braun and Clarke (2006), are not necessarily the topics that are the most prevalent or take up the most interview time, but

rather the ones that I feel are the most relevant in terms of my research questions. Thus, the themes I looked for were the methods and processes associated with the self-management of motivation in this particular context. My goal was to understand the researched topic from a desired point of view and specific context (i.e. this particular team and company) instead of making statistical generalizations.

The themes I looked for in the interviews had to be both connected to theory and have an empirical representation in the data in order to be meaningful (Hirsjärvi & Hurme, 2008). To help in the analysis process, I used the theoretical framework provided by the Self-Determination Theory to interpret the data. While I believe that theory is an important foundation for understanding how and why behavior occurs, at the same time I recognize the importance of the interpretive nature of understanding behavior. However, for the most part the analysis was theory-driven. In addition, the extensive multiple case study –approach to this study allowed me to analyze the findings cumulatively. In other words, each new case cumulatively added to my understanding of the motivational self-management methods of the individuals in this self-directed work team. (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2015)

In terms of the systematic analysis, I started off with descriptively coding the data with the various methods or processes of motivational self-management as a focal point. I then sorted the codes into categories, and then into broader themes, something that is common to a critical realist approach (Maxwell, 2012). Finally, I explored how these uncovered themes, i.e. the methods and processes, are linked to autonomous and controlled motivation. I also analyzed these methods and processes in light of the Self-Determination Theory, and compared them to previous literature. In short, I wanted to find out how these individuals in self-directed work teams manage their motivation to work, how these different methods and processes can be interpreted by the Self-Determination Theory, and how similar these methods and processes are to those found in previous studies in other settings.

Using a heavily contextual, qualitative study to uncover motivational self-management methods in contemporary knowledge-workers not only contributes relevantly to existing literature and theories, but also potentially provides an understanding of human behavior and motivation that

previous quantitative studies have been unable to do. The extensive multiple case study –approach of this study with its semi-structured interviews delved into a specific context and its people, and the thematic analysis was a flexible tool for organizing and describing the findings. Using the framework offered by the Self-Determination Theory helped me provide meaning to the methods and processes associated with the self-management of motivation, and thus furthered the understanding of their potential outcomes. Next, I will elaborate on the findings of this study.



## 4. FINDINGS

In this chapter, I will first present some ethnographic notes of the general ambiance and setting of the organization and case team. In the same section I will use the findings from the interviews to describe the team in more detail. Afterwards, I will present the motivational self-management methods and processes that the interviews unveiled, finishing with a summary of the findings.

### 4.1. The Solution-Delivery Team

When I walked into the case company at the end of April 2017, my first impression was that of relaxed professionalism and an impeccable sense of interior decorating. The office-space is wide and open, and it is decorated in an industrial sort of way with Finnish design elements. There is lots of wood, metal, and glass. The central element is an open kitchen space with a wooden table-island in the center. The layout is open-office, but all tables are situated near the windows. Teams sit around the same table, and they seem to be continuously calling over or asking something from a person sitting at the same table complex. All of the desks are decorated and adjusted differently. In this modern, chic environment, it is somewhat of a surprise to see Koff-cans on almost half of the desks. Later, I find out that the company actually has a beer-fridge which can be opened after 2pm on Fridays. It seems accepted to be a bit playful here.

The people seem relaxed, and are either engrossed in work or chatting happily with the people sitting next to or across from them. There is a happy, serene feeling; there are lots of smiles. Everyone seems to be doing their own thing. Coats are scattered all over the place, coke bottles sit on tables, and some rock music is playing softly at one table. Chatter can be heard in Finnish, English, and Swedish. The employees are also diverse, ranging from twenty to sixty years of age, male and female, and of multiple different ethnicities. Some are wearing hoodies, others are in suit shirts.

The solution-delivery team I will be interviewing is strewn across a clutter of desks. The team consists of four project managers, two data engineers, a systems engineer, and a team leader. I asked the team-members to shortly describe the different work roles. Tarja, a project manager,

explains her job as follows: *“In short my job is to oversee and coordinate our delivery projects from when our sales manager has sold something and we have a hand-over, up until our system onboard gets activated.”* The data engineers, as put nicely by Jari, are *“--doing anything related to data and models.”* The role of the systems engineer, on the other hand, is a bit narrower. From an interview with Max, it became clear that the systems engineer takes over the installations after the hardware is installed onboard: doing all the configurations, making sure the data is in order for modeling purposes, etc. When a model is onboard the vessel and it is activating solutions, the systems engineer also acts as customer support.

In other words, the role of the solution-delivery team is to get the solution, i.e. the fuel-saving system designed by the company, delivered to the customer. When the solution is delivered and installed onboard the vessel, the responsibility shifts to the lifecycle-team, which physically sits right next to the solution-delivery team in the office. In general, the team-members of the solution-delivery team have their own area of responsibility as Matti, a project manager, describes it:

*“We have basically different customers, so vessel owners and charterers. Currently there’s really no other specific way of dividing the work other than according to owners. For example myself, I have certain customers and they have a set of vessels and if they order more projects to new vessels then it is coming to me.”* Matti

However, the main idea of the solution-delivery team is to have the solution delivered to the customer as seamlessly as possible. Thus, the members of the team have been chosen so that their skills complement each other, and so that they can offer each other support and help. Jari explains this as follows: *“The second part is helping the team if there is some problem that is related to data, data quality or basically models.”*

The team leader, Ben, is in charge of reporting the team’s position to the chief operating officer. Thus, the organization is two-tier in terms of hierarchy: the team heads communicate directly to the management level. The team leader describes his position in the following manner: *“I’m trying to manage that the deliveries are done on time and according to certain criteria and we also make*

*sure that we recognize the revenues so the financial part. There's of course also administrative tasks related to the subordinates like holidays and those kind of things.” (Ben)*

When asked to describe the team leader's role, Tarja remarks that *“I think he provides support when needed. I think what's really great here is that you have your own responsibility and no one is stalking you or micro-managing. I feel like I'm getting support from (Ben) whenever I need it. So if there are any problems or issues or support is needed, I go to him.”* There was also a slightly different picture of the team-leader from another team-member, Max, who is of the opinion that their team is clearly not a democracy, but that usually issues can be reasonably discussed with the team leader with different points of views being shared and explained. Max comments that there is usually a good understanding of the other's point of view in the team. This does not mean that Max's ideas or ways of thinking are always correct or get approved, but at least no one is saying *“I don't care what you think”*. In other words, it seems that communication within the team is open and non-hierarchical. All in all, Max would describe the team as follows:

*“Well I would say the team leader is clearly the leader and it's well defined. (Ben) is leading the team and if there is a decision it's on him. Otherwise in this team I don't see much of a hierarchy. It's not that I would have the feeling that the project managers would stay on a different level or the technical manager or the data modeler would be on a different level. But mostly it is everyone working together in the team and not that everyone is working for someone else.” Max*

Thus, it appears that the team is a very typical self-directed work team as described by Bishop & Scott (2000), i.e. a team comprised of individuals with different talents and skills working together towards a common goal without typical managerial supervision. There is a clear team leader, but his role is primarily to guide, offer support, and handle administrative tasks. All of the members of the team work towards a common goal: to have a solution successfully delivered to the customer. The team members have different skills and roles, but these attributes complement each other and together help to achieve the team's goal.

The team is autonomous and self-directed, and thus everyone has the responsibility of managing their own motivation on a daily basis. There is no micro-management or scrutiny by management,

and the project-type of work also offers its challenges with its abstract nature. The company atmosphere is relaxed and informal, offering the employees a chance to manage their motivation according to their own needs. There is no need to conform to a certain mold. As Sonja puts it: *“everyone is appropriately weird”*.

In the following section I will present the motivational self-management methods and processes that the individuals in this team commonly use. The range of methods is diverse, just as the range of people in this team.

## **4.2. Motivational Self-Management Methods and Processes**

*“So it’s the typical cycle when you start in a company and in a job and in the beginning everything is exciting, everything is new, you get to learn about all this cool stuff, and so on. It’s great. At some point it starts getting a bit annoying, you know your stuff. There’s not so many new things anymore. You figure out where all the issues are. At this point the snow has melted and you see all the shit on the ground.”* Max

The above quote from an interview with a team-member is a good portrayal of why motivational self-management methods are needed at work, especially when one is not fresh to the job. After the initial excitement has worn off, managing one’s motivation starts to become a crucial issue for the continued enjoyment of the job, and for not changing organizations in search of something exciting and new.

Next I will describe the motivational self-management methods and processes that I uncovered from the interviews, particularly in terms of prevalent themes. I will also analyze these motivational self-management methods and processes with the framework provided by the Self-Determination Theory, and categorize them into autonomous and/or controlled motivation. The themes are presented in the following order: sense of control, focusing on the positive, creating pressure from within, the role of rewards, seeking out positive feelings, avoiding negative feelings, and team-dependency. After presenting the themes and the motivational self-management methods and processes associated with them, I will summarize my findings.

#### 4.2.1. Sense of Control

Achieving a sense of control was a theme that came up many times during the interviews. This included feeling in control of the work itself and of the environment it is done in. Many different methods were used to deal with what many called “chaos management”, the daily life of project work in a self-directed work team. These methods can also be seen to be ways of managing one’s motivation in order to not get demotivated by the chaotic project work. The methods can be divided into organization of work, environmental control, and scheduling by disposition.

##### **Organization of work**

A sense of control seemed to be important for each interviewee, and it seemed to be achieved primarily through the organization of work. Every interviewee said that they started the day by checking their emails. When asked why this was, a typical response was *“It might be that it’s some sort of control thing. You want to read all the emails that you have.”* (Jari) It seems that chaos was managed through creating the feeling that one was in control of information streams, for example through reading all emails.

Being organized played a big role in the daily lives of the interviewees. To-do lists, email rules, folder structures, project management tools, and Excel files were mentioned by every interviewee as ways to manage the chaos. As explained by Tim: *“I like being structured. In many ways. I’ve structured my folders, my emails, and everything so it’s easy for me to find things and everything is where it should be.”* It appeared that motivation was managed through knowing at any moment in time what one should be doing and being on top of things in general.

*“-- at some point it might happen that you have so many small tasks that are scattered and then I put them in a list and maybe even writing down all the things helps to organize them in my mind and then I can kind of pick them out.”* Tiina

*“I know what the tasks are, I know when I need to do things. I rely a lot on emails, we have a file system. I get a lot of help in knowing what I need to do. I know my tasks at any given time. Of course it’s not always the same, it changes. Not one project is the same as another, which is nice.”*

*I like that. So I know my tasks because we have these systems and I know the process very well by now.”* Sonja

When asked why the team-members wanted to keep their work organized, there were various responses, such as “*--it still feels chaotic and I create these systems to try to organize it.*” (Tiina) and “*Maybe I get a feeling of control.*” (Ben). Matti stated that otherwise there would be utter chaos and nothing would work. Tim said that he has been doing this type of work for ten years, and he has learned that things are a mess if they are not organized. From experience Tim has learned a way of organizing his work that functions for him.

The interviewees actively organized, put in place structures and rules, and established a specific order to do tasks in in order to create and sustain a sense of control over chaos; so that they could get their work done effectively. In other words, it seems that keeping work organized was a way to prevent feelings of messiness, chaos, and a feeling of no control. These feelings can be seen to influence work motivation negatively, and so preventing these feelings from arising is a way to manage and sustain motivation.

### **Environmental control**

Another way of managing chaos and being in control was achieved through environmental control. This occurred mostly through working remotely to make it easier to concentrate, or through making the office environment easier to concentrate in. While most interviewees preferred to do remote work in order to avoid distractions and interruptions, one interviewee had an opposing view: “*When I’m here (at the office) I’m away from everything I could be doing, so it’s safer.*” (Sonja) In other words, for her the interruptions came from the distractions at home. Thus, the most efficient environment in terms of concentration differed between interviewees, and required a degree of self-reflection to be known. Nonetheless, nearly all the interviewees had some ways of implementing environmental control to improve concentration and thus manage motivation. Most often this happened through remote work.

*“So actually if I want to make sure that I have time to do some tasks or some things that require me to concentrate I try to work remotely to make sure that I’m not interrupted -- The environment makes it easier to work on the task. Not getting distracted and being able to concentrate better.”*

Ben

*“--what I often find at home is that you have no interruptions. Often in the office it’s very hectic, there’s a lot of noise in the open office and sometimes it’s difficult to be able to concentrate. -- good to work remotely sometimes because it is quiet and you get more things done.”* Tarja

In addition to working remotely, there were also other ways of environmental control. These were involved with making the office environment easier to concentrate in. Tim remarked that having music in the background helped him to “zone out” and concentrate better. Matti, on the other hand, kept his desk very neat and uncluttered, as otherwise he would feel overwhelmed by the amount of paraphernalia. Jari had a peculiar way of controlling his environment. He would avoid visual distractions by positioning his monitors to block his view, and simultaneously lie on his desk to avoid being seen by or seeing others. In addition, Jari used headphones to help ignore other noises. There were various ways of enacting environmental control, and some of the team-members went to greater lengths than others in doing so.

The interviewees actively deployed an array of individual means to manage distractions, disturbances, and interruptions in order to create and sustain a sense of control over chaos. Both organization of work and environmental control assisted in managing chaos through achieving a feeling of control. These methods can also be seen to be forms of self-management of motivation, more precisely ways to manage motivation in a way to ensure that the motivation stays at a certain level and to prevent amotivation from occurring. This can be explained in the following way. Motivation is defined as ‘forces that energize and direct goal-directed activities’ (Reeve, 2005). A sense of chaos can be reasonably thought to undermine a sense of direction, but it could also be thought to overwhelm rather than energize a person. Thus, amotivation is kept at bay through organization of work and environmental control.

A sense of control is closely related to a sense of competence. In the Self-Determination Theory competence refers to a basic need to feel mastery: a feeling that one is capable, operates effectively and successfully, is able to accomplish. Hence, fostering a sense of control enables mastery, and is, in the SDT frame of reference, an underlying element of motivation. (Deci & Ryan, 2000) Thus, it could be seen that achieving a sense of control through the organization of work and environmental control not only keeps amotivation at bay, but also fosters autonomous motivation through feelings of competence and mastery.

### **Scheduling by disposition**

In addition to achieving a sense of control through the management of the environment and work tasks, another method for managing motivation was matching work with one's mood, energy levels, or general setting. In other words, scheduling tasks according to one's current disposition was a prevalent theme in the interviews. This can be seen to be a flexible and dynamic way of managing motivation.

One way this occurred was by taking up easier tasks or having more breaks when energy levels were low. For example, if Max is exhausted from issues at home, he schedules tasks to match his mood in the following manner: *"If there's something that I don't like to do then especially when I'm having some lack of motivation at the moment I'm pushing it a bit back and doing something better first. -- Once in a while you also need some work so that you can just do something but you don't want to think about anything. You simply want to drop your brain at the wardrobe and pick it up after work."*

There were also many cases of people not scheduling difficult work or meetings for the mornings, as they know they are not "morning-people". Tim admits that he is *"not really productive at work the first hour anyway."* It appeared that the team-members could self-reflect to such a degree that they proactively avoided tasks when they knew their energy levels would be low.

There were also cases where high energy levels caused more work to be taken up. For example, Sonja describes it as follows: *"Usually when the day comes to an end I'm like "what is it that I*



*still must do?” And a bunch of things come to my mind and I’m quite productive in the last three hours. – I’m in the mood and I have all this energy because I’ve had lunch but it’s settled already. I will get to go home in some hours.”*

On the other hand, work tasks were also scheduled according to the environment. Tim does the work that he needs other people for in the middle of the day and then when everybody else goes home, he has a few hours of calm before he finishes the day. Accordingly, Ben says that when he has a task which requires concentration he chooses a quiet time to do the work: “--the reason I’m coming here in the morning is to get things done before everyone else gets in.”

In other words, the interviewees stated that they chose the most appropriate time to do tasks in terms of peacefulness and personal energy levels. This meant that the interviewees tried to find a time when the task was most pleasant or easy to be done. Of course, this is merely a general guideline – sometimes the tasks were at no point in time pleasant, but needed to be done nonetheless.

This is an important method of managing motivation as it involves doing work that is fitting to the current mood and energy levels. In other words, it avoids the situation where no task is started if motivation is declined, or of motivation declining further due to an unpleasant task. The sense of accomplishment achieved from completing even less important tasks might also have the potential to sustain motivation to work. The interviewees seemed to be able to sense their own level of motivation and its fluctuations; for some motivation was lower in the mornings, for others it declined momentarily as a result of problems in personal life, and again for others it was greatly impacted by the environment. When motivation was low, the interviewees chose to do easier tasks or allow themselves more slack; when it was higher, more difficult tasks requiring concentration were done. It also seemed that when the pairing was done correctly, motivation increased in general as the interviewees had more autonomy over how they did their work and had less need to force themselves to do something they did not want to do.

As all work comes with a wide range of tasks perceived as pleasant or unpleasant, exciting or boring, easy or difficult, it is possible to divide the execution of the tasks to optimal times of the

day. This pairing of tasks with motivational levels seemed to make it possible for some level of work to be done throughout the day, which also sustains the feeling of accomplishment. The interviewees seemed to be able to manage their motivation through which tasks they took up and when.

This motivational self-management method of scheduling by disposition portrays the flexible and dynamic nature of managing motivation in the contemporary work environment. This also requires competence in self-reflection; in knowing oneself well enough to be able to schedule tasks at appropriate times. Being able to flexibly change tasks according to disposition is also a way to handle motivational fluctuations, or to keep motivation from declining. Above all, this dynamic method is one that could have easily been overlooked by a static, quantitative study.

Organization of work, environmental control, and scheduling by disposition allow the interviewees to decide themselves how, when, and where to do the tasks that are included in their work. This increases autonomy in terms of work, and thus can be seen to fuel autonomous motivation more than controlled motivation. However, in most of these above-mentioned situations the role of these motivational self-management methods is more to sustain a certain level of motivation instead of increasing motivation when it has declined. In other words, these methods can be thought to be more preventative rather than reactive. Hence, it is difficult to link these motivational self-management methods to solely autonomous or controlled motivation, as it is impossible to know what the regulatory factors behind the individual's current motivation are; some might be using these methods to sustain very controlled motivation, while others might be using them to prevent autonomous motivation from declining.

However, these motivational self-management methods could also be perceived as proactive measures to enable mastery now and in the future (work/external control), and a sense of accomplishment in the present (scheduling by disposition). Thus, they could be linked to *autonomous motivation* through the psychological need of competence and seen to foster motivation, not only keep it from declining. (Deci & Ryan, 2000) Hence, achieving a sense of control through the organization of work, environmental control, and scheduling by disposition

can be seen to both prevent motivation from declining or to fuel motivation, depending on the situation.

One important note to make is the difficulty of classifying these methods into purely autonomous or controlled motivation. The above-mentioned, control-related motivational self-management methods can be linked to either controlled or autonomous motivation depending on the situation. For example, organizing work through email-rules and folders can be a way to increase the feeling of mastery and autonomy, and thus foster autonomous motivation. However, the same act of control can also fuel controlled motivation if it is done to avoid performing worse than a team-member. In some cases, both of these reasons can be behind organizing work with email-rules and folders, to various degrees. Thus, some methods cannot be categorized into controlled or autonomous motivation in a black-or-white manner, as human behavior is dynamic and prone to fluctuations. What is done for one reason one day might be done for different reasons the next.

#### **4.2.2. Focusing on the Positive**

Another way that the team-members of the solution delivery -team managed their motivation was through increasing task enjoyability and creating meaning. In other words, the interviewees made the work more enjoyable in itself or made it more meaningful to themselves in an effort to overcome declined motivation or to increase motivation to do the task in general. Rather than focusing on the negatives, the team-members focused on the positive features of the work.

##### **Increasing task enjoyability**

*“I just sort of set my pace, like a comfortable pace, and I can listen to music or some radio programs in the meanwhile. So I just feel like this is not super difficult but it just has to be done and it can be still a nice time in a way so I kind of lower the bar of what I think I’m achieving here -- Yeah, well it’s still my time and my life so I think if it’s a really boring task then maybe I can gain something from that time”* Tiina

Tiina gives a good portrayal of how increasing task enjoyability helps to get tasks done despite a feeling of declined motivation. Even a boring or tedious task can be thought of as a chance to do something nice for oneself, such as listening to music or radio programs. Re-framing a tedious task as an opportunity to personally “*gain something from that time*” (Tiina) also incorporates the aspect of viewing the task more positively. This is in contrast to viewing the unpleasant task in a thoroughly negative way, with nothing to offer. When task enjoyability is increased, motivation to do it increases also.

Other team-members increased task enjoyability by emphasizing the positive features of the work and giving less attention to its negative features. For example, Sonja recognizes that the feelings of declined motivation associated with tedious tasks are just temporary. She realizes it is just a feeling that will pass, and thus gives the feeling of declined motivation less power over her actions.

*“Overall, I’m a happy employee here. There are days when I got bored, or I get frustrated because I’m waiting for some tasks, but it’s not something that affects me. It’s a feeling and it will pass.”*

Sonja

### **Creation of meaning**

Another method of self-managing motivation was through thinking about the personal or greater significance of the task or work. The creation or increasing of meaning was a common theme in the interviews, and it suggested that the self-directed knowledge workers that I interviewed managed their motivation through perceiving work as something of greater importance, not as merely tasks to be done. In general, it involved understanding the impact of single tasks on the bigger picture, as Ben describes below,

*“I try to make it more meaningful to me and make connections. I try to understand the big picture and the part that I’m doing now, what does it actually mean. And also from the big, financial figure down-list I see all these projects and which of these projects are influencing the financial figures in a negative way. I try to see both the micro picture and the macro picture. I’m working actually in-between so to say.”* Ben

Tiina has similar ways of managing her motivation through linking her own part to a greater meaning; a bigger picture; a purpose. However, for her the meaning does not merely come from seeing her part in the greater scheme, but also realizing the environmental impact of the company.

*“All things that I do, well first of all the feeling that I’m doing something that is worthwhile doing. That the job that I do that it’s a part of a bigger project. Even if it’s a small task if I get the feeling that it actually has an effect that is at least somehow useful. The systems that (the case company) has, they are useful, there is a meaning to it. Not just selling something for money. There is a larger effect. -- So I like that you can have an actual company that makes profit out of something that has some environmental effect.”* Tiina

Sonja also managed her motivation through thinking about the environmental effect of the work she is doing: *“I thought I was working for an environmental cause, because our system is basically saving fuel and emissions, CO2. It thought it’s a good cause.”* Environmental conservation seemed to be a personally important cause for many of the team-members, and a factor that kept them going even when they were lacking motivation in specific tasks.

Another way the creation of meaning came across was thinking of work as a pathway to personal development, as Tiina describes: *“And also somehow that I know what I’m doing and that I’m improving on a personal level.--I hope I can build that kind of skills that help me get that kind of jobs in the future as well.”* Similarly, Tarja, who has a less technical background than some of her co-workers, also has a goal in mind that she would like to better understand the technical aspects of her work someday. Tarja finds it exciting that something new comes up every single day; every day is a new learning opportunity.

All in all, increasing task enjoyability and the creation of meaning helped the interviewees to manage their own motivation by allowing them to view their work from a new, more meaningful and enjoyable perspective. Focusing on the positive features of work instead of the negative sides helped to cognitively re-frame the situation and thus increase motivation for specific tasks. Likewise, seeing the big picture instead of focusing on individual, sometimes tedious tasks, helped the interviewees to overcome moments of declined motivation.

Increasing task enjoyability and the creation of meaning can be perceived as ways of increasing autonomous motivation. These methods can be seen to be linked especially with increasing *integrated regulation* as the individual aligns his/her own values and goals, such as personal development and environmental conservation, with the work he/she is doing. (Deci & Ryan, 2000) Thus, there is increased coherence among the individual's goals and values and the goals and values of the work itself. Increasing task enjoyability may also increase *intrinsic motivation* if the task is made inherently enjoyable through listening to music or radio programs. In any case, these motivational self-management methods can be seen to be linked to increasing autonomous motivation rather than controlled motivation.

#### **4.2.3. Creating Pressure from Within**

A prevalent theme in the interviews was also self-discipline, namely creating pressure from within to get a certain task done. There were various ways in which this was done, for example through creating a sense of hurry via procrastination, through persuasive self-talk, and through setting time-limits for oneself. These motivational self-management methods of procrastination and enforcing self-discipline were ways that the interviewees led themselves to complete tasks in the absence of the micro-management of superiors.

#### **Procrastination**

The motivational self-management method of procrastination, although not intuitively appealing, seemed to be an efficient way of overcoming declined motivation through creating a sense of pressure in oneself. As Tim stated in an interview, "*But if things are slow you kind of, you get slow.*" Thus, if there is no sense of hurry, motivation declines. Tim overcomes this declined motivation through creating a sense of hurry through procrastination.

*"So then if there is something to do I put it off until the last minute. And then you're just kind of forced through it in the end. --You just kind of put it off and put it off and put it off, like you could have done it in twenty minutes one day but you end up doing it two weeks later when you kind of have to do it."* Tim

Tarja has a similar way of managing her declined motivation: *“It might be that I want to cause myself to be busy so that things pile up in the end, give myself a little shock then.”* Using procrastination as a motivational self-management method also requires a degree of self-reflection; some individuals may become more motivated by work building up and a deadline approaching, while others may become frozen with stress and demotivation. Thus, the team-members who proactively utilized this method of procrastination seemed to belong to the former group of individuals and were also knowledgeable of this.

### **Enforcing self-discipline**

Self-discipline was a prevalent way of managing motivation in other ways as well. For example, for some it involved deciding that a task will get done on that day: *“I always put additional stress and pressure on myself -- When I start something it is difficult to stop even though I know maybe this wouldn't necessarily need to be finished today. I might have decided that I want to get it done today.”* (Tarja)

Often, self-discipline involved persuasive self-talk. Tim says that he forces himself through the work when things need to be done by a certain time, telling himself *“screw it, now I'm doing it.”* Similarly, Tiina thinks to herself that *“that is your job, just open that file.”*, and when she gets over the threshold of starting, the work itself is not too difficult. Sonja enforces self-discipline by thinking *“I get paid for this, just do it”*. This persuasive self-talk helped the team-members get over the initial hurdle of starting the task, the situation in which an increase in motivation was needed the most according to the team-members.

Another example of self-discipline involved self-talk and timing. In this case, self-discipline was achieved by setting a goal time, and not stopping until that goal time was reached. Ben describes this as follows: *“Sometimes I feel that I use too much time for certain tasks so I try to do them with a timer, thinking that this task should take half an hour. Then I put the timer on. Or then I know that it's a long task, and then I try to split it up into, say “I need to concentrate on this for let's say 45 minutes, then I can have a 15 minute break and then I can continue again”.”*

These knowledge-workers in the self-directed team I interviewed had no superior micro-managing their work. Thus, they had to invent ways of creating pressure for themselves. Everyone seemed to have some way of doing this, but the most effective way seemed to vary from person to person; what worked for one may not work for another. These methods of procrastination and enforcing self-discipline seemed very effective in curbing declined motivation through creating a sense of urgency and pressure.

Procrastination and self-discipline can be thought of as ways of increasing *controlled motivation*. They are used to avoid punishments, such as not reaching a deadline or putting one's employment at risk. Thus, these can be linked to both external regulation, if the methods are used to avoid punishments or attain a reward, and/or introjected regulation, if the methods are used in order to avoid the feeling of self-worth from declining (Deci & Ryan, 2000).

Of course, this is not black-and-white, and some forms of self-discipline such as timing could also be taken as a more autonomous way of managing motivation, if a sense of mastery and accomplishment is fueled through being in control of one's work. Overall, however, these motivational self-management methods seem to be tied more to controlled motivation than autonomous motivation, even though the control comes from internal sources.

#### **4.2.4. The Role of Rewards**

Rewards, more specifically thinking about rewards and using them to guide motivation, were a reoccurring theme in the interviews. Rewards came in all shapes and sizes, and were also used in varying ways to self-manage motivation.

##### **Thinking about material rewards**

In this case study, material rewards came in the form of salary payments. The interviewees used the thought of money to overcome declined motivation and to continue working even when it felt challenging. For example, according to Jari: *"This company is paying my salary. That is something, that I get my salary. That is the most important thing."*



Other team-members had similar thoughts. Max concurs that the final motivation is that he needs the money and thus he needs the job. Sonja also agrees that her base motivation is that she needs to make money for a living. Thinking about the material reward of money pushed the interviewees to do tasks when motivation was lacking.

### **Self-rewarding**

It was not only thinking about material rewards that helped the team-members manage their motivation. Other types of rewards that the interviewees could themselves control were also of importance. Self-rewarding in the form of chats with colleagues, breaks, and other ways of disengaging were used after completing tasks as a form of prize. Self-rewarding was also used before tasks in order to recharge batteries and increase motivation for the task at hand.

For example, Tiina used talks with colleagues as a method of self-rewarding after completing some work: *“Yeah, it puts you in a good mood when you sometimes have some funny conversations with your colleagues.”* She also used other forms of self-rewarding to manage her motivation, in order to prevent getting frustrated or to keep a good spirit. These included giving herself permission to work a shorter day or have a longer coffee break if she was having an off-day. Tiina tried not to push herself too much if she felt that overall she was doing work. It seemed that self-reflecting and hence knowing when self-kindness is needed was an important way to manage motivation in this self-directed work team.

Disengaging and recharging batteries was a common form of self-rewarding. This happened both mentally and physically. For example, Matti managed his own energy levels and motivation by walking outside after lunch and spending his break without the presence of colleagues. The hectic work environment that this self-directed team works in is characterized by constant availability and tight-knit teamwork. It seems that for Matti, allowing himself some alone-time was a prize in itself.

*“I would say the lunch is the most important thing that happens. Then you can be in peace and just calm down and concentrate on the eating. Then I have for some time been doing this thing,*

*where I eat for 15 minutes and for the next 15 minutes I go for a walk. That's been really helpful. You get things moving and you're not just sitting for 8 hours. -- I eat lunch also on my own. If it would be that I discuss with people, then it would be the same thing that I wouldn't have that peace. I do it on my own."* Matti

Lunch was seen as a form of reward as it allowed a chance to disengage, recharge batteries, and thus increase motivation for the day to come. For example, Sonja says that "*--at some point I'll start to be sloppier and more tired and grumpier. It's better to do a bit of refreshment, like stepping out for lunch. -- I think it should be out of the office. I feel like it's a nicer break when it's out. Also chatting to colleagues about personal things, not work. It's nice.*"

Disengaging to prevent the declining of motivation was also done in other ways, as became clear from the interview with Max. When work felt particularly chaotic or frustrating, Max detached himself from the job in an effort to manage his motivation. He does this in the following fashion: "*Get annoyed and drink some beer. You'll hear the beer-answer quite a few times.*" (Max) Disengaging was done both physically and mentally, but it seems that the mental disengagement from the daily knowledge-work was most vital for regaining energy levels. Disengaging physically, such as going out for lunch, a beer, or a walk, seemed to enable mental disengagement.

Rewards were used to manage motivation in numerous ways. Thinking about material rewards helped to push through declined motivation. Self-rewarding was done through prizing oneself after completing tasks in order to increase motivation. Disengaging both mentally and physically from the daily work was also a form of self-reward, and it was used to prevent motivation from declining through managing one's energy levels. Again, the ability to self-reflect was crucial in the optimal deployment of these methods of motivational self-management, especially when it came to knowing when and how to disengage from work in order to prevent motivation from declining. This also highlights the dynamic nature of these self-management of motivation methods.

Material rewards and rewards given to oneself after completing a task can be seen to increase controlled motivation, especially *external regulation* (Deci & Ryan, 2000). A task is done in order

to receive a certain reward. In the case of self-rewarding before commencing on a task, the linkage is less clear. In some cases, such as self-rewarding through talking to colleagues, the fulfillment of the needs of autonomy and relatedness may be increased, thus making it plausible that *autonomous motivation* is also implicated. In terms of the Self-Determination Theory, Deci and Ryan (2001), state that the controlled or autonomous nature of the reward depends on how it is cognitively framed. The researchers note that if the reward is seen as a symbol of good performance or competence, it is likely linked to fostering autonomous motivation.

#### **4.2.5. Seeking out Positive Feelings**

Relating to rewards, another common theme emerged from the interviews. The interviewees seemed to find motivation through achieving positive feelings. More precisely, they managed their motivation by actively seeking out these positive feelings, almost a type of self-reward. There were various ways these positive feelings were achieved: through the positive affirmation of others or through visualizing progress.

##### **Seeking positive affirmation**

Max describes his seeking of positive affirmation in the following manner: *“I got the feeling that I could interest them; that they could understand it, and they have been openly giving feedback. That’s of course one of the good things that’s motivating. I want to push forward, I want to get the next good feedback. When I figure something out, that something is wrong, I want to fix it and tell the crew “hey, I fixed this for you!” And they will be happy. It’s a bit like you are the dog and you get patted when you collect the ball. Basically all humans are based on that.”*

He views this seeking of positive feelings as an addiction driving one to perform certain tasks, comparing it to alcoholism: *“It’s the same with why people are starting to drink for instance. Because in your brain there is the positive feeling that you got something nice now, and you want to get the nice feeling again. You get the same at the job, when you do nice work and everyone is telling you “good work!”.”* (Max)

Matti describes this seeking of positive feelings to result in a cycle that fuels motivation. He strives for a situation where everything goes well, because then he feels good as both the customer and the company are happy. Ben, on the other hand, manages his motivation through the happiness of his team. In his words, *“Actually through keeping my team happy I’m happy as well.”*

Seeking positive feelings through the affirmation of others is a way of managing motivation because when motivation is lacking, it provides an incentive for taking up tasks. Thinking about the happiness that will result, or even being addicted to these positive feelings, drives one to perform even when motivation is declined. These positive feelings are rewards that one can provide for oneself after successfully completing a job.

### **Visualizing progress**

Motivation was also self-managed by the positive feelings resulting from the visualization of progress. Sonja describes how visualizing the completion of tasks, particularly the most unpleasant ones, gives her a feeling of satisfaction. *“But those tasks that are most unpleasant I put them (on my to-do list) and there’s some sort of feeling of achievement when I can move them from pending or open to done. It’s like the small satisfaction that helps. Visualizing it and visualizing the progress.”*

In a similar fashion, Tiina expresses that *“Yeah, I like to check off things.”* This visual and almost physical act of checking tasks off a list, or moving them from pending to done, seems to provide such satisfaction that it makes it more fulfilling to perform un-motivating tasks.

This visualization of progress was not only related to single tasks. Rather, Ben describes it as a positively reinforcing cycle: *“Well my motivation comes from seeing that things are getting better. It’s a bit self-fulfilling of course. You see that here are lacks, and then you begin to fix it and you notice that we are able to fix certain things and pick up certain issues and try to solve them. I get motivated to continue improving it.”*

In other words, it seemed that seeing progress and feeling that you had a chance to impact that progress contributed to increasing motivation. Motivation was managed by creating ways of visualizing progress. These included simple ways, such as ticking off tasks from a to-do list, or more complex ways, such as getting involved in concretely fixing a problem.

The positive feelings that result from either getting positive affirmation or through visualizing progress are only ways of self-managing motivation if one is proactively seeing out these feelings. In other words, striving to get the positive affirmation or through creating ways to visualize progress. From the interviews it became clear that motivational self-management through striving to get positive feelings was very common, and clearly a form of self-leadership. The interviewees were not merely passive workers, but rather active and growth-oriented individuals on a quest to increase motivation through increasing the feelings of happiness or satisfaction.

Emotional rewards such as feelings of satisfaction and happiness are rewards nonetheless, and thus the activity can be seen to be done for instrumental reasons; for achieving a reward. Thus, they can be seen to fuel controlled motivation, especially *external regulation*, more than autonomous motivation, even though the reward is not external in nature. (Deci & Ryan, 2000)

On the other hand, these motivational self-management methods can also be tied to *autonomous motivation*. Seeking positive affirmation from others may foster a sense of relatedness, a psychological necessity for autonomous motivation according to the Self-Determination Theory (Deci & Ryan, 2000). Likewise, visualizing progress may be a way to fuel a sense of accomplishment – or to satisfy the need for competence in the SDT language. We may learn that a sense of competence makes us feel good. Thus, it is plausible that we seek positive feelings in ourselves but it is also likely that there is there is a cognitive element associated with the act. While it is safe to say that seeking positive feelings suggests that controlled motivation is at play, it is too black-and-white to infer that autonomous motivation is not affected at all. Thus, both autonomous and controlled motivation seem to be linked to the motivational self-management methods of seeking positive affirmation and visualizing progress.

#### 4.2.6. Avoiding Negative Feelings

*“I think I’m just kind of a person who wants to get things done, and I feel really guilty if I don’t get things done-- I don’t think I could live with myself if I didn’t give my best. I would feel really bad, for the team and the company and the customers as well.”* Tarja

Guilt and shame were words that arose during the interviews multiple times. Wanting to avoid these negative feelings seemed to be a way that the team-members motivated themselves to continue working even when they experienced lack of motivation. As Sonja explains it, *“I couldn’t not do it, I would feel so guilty. -- I don’t want to laze around and be paid for it. That’s not what I want to do in my time. -- Plus if you do that, it will be someone else who will have to do what you haven’t done. How can you look in the eyes of a colleague and not feel guilty and ashamed?”*

For some, this threat of feeling guilty was evident only in certain situations, and in these situations the avoidance of it was a primary reason to start working. For Tim, remote work caused him to be more efficient as this was the situation where he felt guilty the easiest.

*“Because if you just sit around doing nothing when you work from home you feel guilty. -- it feels just kind of wrong if you’re just sitting with that TV on in the background and waiting for emails or something.”* Tim

Wanting to avoid feeling guilty, and taking measures to avoid this feeling, were ways that the interviewees self-managed their motivation. When the threat of feeling guilty was imminent, the interviewees curbed this feeling through working more intensely. This seemed to be linked with the personality of the individual. The more conscientious the person, the more easily they seemed to feel guilty at work. As Tarja describes it, *“I just want to do my job as good as I can. I’m such a conscientious person.”* Many others described themselves similarly, representing a degree of self-reflection.

This method can be linked to controlled motivation and *introjected regulation*. In general, when an individual motivated by introjected regulation is able to meet the standards that they constitute

as “good” work, he/she feels self-worth and self-esteem. If he/she is unable to reach these standards, self-criticism and other negative feelings result. (Deci & Ryan, 2000) In avoiding the feelings of guilt and shame, the goals of the activity appear less important than doing work to the best of one’s abilities; to the standards one have adopted unto oneself.

#### **4.2.7. Team-Dependency**

*“Maybe it’s that you don’t want to fail your team. You want to do your own stuff because there is a team that needs you.”* Jari

In the interviews a prevalent theme was also not wanting to let people down – your team, the company, or the customers. A sense of dependency and responsibility pushed the interviewees to perform tasks as they did not want others to suffer. Since the work-community is a tight-knit group, there was a high sense of loyalty, especially to one’s team. Breaking the social code of looking after one another would result in negative feelings, such as the afore-mentioned guilt and shame.

This also involved doing tedious tasks that were nonetheless helpful to the community. They were done through a sense of dedication and loyalty, as Tiina describes it: *“And because these things don’t work if you don’t do it. It’s only useful if everyone does it a certain way but that’s about the ways of working, the process. -- In those moments you notice why it’s so important to do things the way they have been agreed to be done.”* Similarly, Max undertakes tedious tasks such as documentation because he realizes that if he fails to do so, no one can take over his projects if necessary.

In this work community, responsibility was spread throughout the employees and the division of it was clear. Max explains it well through an analogy: *“Yeah, you know when you come to the kitchen and there are cups in the sink, it is rather easy to think “no one else is putting them in the dishwasher, why should I?” But when it is quite clear that you have the cup in your hand, it is quite clear who is in charge of putting it in the dishwasher.”*

This meant that every employee knew what he/she was responsible for, and this sense of personal responsibility pushed them to complete tasks even when motivation was lacking. The team-members did not want to fail the team, the organization, or the customer. Tim describes it as follows: “*Yeah. I mean I’m responsible, we have promised to deliver something and I’m responsible that we keep our promises. So yeah, I have high dedication to my customers and that’s a motivator.*”

The feelings of dedication and responsibility pushed the team-members to act even when they did not feel motivated. Letting down the team, the organization, or the customer seemed to be a punishment to be avoided at all costs. On the other hand, this also incorporated the notion of realizing the importance of the task to the team or the company, even though it was not necessarily important to oneself personally. Using cognitive thought patterns or self-talk to think about the importance of the task to the team or company, and at the same time not wanting to let these parties down, was a way these individuals managed their motivation. This is heavily tied to a need for a sense of relatedness in the SDT-framework, as described by Deci & Ryan (2000). The researchers state that individuals have a psychological need to feel part of a group; connected to a greater community, and without the fulfillment of this need motivation cannot be autonomous.

This type of motivational self-management can be tied to controlled motivation, in some cases especially to *introjected regulation*. Introjected regulation is linked to when an activity is done to avoid feeling like a “bad” employee, rather than because of the goals of the task. However, this motivational self-management method can also be tied to *identified regulation*, a form of autonomous regulation, if the individual performs an activity mainly because he/she realizes its importance to the team or the company. (Deci & Ryan, 2000) Thus, this motivational self-management method can be seen to be linked to both controlled and autonomous motivation, depending on the situation.

### **4.3. Summary**

After exploring the methods and processes of motivational self-management and how they can be interpreted by the Self-Determination Theory, it is time to summarize the findings and view them



in relation to one another. In addition, in this summary I will consider the overall main contributions of this study and what added value the Self-Determination Theory brings to analyzing the findings.

The findings of this study, i.e. the self-management of motivation methods and processes, as well as their links to either autonomous or controlled motivation, can be seen in figure 5. A note must be made that if a method could clearly belong to either autonomous or controlled motivation depending on the situation, I have situated it in two different sections of the autonomous-controlled continuum. If a motivational self-management method was clearly more connected to one type of motivation, it is only shown once. Figure 5 below is more a general guideline of how the motivational self-management methods I uncovered are situated in terms of how the Self-Determination Theory views motivation, not an absolute truth.

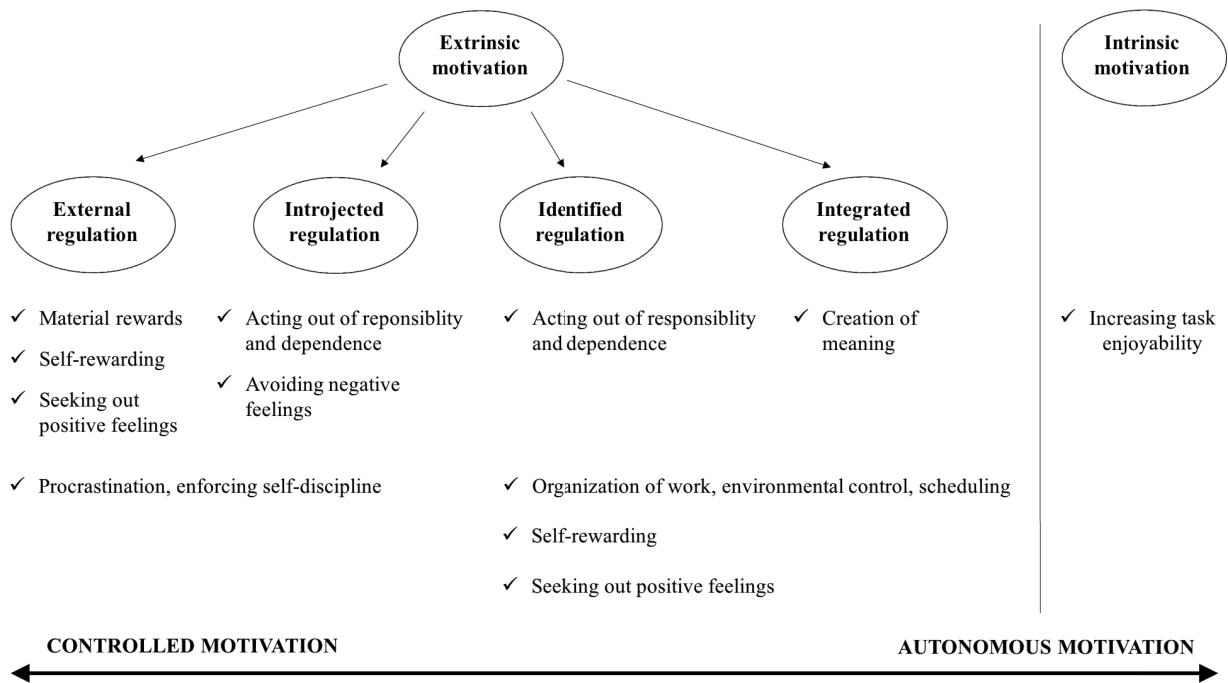


Figure 5. Motivational self-management methods and their links to autonomous or controlled motivation (adapted from Gagné & Deci, 2005)

What can be seen from figure 5 above is that increasing task enjoyability and creation of meaning are clearly linked to autonomous motivation. Thinking about material rewards, avoiding negative feelings, procrastination, and enforcing self-discipline are connected to controlled motivation. The other methods of motivational self-management can be connected to autonomous or controlled motivation, depending on the situation.

The fact that the same methods can fuel autonomous or controlled motivation depending on the situation is intriguing. This came across particularly well with the motivational self-management method of self-rewarding, which could fuel either autonomous or controlled motivation depending on how the reward was cognitively framed. In addition, in many situations both controlled and autonomous types of motivation seemed to be at play at the same time to varying degrees. The dynamic between controlled and autonomous motivation seemed to be affected greatly by the aspect of time. When the deadline was approaching or a task was short-term, or tedious/boring, controlled motivation seemed to be used more. In more complex tasks or in the overall perception of the job, autonomous motivation played a greater role.

In addition, this study highlighted how the different motivational self-management methods are used dynamically in different situations and contexts, something a quantitative study cannot portray. The method of scheduling by disposition was a key example of the dynamic and flexible way of managing motivation. Every interviewee noted daily motivational fluctuations and situational shifts, and how motivational balance could be achieved by scheduling tasks according to energy levels and disposition. Self-reflexivity played a crucial role in being able to flexibly and optimally choose and utilize motivational self-management methods. Only through self-awareness was it possible to know when a self-reward in the form of disengagement was most beneficial, or when self-discipline in the form of self-talk would be more effective.

In effect, the main contributions of this study include the dynamic nature of motivational self-management and the role of self-reflection in utilizing these methods optimally and effectively. These findings would have been difficult, if not impossible, to uncover with a quantitative study. The context, both internal and external, was vital in understanding how and when different

motivational self-management methods were used by the team-members of this self-directed work team.

Without the Self-Determination Theory it would not have been possible to categorize the motivational self-management methods uncovered by this study into autonomous and controlled motivation and their sub-categories. Being able to categorize these methods roughly into their underlying types of motivational regulation allows us to infer the potential outcomes of these motivational self-management methods and processes. In other words, the Self-Determination Theory makes it possible for these methods to be categorized into those more beneficial to the well-being and productivity of the individual (i.e. linkage to autonomous motivations) and those less beneficial for the well-being and productivity of the individual (i.e. linkage to controlled motivation). These interpretations are theory-driven and backed up by various empirical research by e.g. Blais & Brière, 2002; Gagné, Forest et al., 2015; Stenius, Hankonen et al., 2016, which state that autonomous motivation results in more beneficial outcomes than controlled motivation. This gives us a glimpse into what motivational self-management methods could be seen to be related to more positive outcomes and which methods to more negative outcomes. The results of this study infer that the motivational self-management methods of increasing task enjoyability and creation of meaning can be thought of as beneficial to the individual (and possibly also the work organization), while the methods of thinking about material rewards, avoiding negative feelings, procrastination, and enforcing self-discipline can be seen as less beneficial.

In the next chapter I will discuss the motivational self-management methods uncovered in this study in relation to prior studies and concepts. I will explore the nature of these previous studies and concepts, and discuss what added value my qualitative study brings to this field of research.

## 5. DISCUSSION

In this section I will discuss the results of this study in comparison to past research on job-tailoring (Tims, Bakker et al., 2012), the Self-Leadership Theory (Houghton & Neck, 2002), and studies on motivational self-management methods in the academic setting (Schwinger, von der Laden et al., 2007) and in weight-management (Hartmann - Boyce, Boylan et al., 2017).

What must first be noted is that previous research on motivational self-management methods has been predominantly quantitative and the work context has remained mostly untouched. In addition, job-tailoring (Tims, Bakker et al., 2012) and the Self-Leadership Theory (Manz, 1986) are concepts used for exploring motivation in the workplace, but they are not theories on motivation. Neither of these concepts has been widely empirically tested, as the Self-Determination Theory has been. Furthermore, both concepts utilize motivational theories such as theories on self-regulation (Carver & Scheier, 2001) to offer normative and conceptual advice on improving workplace motivation. The theories do not, however, differentiate between types of motivation. Hence, using an empirically-tested motivation theory such as the Self-Determination Theory to explain the results of this study allows me to categorize the motivational self-management methods meaningfully and understand their implications of these methods. Next, I will move on to discuss the motivational self-management methods and processes I uncovered in this study in relation to previous research.

The first theme that I introduced in this study was “Sense of Control”. The motivational self-management methods within this theme included organization of work, environmental control, and scheduling by disposition. These methods correspond with previously done studies on methods of motivational self-management. For example, organizing work incorporates an element of proximal goal setting – to-do lists and project management tools were used by the participants to break down tasks into smaller pieces. Goal-setting was seen to be a motivational self-management strategy by the studies by Houghton & Neck (2006), Schwinger et al. (2007), and Hartmann-Boyce et al. (2017). I decided to add organization of work as a motivational self-management method in itself as I perceive the whole act of organizing work to be a way to manage motivation, not only the goal-setting aspect of it. Environmental control was seen as a motivational self-management

method by the studies by Schwinger et al. (2007) and Hartmann-Boyce et al. (2017). Scheduling is found in the weight-management study by Hartmann-Boyce et al. (2017). Thus, my findings agree with previous research, although previous studies have not explained the holistic or dynamic nature of these methods, especially scheduling by disposition.

My second theme was “Focusing on the Positive”. The motivational self-management methods of increasing task enjoyability and creation of meaning were also found in previous studies. Increasing task enjoyability, which incorporates the aspect of making the task more enjoyable to oneself or focusing on its positive aspects instead of the negative ones, was found to be a motivational self-management method by the studies by Houghton & Neck (2006), Schwinger et al. (2007), and Hartmann-Boyce et al. (2017). The creation of meaning was found to be a motivational self-management method by the study done by Schwinger et al. (2007) in the academic context. Schwinger et al. (2007) called this method “enhancement of personal significance”. The concept of job-tailoring also perceives personal development as a way to increase internal job resources (Tims, Bakker et al., 2015). However, according to the interviews I conducted I believe that creation of meaning is more than enhancing personal significance of a task; it also incorporates the sharing of company values and seeing how your own part contributes to a greater end-goal. In this way, increasing task enjoyability and creation of meaning are inevitably linked. They both involve seeing one’s work from a new, greater perspective. Thus, I believe the self-management of motivation methods of increasing task enjoyability and creation of meaning are more holistic than the methods found in previous studies.

The third theme was “Creating Pressure from Within”. Procrastination is a new motivational self-management method not portrayed by previous studies. This is perhaps because it is not necessarily a normative method of motivational self-management. Nonetheless, from this study it became clear that it is used in practice to manage motivation. Enforcing self-discipline, on the other hand, has been conveyed in previous studies under many different names. Houghton & Neck (2006) describe it as self-observation and self-goal setting; Schwinger et al. (2007) use the phrase “performance-approach self-talk” to describe self-talk used to call oneself to action; Hartmann-Boyce et al. (2017) describe it as self-monitoring. Self-discipline comes in many forms, and from

my study it became clear that its primary role was to create a sense of urgency and pressure, as procrastination does in a literal fashion.

The fourth theme of my study was “The Role of Rewards”. Thinking about material rewards can be loosely linked to “performance-approach self-talk”, which the study by Schwinger et al. (2007) conveys to be a motivational self-management method. The researchers explain that this method is used to think about how a certain prize, such as salary, will not be reached if one does not perform in a certain way. Self-rewarding, on the other hand, is seen as a motivational self-management method by all of the afore-mentioned studies by Houghton & Neck (2006), Schwinger et al. (2007), and Hartmann-Boyce et al. (2017). However, these studies see self-rewarding merely as a prize given to oneself after completing a certain task. I argue that self-rewarding in the form of mentally and/or physically disengaging is also used *before* commencing a task in order to increase or sustain motivation and energy levels.

The fifth theme that I introduced was “Seeking out Positive Feelings”. Managing one’s motivation through the positive feelings resulting from seeking out positive affirmation or visualizing progress can be seen to be a form of self-reward. Thus, the findings concur with previous studies on motivational self-management methods done by Houghton & Neck (2006), Schwinger et al. (2007), and Hartmann-Boyce et al. (2017). However, in these previous studies positive feelings in themselves are not seen as forms of self-reward. Thus, it seems to be a new finding that positive feelings constitute as self-rewards; that they are prizes one can grant oneself.

The sixth theme was “Avoiding Negative Feelings”. Using cognitive strategies, self-talk, or concrete actions to avoid feeling guilty can be linked to “performance-avoidance self-talk” in the study by Schwinger et al. (2007), which involves managing motivation by using cognitive measures to avoid sub-par performance. It appears that this method of motivational self-management is clearly linked to managing one’s emotions and overall perception of self-worth.

The last theme was “Team-Dependency”. The method of motivational self-management of acting out of responsibility and dependence is linked to the above-mentioned “performance-avoidance self-talk” in the study conducted by Schwinger et al. (2007). However, the rather strong social

element of “you can’t let others down” portrayed in my study is not entirely captured by performance-avoidance self-talk. Using cognitive thought patterns or self-talk in an effort to avoid disappointing others was particularly prominent in the self-directed work team I interviewed. This could be because the team relied on each other in daily work, and the feeling of togetherness was an important part of work life. As Tarja describes it, *“I can’t do anything without my team. I need them around me.”* Thus, this motivational self-management method of acting out of dependence and responsibility involves some elements of performance-avoidance self-talk, but is more all-inclusive in nature.

Most of the motivational self-management methods found in previous research do indeed concur with the methods I uncovered with this study, but the previously found methods appear more one-dimensional and static in nature. For example, I found team-dependency to be a way to manage motivation. This method of motivational self-management appears to incorporate a much more complex, cognitive, and flexible form of motivational self-management than the previously uncovered method of “performance-avoidance self-talk” (Schwinger, von der Laden et al., 2007). To provide another example, in my study I found creation of meaning to be a way of managing motivation through viewing the task as part of a bigger purpose, seeing it from a greater perspective, and connecting it to personal goals and values. The study by Schwinger et al. (2007), the only previous study to have touched upon this motivational self-management method, viewed it as “enhancement of personal significance”. However, I believe the motivational self-management method of creation of meaning to incorporate more than merely enhancing personal significance. Likewise, I found organization of work via email rules, folder structures, controlling information flows, and to-do lists to be a holistic way to manage the feeling of chaos and thus manage motivation to work. The previous studies by Houghton & Neck (2006), Schwinger et al. (2007), and Hartmann-Boyce et al. (2017) viewed this motivational self-management method as “goal-setting”. In my study, I found the method to be more holistic than goal-setting. Thus, although my findings mostly agree with the results of previous studies, I found the motivational self-management methods to be used more dynamically and holistically than prior studies portray. This is perhaps due to the naturally contextual, qualitative approach of this study as opposed to the dominance of quantitative approaches in this field of research.

In addition to new or different ways of using previously studied motivational self-management methods, this study also offered other novel findings. Some new findings include procrastination as a way to manage motivation, positive feelings as self-rewards, and the overall role of self-reflection in managing motivation. Procrastination was a concrete way that the participants of my study created a sense of pressure for themselves and thus overcame declined motivation. Positive feelings, such as happiness and proudness, were actively sought after by the interviewees and thus I found them to constitute as self-rewards. These positive feelings were rewards the team-members could grant themselves after accomplishing work tasks, and the possibility of attaining these feelings was enough to push them through un-motivating work. In general, this study showed how self-reflection and emotional management play a vital role in motivational self-management, something which has not been conveyed in previous studies. Be it through avoiding negative feelings such as chaos, shame, guilt, or disappointment, or attaining positive feelings such as happiness and proudness, emotional management was closely linked to motivational management. Even if motivation was lacking, the threat of a negative emotion or the possibility of a positive emotion pushed the employees to continue working. Thus, novel contributions of this study include the new motivational self-management method of procrastination and the role of emotions and self-reflection in motivational management.

Overall, what is conveyed when comparing the results of this study to prior research is that the qualitative approach captures a much more dynamic and holistic reality than quantitative studies. In addition, I found self-reflection to play a crucial role in the accurate and timely usage of these motivational self-management methods, something which has not been conveyed by previous research. In effect, the contextual and in-depth nature of the extensive case study that I conducted portrayed the role of self-reflection and dynamism in motivational self-management in a way that previous studies have not.



## 6. CONCLUSION

The motivational self-management methods and processes of knowledge-workers in team-based organizations have not been studied previously. Overall, little empirical research has been done on how individuals self-manage their motivation in any discipline. Studying these methods and processes is important for society, as being better able to self-manage one's motivation has the potential to increase one's wellbeing and productivity, especially if it happens through autonomous motivation (Gagné, Forest et al., 2015). As the job-design in the knowledge-intensive sector has over the past decades been changing to favor flexibility and autonomy of employees (Hornung, Rousseau et al., 2010), these same employees also have the increased responsibility of managing one's motivation without constant top-down orders. In other words, not only have the self-management of motivation methods lacked previous research, being able to manage one's motivation has also become increasingly important with the changing work environment.

The purpose of this thesis was to explore how knowledge-workers in a self-directed work team manage their motivation to work on a daily basis, especially when it feels most challenging. Another goal was to investigate how these motivational self-management methods are linked to autonomous and/or controlled motivation, as described by the Self-Determination Theory (Deci & Ryan, 2000), and with what potential outcomes.

I explored the phenomenon of motivational self-management through an extensive multiple case study -approach and interviewed eight team-members of one self-directed work team in a Finnish SME in the knowledge-intensive sector. The thematic analysis showed that the participants self-manage their motivation in the following ways: work and environmental control, scheduling by disposition, increasing task enjoyability, creation of meaning, procrastination, enforcing self-discipline, thinking about material rewards, self-rewarding, seeking positive affirmation, visualizing progress, avoiding negative feelings (including guilt and shame), and acting out of dependency and responsibility.

The motivational self-management methods of increasing task enjoyability and creation of meaning are linked to autonomous motivation. Procrastination, enforcing self-discipline, thinking

about material rewards, and avoiding negative feelings can be tied to controlled motivation. The other methods of motivational self-management are more ambivalent, and can be linked to either autonomous or controlled motivation, depending on the situation.

One of the main contributions of this study is the dynamics of the use of motivational self-management methods and processes in the context of a self-directed work team. In other words, this study showed how motivational self-management methods are flexibly picked up according to individual disposition, and how at times multiple methods were used at once to varying degrees. This study also portrayed the role of self-reflection in motivational self-management. The team-members in this study were able to assess their own energy-levels, dispositions, and personal preferences, and thus flexibly utilize different motivational self-management methods at appropriate times or situations. The dynamism of the use of motivational self-management methods, including the ability of the individuals to flexibly switch between tasks or methods, was a primary finding of this study, and one that was attained through the study's contextual and qualitative approach.

In addition, this study offered novel insight into how these motivational self-management methods are linked to autonomous or controlled motivation. According to previous research, it can be assumed that those motivational self-management methods linked to autonomous motivation result in more positive outcomes for the individual and the workplace than those linked to controlled motivation (Blais & Brière, 2002; Gagné, Forest et al., 2015; Stenius, Hankonen et al., 2016). Thus, this infers that both the organization and the individual would benefit if the motivational self-management methods associated with autonomous motivation would be strengthened and their use increased, and/or if the use of motivational self-management methods associated with controlled motivation were decreased. In other words, the motivational self-management methods of increasing task enjoyability and creation of meaning could be considered favorable ways of self-managing motivation, as both are tied to autonomous motivation. This contribution would have been impossible to make without the framework provided by the Self-Determination Theory. However, this is certainly an area which requires more research in order for causal linkages to be deduced more thoroughly.

## 6.1. Limitations of the Study

Most of the limitations of this study are a logical result of the methodological choices I purposefully made to best suit the nature, the motivations, and the resources for this research. The eight semi-structured interviews I conducted in one self-directed work team can only provide a limited account of interactional situations, but I do not view them as a limitation per say. This is because these interviews provided me with a deeply contextual and holistic snapshot of the motivational self-management methods of one self-directed work team.

Had the scope of the study been larger, I could have investigated how members of self-directed teams in other contexts manage their motivation to work. This could have included exploring this phenomenon in different teams within this same case company, or even investigating motivational self-management in self-directed work teams in other companies or even different countries. It could also have been fruitful to investigate this topic in companies which do not offer employees much autonomy, or where bureaucracy or hierarchy are still the primary ways of functioning. Exploring this phenomenon in other contexts would have made it possible to improve the transferability of results. With the methodology I chose for this study, the results are very much tied to the specific context I conducted the research in. Thus, the motivational self-management methods uncovered by this study cannot be thought of as universal methods.

One other potential limitation is the role of the Self-Determination Theory in this study. It is a universal motivation theory, but perhaps suits the Western world better than other countries. For example, the theory's presuppositions on the needs for autonomy, relatedness, and competence may not be fundamental psychological needs universally. This has not been researched to a great degree. However, I believe the context the study was conducted in, i.e. a metropolitan area of Finland, was well suited for the use of the Self-Determination Theory in explaining the empirical findings.

Other practical limitations include the fact that the interviews were done in English, as this is the corporate language of the case company. Some team-members may have been more proficient in answering in Finnish. Although the choice to do the interviews in Finnish was offered to every

interviewee, all chose to do the interviews in English. In the end, it is difficult to assess whether the results or the ability to self-reflect would have differed with language.

## **6.2. Practical Implications and Suggestions for Further Research**

Some practical implications of this study include suggestions on how the employee and the employer can help further autonomous motivation, which has been shown to increase both work well-being and productivity (Gagné, Forest et al., 2015). A self-directed work team in itself offers a good foundation for autonomous motivation, as it provides the employees a chance to work in a close-knit team and also make independent decisions regarding how the work will be done. These factors can already be seen to improve the feelings of relatedness, competence, and autonomy. (Deci & Ryan, 2000)

The motivational self-management methods of increasing task enjoyability and creation of meaning can be seen to be linked to autonomous motivation. In these cases the individual gets satisfaction from the work itself, because it is enjoyable or interesting, or because its goals are perceived as personally important or congruent with one's values, not only from the rewards that can result from it. (Deci & Ryan, 2000) In other words, both the employee and the employer would benefit from ways of increasing the use of these two motivational self-management methods linked to autonomous motivation.

From the employer point of view, this would entail giving the employees opportunities to develop themselves through taking on more challenging tasks or even changing roles. This could occur through creating a work environment where personal development can easily occur, and where employees can effortlessly take on more difficult or different tasks if they so wish. Scheduling one-on-one meetings where employees can discuss their own development and progress would be a concrete way of tackling these issues. This is important to increasing the use of autonomy-fueling motivational self-management methods as the employee can attach greater meaning and significance to the tasks at hand if he/she feels that these tasks have a bigger purpose, such as personal development. In addition, it is important to offer the employee enough room to modify the way they carry out their tasks in order to be able to increase personal task enjoyability.

Another aspect for the HR function to consider is person/organization fit. If the values and goals of the individual concur with the values and goals of the organization, it is much easier for the individual to manage his/her motivation in a way that autonomous motivation increases. Thus, when recruiting it is important to find a person who possesses both the skills *and* the values required for the job.

From the employee point of view, it is important to self-reflect and know one's values. Once these are clear, it is easier to find links between these values and the actions of the organization. If one finds that one's values and goals do not match with those of the organization, perhaps one would be both happier and more productive in another workplace.

Some suggestions for further research include assessing the effectiveness of the uncovered motivational self-management methods and processes. In other words, it would be fruitful to assess the causal links between these methods and work well-being and productivity. Some theory-driven inferences were made in this study, but more research is needed for deducing what motivational self-management methods are most favorable for the individual and the organization and in what ways.

What was also beyond the scope of this thesis was investigating how individuals in other work organizations self-manage their motivation. This could involve exploring this phenomenon in a more hierarchical organization without self-directed teams, or in other cultural settings where power differences are greater. This would make it possible to compare motivational self-management methods between teams or companies, and see what the similarities and differences are on a wider scale. In addition, the different causes for lack of motivation in the work setting could also be further researched. This study was able to offer a glimpse into the world of motivational self-management in a self-directed work team, but there is still much to learn in this novel field.

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## APPENDIX 1: INTERVIEW GUIDE

Ask for personal details (name, team, position, how long employed)

- Could you tell me in general about the work that you do?
- Could you tell me in detail, how do you structure your day starting from the morning?  
What about workweek? Any reasons for this?
- Do you ever experience lack of motivation at work?

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- What kind of situations or work tasks do you normally experience lack of motivation in?  
Can you give me an example?
- What did you do to solve this lack of motivation in this particular instance? In other words,  
how were you able to continue working?
- Do you have other ways of solving it in the same situation?

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- Overall, what would you say are the main reasons behind lack of motivation?
- Is the way you organize your work day or workweek somehow linked to managing your  
work motivation?
- How does the organization motivate you? How do you motivate yourself? How effective  
do you find it?
- Does anything else come to mind when you think about motivation or lack of motivation  
at work?