

The role of organizational culture in employees' work-life balance as an aspect of health

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Abstract

Organizational culture defines how employees should behave in a given set of circumstances. The **purpose** of this study involved analyzing the organizational culture of an Icelandic software consultancy company in relation to employees' work-life balance as an aspect of health, and explaining the process for creating and sustaining a supportive work-life culture. Achieving this purpose required answers to several **research questions**, What are the components of the existing organizational culture? What is the managers' role in creating and sustaining this organizational culture? What are the challenges in sustaining this organizational culture?

This case study used both quantitative and qualitative **methods**, and four data sources for triangulation purposes. The methodological approaches included a questionnaire-based survey, completed by 72 employees (90%); semi-structured interviews with eight employees; observations conducted during two separate weeks; and document analysis of various documents dating back a maximum of two years.

The **results** suggest that the case organization's culture was work-life supportive, i.e., the organization supported and valued employees' integration of work and private life. The components of the existing organizational culture were defined as: fun, ambition, flexibility, international character, openness, cooperation, informality, flat organizational structure, responsibility, trust, understanding, support, and pride. The managers' role in creating and sustaining this culture involved availability, supportiveness, understanding, trusting, and giving feedback. Among the main challenges in sustaining the culture was the growth of the organization, which could affect considerably the informal culture. Description of the components of the case organization's existing culture includes description of the culture's enablers, according to the purpose of explaining how a supportive work-life culture can be created and sustained.

Key words

organizational culture, work-life balance, leadership, workplace health promotion

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1 INTRODUCTION

The theme of this thesis is organizational culture and work-life balance. Both are areas of activity in workplace health promotion and can have impact on health in general.

Organizational culture is increasingly becoming a preferred site of inquiry in work-life balance, as research has shown that the culture is of great importance for employees' work-life balance. Now it is asserted that a supportive organizational culture is required to ensure that the intent of work-life balance policies is realized in practice (Callan 2007, Lewis 2001).

The world of work is constantly changing, as work from home, outsourcing, and career in more than one or two workplaces has become common. Before, workplaces were characterized by clear and stable structures and practices (Arnold 2005), but this is not the case anymore and it adds to the challenge for today's workplaces. The challenge is for instance to hold on to the employees by building a supportive work environment. One aspect of that is making it possible to acquire work-life balance.

The work-life literature often refers to work-life conflict as something that occurs when demands associated with work are incompatible with demands associated with life outside work (Allen *et al.* 2000). The work-life balance can therefore be understood as balance between the demands associated with different domains.¹

This is a case study of "best practice" as the case organization, a software consultancy company in Reykjavik, won the diploma "Company of the year" 2007, according to an annual survey done by one of the largest unions in Iceland. This woke the researcher's interest of looking behind the results – what makes the results so positive in this company? By defining those components, an insight into employee wellbeing in the workplace can possibly be provided.

The thesis is divided into nine main chapters: Introduction, background, purpose and research questions, conceptual framework, methods, ethics, results, discussion and final remarks. The methods and results are described in subchapters according to the four methodological approaches used in this case study.

¹ The concept of work-life balance is wider than the concept of work-family balance. In spite of this, the concept work-family balance is often used in the meaning work-life balance. This thesis uses the concept work-life balance. In this thesis it is moreover preferred to use the more positive concept of balance rather than the negative concept of conflict. This in spite of the critique on the use of the concept of balance, i.e. that it is not possible to reach a perfect balance between work and private life. Other concepts include work-life integration or work-life enrichment. It was decided to carry on with the concept of work-life balance, because it seems to have found its place in the literature and the discussion in this subject.

2 BACKGROUND

2.1 Iceland

The population in Iceland is the youngest of the Nordic countries and the total fertility rate of about two is among the highest, also in the member states of EU. “Motherhood in Iceland means a short interruption from paid work and then reduced hours of work until the youngest child is between seven to 15 years” (Mósesdóttir 1998). Fatherhood in Iceland on the other hand involves increased hours of work to compensate for the drop in income that occurs when the mother reduces her hours of work, according to Mósesdóttir’s research.

The aim of the Icelandic legislation on father’s right to paid leave from work when a baby is born, from year 2000, was to increase gender equality, inside and outside the home. Since then, the number of fathers taking part of the paternal leave has increased in Iceland. In the year 2002, fathers used nearly 20% of the days the state paid for parental leave, and this was the highest percentage in the Nordic countries (Valdimarsdóttir 2005). Since then, this percentage has increased in Iceland, and was 35% in 2004.

Average annual hours worked per worker are high in Iceland, about 1800. This is the highest of the Nordic countries, and above the OECD average of about 1750 hours per year (OECD 2004). OECD analysis shows that long working hours are associated with greater perceived conflict between job and family responsibilities. Unpredictable working hours are also associated with this conflict (OECD 2004).

The concept of “hours worked per capita” takes into account how many people of working age are outside the labour force, staying home to look after children or are unemployed. Thus, it provides a more comprehensive measure of working time and for making international comparisons. Annual hours worked per capita are about 1000 in Iceland and only Korea and Japan have higher numbers (OECD 2004). OECD average is about 800 and all the other Nordic countries are at or below that.

The OECD Observer (2004) reflects on the main lessons for policymaking: “A first lesson for policymaking is that working time is at the nexus of a number of policy concerns, including achieving strong economic growth, an inclusive labour market that supports high employment rates and working conditions that allow employees to achieve a balance between work and the rest of their lives.”

The Icelandic professor of economics, Thorvaldur Gylfason, has written a number of articles related to the labour market, productivity and comparison between countries. He argues that most wage earners would prefer leisure to work for given income (Gylfason 2007). The measure Gross Domestic Product (GDP) per hour worked, reveals further results on Iceland. In the United States, GDP per hour worked is reached through “hard work”, as in many European countries the same GDP or higher is reached through less work. In USA the GDP per hour worked is below 50 US dollars in the year 2005

compared to the highest productivity, over 60 US dollars in Luxembourg and in Norway. Furthermore, average annual hours are more in USA than in Luxembourg or Norway. The GDP per hour worked in Sweden is just under 45 dollars in 2005, but in Iceland it is about 35 dollars in 2005 (see Figure 1). This combined with over average annual hours worked, means an under average productivity in Iceland in comparison with other western states.

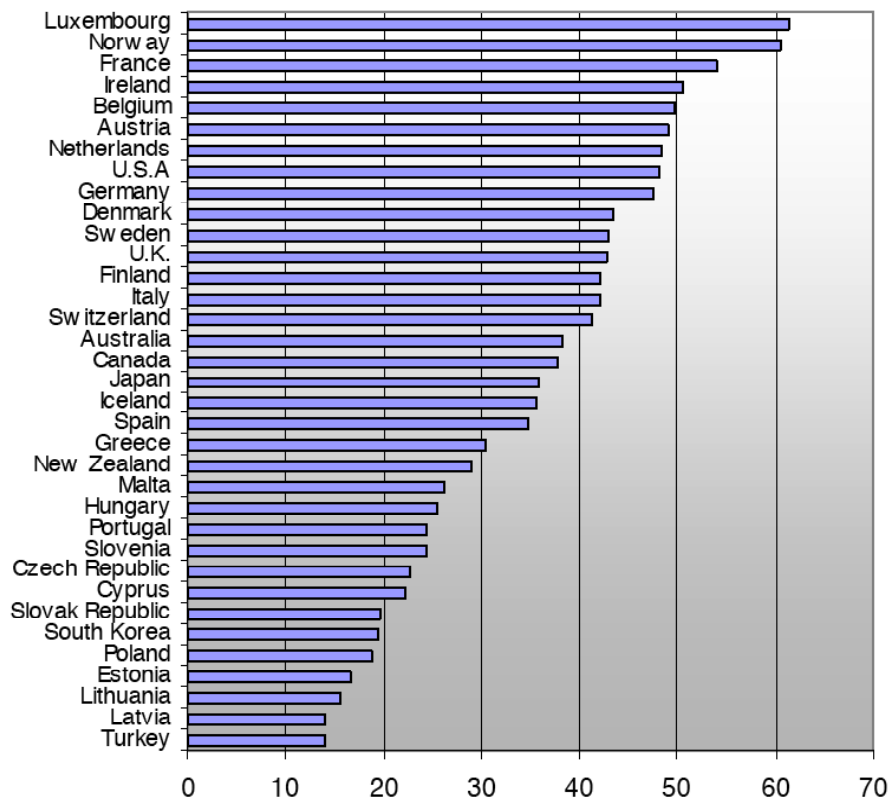


Figure 1. GDP per hour worked, US dollars, (from Gylfason 2007).

2.2 The “Company of the year”-survey

The Commercial Workers' Union (VR) in Reykjavik, Iceland, embraces over 20,000 members in more than 100 occupations. “Its aim is to improve and defend the position of shop and office workers in the region by working to secure better rights, educational opportunities and wages and other terms of service for wage-earners in Iceland. VR negotiates collective agreements for its members and represents them in dealings with government authorities and other bodies” (VR web 2008).

The “Company of the year”-survey is an annual survey done by the worker’s union VR in Iceland. The ideology behind the survey is that the internal working environment of companies has more effect on their earnings than the outside business environment. According to VR’s ideology, the internal working environment is foremost the attitudes that are dominant among the employees. How do they experience their job, working environment, colleagues, supervisors, policy and leadership? (VR web 2008).

The more negative those attitudes among the employees are, all the poorer the internal working environment can be, and that can be a liability to the employee performance, according to VR. The VR survey measures job satisfaction by four factors. The respondents answer questions within those factors. Each factor is rated from 1 to 5 and together they create the company's grade according to different weight of each factor, provided in the brackets. The factors are "trust to managers" (40%), "respect for employees" (30%), "pride of company" (15%) and "spirit at the workplace" (15%). The factor "trust to managers" is divided into three subfactors: leaders' credibility, wage terms, and employment conditions. The factor "respect for employees" is divided into three subfactors: flexibility at work, independence at work, and workload and demands (VR web 2008).

3 PURPOSE AND RESEARCH QUESTIONS

According to the previous survey done by VR, the employees in the case organization experienced job satisfaction and high flexibility. The purpose of this study is to analyze the organizational culture of the case organization in relation to employees' work-life balance as an aspect of health, and explain how a supportive work-life culture can be created and sustained.

In order to reach this purpose, several research questions have to be answered:

1. What are the components of the existing organizational culture?
2. What is the managers' role in creating and sustaining this organizational culture?
3. What are the challenges in sustaining this organizational culture?

4 CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

4.1 Organizational culture

Organizational culture defines how those working in the organization should behave in a given set of circumstances (Arnold 2005). More complex definition of organizational culture is Schein's (2004): "a pattern of shared basic assumptions that was learned by a group as it solved its problems of external adaptation and internal integration, that has worked well enough to be considered valid and, therefore, to be taught to new members as the correct way to perceive, think, and feel in relation to those problems".

Research has shown that clear organizational identity is a stable ground for health in the workplace and it is important to be proud of one's work to achieve wellbeing (Menckel and Österblom 2000).

According to Schein (2004), organizational culture and leadership are two sides of the same coin. Organizational culture points us to invisible phenomena. "...culture is to a

group what personality or character is to an individual”. The result is a certain behavior, controlled by invisible forces. Organizational culture guides the behavior of the employees in an organization, through the shared norms that are held in the organization.

Organizational culture has become an integral aspect of many organizational development programs. Certain types of organizational cultures have been associated with either positive or negative outcomes for either the organization or for individual employees. Positive outcomes for the individual include motivation and satisfaction, while negative outcomes include job insecurity and stress (Balthazard *et al.* 2006). Constructive organizational culture has positive impact on both organizational and individual level, while dysfunctional culture has negative impact on both (Balthazard *et al.* 2006).

A case study in a Swedish industrial workplace showed a culture with a decentralized structure consisting of self-managed teams where the employees have a high degree of control over their work situation (Eriksson *et al.* 2008). In this workplace it were the extensive possibilities for personal development and responsibility, as well as good companionship, which made the employees feel well at work.

Supportive work-life organizational culture has been defined as “the shared assumptions, beliefs, and values regarding the extent to which an organization supports and values the integration of employees’ work and family lives” (Thompson *et al.* 1999). Thompson and colleagues argue that by not fostering a more balanced work-family life for employees, organizations are contributing to tensions in employees’ personal lives, which can have negative effects for both the employees and the organization.

Thompson *et al.* (1999) suggest at least three possible components of work-life culture. The first concerns organizational time demands or expectations that employees prioritize work above family. This concerns norms about the hours spent at work and the employees’ use of time. Time-based conflict has been identified as a major source of work-life conflict and this occurs when time pressures in one role, for instance work, make it difficult to comply with expectations in the other role, that is private life.

The second component of work-life culture concerns perceived negative career consequences associated with utilizing work-life benefits or devoting time to family responsibilities (Thompson *et al.* 1999). In many organizational cultures, visibility is a norm and “face time” an indicator of the employees’ contribution and commitment to work. Participating in work-life programs or utilizing benefits as flexible working hours or location may undermine the employees’ possibilities to be seen as an employee who is committed.

A third component of work-life culture concerns managerial support and sensitivity to employees’ family responsibilities (Thompson *et al.* 1999). Managerial support on a daily basis may be the most critical cultural variable in employees’ decisions to use family-friendly benefits and programs.

According to Thompson *et al.* (1999), supportive work-life culture should also make an organization a more desirable place to work. Employees' commitment and intentions to remain with the organization should also be positively influenced. The Thompson study revealed that supportive work-life culture was related to higher levels of commitment, lower intention to leave the organization, and less work-life conflict.

The key elements that must be in place within organizations to foster what Hillier *et al.* (2005) call a wellness culture, are for example conducive, welcoming and supportive environments that enable staff to form social networks. Also, the creation of trusting relationships and a sense of control over one's own working practices.

Organizational culture of a workplace does not necessarily suit all employees. In the already mentioned Swedish case study (Eriksson *et al.* 2008), employees who did not fit the culture did resign, but those who stayed, adapted to the existing organizational culture. In the studied organization, the organizational culture was clearly expressed already during recruitment of new employees, and the recruitment was selective, favoring those who were able to adapt to the organization.

4.2 Leadership

It is necessary for work-life solutions in the workplace to be driven or supported by top management in order for the solutions to become part of an organization's culture (Eversole *et al.* 2007). Those solutions can for example be provided flexibility or support.

Organizational culture can be linked to the ideal of a learning organization (Argyris 1999). Schein (2004) argues that in a world of turbulent change, organizations have to learn ever faster and that calls for a learning culture which functions as a perpetual learning system. The primary task of a leader in contemporary organizations is to create and sustain such a culture, according to Argyris (1999).

“The leader's first task is to be the trumpet that sounds a clear sound” (Drucker 2001). The second requirement is that the leader sees leadership as a responsibility. He or she wants strong associates whom they encourage and push. “An effective leader knows that the ultimate task of leadership is to create human energies and human vision” (Drucker 2001). The final requirement of effective leadership is to earn trust, show integrity and be consistent.

According to Arnold (2005), psychologists have shown a lot of interest in what is known as Organizational citizenship behaviors (OCB). The OCBs are labeled as altruism (helping others), conscientiousness (going beyond minimum role requirements), civic virtue (involvement in the life of the organization), courtesy (polite and considerate behavior), sportsmanship (tolerates less than ideal circumstances without complaining).

Fairness and justice in the workplace are important aspects when studying work-life balance and organizational culture (Arnold 2005). Experienced unfair treatment in the workplace, for example when a father experiences discrimination when a woman receives some kind of support from the workplace because she is a mother, can have the effects that he as an employee does not want to show good “citizenship behavior”, which in turn can have negative effects for both the employee and the organization.

Organizational culture can motivate employees. Leaders who have created or sustained a strong organizational culture, may have built in a purpose in the organization, which makes the employees’ understanding of the organization as something of value (Jacobsen and Thorsvik 2002). The employees can identify themselves with the organization and in a way find a source of personal satisfaction of needs, according to Jacobsen and Thorsvik (2002).

In a Swedish report from The National Institute for Working Life, on the impact of leadership regarding the health of subordinates, management is recognized as a part of the organizational culture and structure of the organization. “Management or leadership style may, in interaction with the organization, be a factor that has impact on the health of subordinates” (Nyberg et al. 2005).

4.3 Work-life balance

The total burden of employment and domestic responsibilities can be high in many families, where both partners work fulltime. Traditionally women have tended to shoulder most of the responsibility for managing the home and the caring for children. The gender perspective is important in the work-life balance research, which has become increasingly prominent in stress research and practice, according to Arnold (2005).

Work-life balance and the demands from different directions can affect individuals’ stress. Marianne Frankenhaeuser’s study (1989) on the difference in men’s and women’s stress levels after the workday emphasizes this. Her results were that women had higher stress levels than men, and that women recovered slower than the men after the workday (Frankenhaeuser *et al.* 1989). This gender difference was explained by the conflict between the demands from the workplace and the demands from other responsibility areas.

Flexible or part-time working have been among the most common organizational measures to support employees’ work-life balance (Eversole *et al.* 2001). Those appear on the other hand only to have marginal effects, for example only giving women more time to do their domestic duties, according to Smithson and Stokoe (2005). They, as well as Lewis (2001), have come to the conclusion that organizational culture was a very important component in supporting employees’ work-life balance.

The demand-control model (Karasek and Theorell 1990), shows the relation between the demands an employee experiences at work and how much control he or she has over

the work (see Figure 2). High demands with low control is not wished for because the employees then become a risk group for becoming stressed with possible serious and longstanding effects on health. The third dimension, later added, is social support, as the support plays an important part in sustaining health.

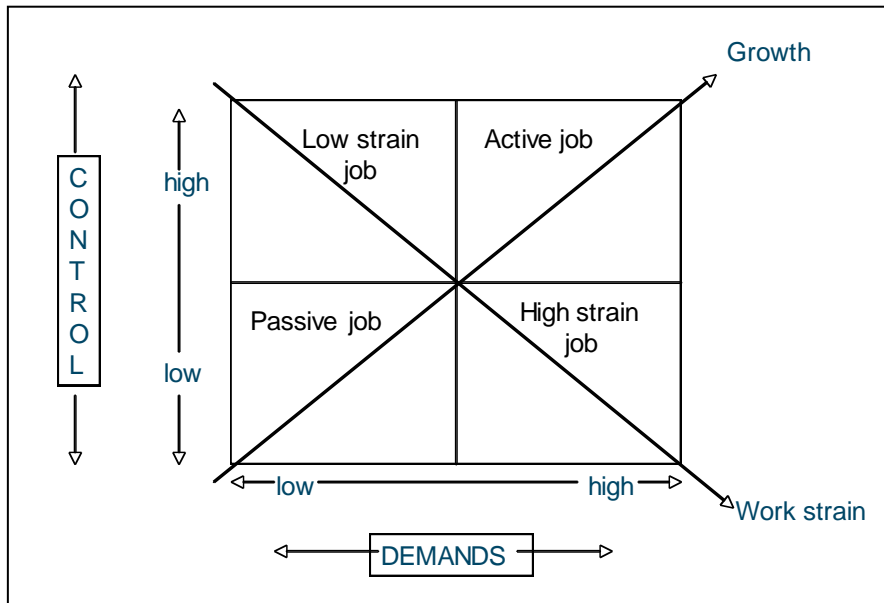


Figure 2. Karasek's demand-control model, (Karasek and Theorell 1990).

Icelandic research done on the work environment in banks, used Karasek's demand-control model to illuminate work-life balance. The results show that management support is more important to women than to men (Fridriksdóttir 2004). Moreover, that it is important that people feel like they are in control of their life, inside and outside the workplace.

Research on work-life balance is often linked to stress research. Occupational stress has been linked to illness in various ways. Research has found that job stressors, for example work pressure and role ambiguity, have contributed to greater work-life conflict (Ogden 2004). A person's social surroundings are essential in coping with eventual conflict or imbalance between work and life. Social support can be of great importance when individuals want to change behavior (Bennet 1997). Social support in the workplace is of importance when it comes to employees' health and wellbeing. The stress buffering hypothesis suggests that social support helps individuals to cope with stress, buffering the individual from the stressor (Ogden 2004).

With a faster tempo in the working life in the western world, longer working hours and modern information technology (IT), the boundaries between working life and private life have become unclear. In many jobs, one is supposed to be alert all the time. This appears in the constant increase in the amount of deadlines. Recovery and pressure do not shift as they used to (Theorell 2006). This is in line with research which has shown

that for some it is better to return to the strict hours of work, instead of flexible hours, for instance to prevent burnout (Rosengren 2006).

Organizational policies or benefits aim to provide employees with more control over the conditions of work and allow employees themselves to attend to private life needs. Callan (2007) refers to studies, which have shown that few workers apply for benefits which offer more unconflicted time at home.

The more unclear boundaries between work and private life in the past years have been accompanied by flexibility. Telework seems to have changed the employees' perception so that they become more flexible towards overtime or working sick, according to a Danish research on call center's employees (Kristensen 2007). The study also showed that the responsibility of drawing the line between work and private life is left with the employees themselves.

Research on organizational responses to work-life conflict is scarce (Eversole *et al.* 2007). One research has often been referred to: Thomas and Ganster's (1995) study on health care professionals with children. The authors came to the conclusion that flexible schedules and supervisor's support are related to lower levels of work-life conflict.

Research has also shown that the non-work time can affect – both positively and negatively – the employees' functioning during working hours (Olson 2004). Work-life balance problems have been much better documented than the effectiveness of the programs designed to alleviate them (Eversole *et al.* 2007). While there is a general acknowledgement that employees are encountering difficulties in balancing their work and private lives, a wide level of agreement does not exist as to how the problem should be addressed on an organizational level.

The employer's interest in what the employees do in their non-work time is relatively new. Work-life balance traditionally focused on family-friendly workplaces, which aimed at enabling mothers to balance work and family responsibilities. Organizations now recognize that work-life balance is about more than families. It is for example about supporting employees' access to working arrangements that are compatible with their other responsibilities and lifestyle. It is also recognized that work-life balance can lead indirectly to productivity gains (Visser and Williams 2006).

4.4 Health and workplace health promotion

Lennart Nordenfelt describes health as a person's ability to fulfill vital goals in different life areas (Medin and Alexanderson 2000). Nordenfelt is one of those who have defined health with a holistic approach, where health is related to people's social and cultural ability to fulfill their goals, and not simply the absence of a disease or even a state of perfect wellbeing.

Wellness is another concept from the literature, which has been defined as a positive, sustainable state that allows us to thrive and flourish (Hillier *et al.* 2005). "Creating and

generating wellness at work involves a balance between healthy performance, a sense of purpose, effective and inclusive communication and work-life balance.” (Hillier *et al.* 2005). By fostering work-life conflict, organizations distract and unempower their members and fail to exploit a potential synergy that can exist between learning organizations, learning individuals and learning families (Senge 1990).

A Finnish report states that both economic growth and investments in health provide advantages which are not to be dealt with as separate issues (Hämäläinen and Lindström 2006). The promotion of workers’ health covers the life course. At national level in the form of policies and programs and at workplace level in the form of culture appreciating workers’ health and proactive workplace development activities, like workplace health promotion (WHP) (Hämäläinen and Lindström 2006).

One of the five key strategies in health promotion, according to the Ottawa Charter (1986) is creating supportive environments. In a health context the term supportive environments refers to both the physical and the social aspects of our surroundings. It encompasses where people live, their local community, their home, where they work and play. It also embraces the framework, which determines access to resources for living, and opportunities for empowerment (Sundsvall Statement 1991).

The settings perspective was also new for the Ottawa Charter (1986). Settings are the places or social contexts “in which people engage in daily activities in which environmental, organizational and personal factors interact to affect health and wellbeing” (Health Promotion Glossary 1998). The workplace is an example of a setting for health, where the individuals and environment interact. In the workplace, the organizational culture and structure affects the employees and their health (Chu *et al.* 2000).

The determinants of health are “the range of personal, social, economic and environmental factors which determine the health status of individuals or populations” (Health Promotion Glossary 1998). Health determinants in companies may for example include human resources and leadership, work organization and job design and work environment (Hämäläinen and Lindström 2006). The Finnish report’s concluding remarks include that the work-life balance should be maintained to prevent adverse effects on health.

According to the Luxembourg Declaration on workplace health promotion (2005) which was drawn up by the European Network of Workplace Health Promotion (ENWHP), workplace health promotion is the “combined efforts of employers, employees and society to improve the health and well-being of people at work”. In accordance with this, the network also supports the balance between working and private life, benefiting the health of both the employees and their companies (ENWHPa 2008).

Assessing workplace health can for example be done through indicators measuring various categories (Tones and Tilford 2001). Organizational features is one of those categories, and the indicators for them are for example workplace culture, management

style, work group cohesion, worker autonomy, defined career paths, workload, worker involvement in decision making, communication channels, power/control versus responsibility, job satisfaction and morale (Chu *et al.* 1997 in Tones and Tilford 2001).

The health promoting factors in leadership have been summarized in a Swedish report (Nyberg *et al.* 2005): With respect to health and job satisfaction of subordinates, a good leader for example shows consideration towards subordinates, allows them to control their work environment, gives access to empowerment structures and opportunities for participation, autonomy and control.

According to ENWHP's policy (ENWHPa 2008), there is an increasing amount of research that provides good reasons for organizations to improve employees' work-life balance and to invest in appropriate initiatives. Those initiatives can for example be to increase employee satisfaction and motivation in the company, raise employees' levels of health and feelings of wellbeing, and improve the image and public reputation of the company.

Both work-life balance and organizational culture are areas of activity in workplace health promotion. Workplace health promotion involves combination of for example developing a working culture that is based on partnership, having an organizational commitment to improving the health of the workforce, and involving employees in decision making processes (ENWHPb 2008).

Workplace health promotion interventions, which have focused on individual approach, have not been as effective as those that have an organizational approach as well (Noblet and LaMontagne 2006). Not least is this important when studying work-life balance as an aspect of health, where this balance is often considered to be a private matter of the individual and not something for organizations to account for.

5 METHODS

This is a case study. The organization was chosen for the study because it was nominated the "Company of the year" 2007, after a survey done by the worker's union VR. According to the survey, this is a very good workplace to work in, with a positive organizational culture. The overall grade was 92 of 100 (VR Questionnaire 2007).

The companies which joined the "Company of the year"-survey, were divided into two groups: larger and smaller organizations. The larger ones had over 50 employees, and the smaller ones 49 or fewer. This case organization got the diploma "Company of the year" 2007 in the group of larger organizations. Over 23 thousand members of VR received the questionnaire 2007. The response rate was about 45% as 11.300 answered.

5.1 Setting

The organization is a subsidiary of a larger Icelandic parent company in IT business. The subsidiary is a software consultancy and service company, working with large software solutions of two global brands. The software department of the parent company developed over time and began with sales and marketing of one software brand, and related services in 1997. This department made the foundation for the organization studied, established in 2005 as a separate company under a new name, after having acquired a Danish company in the same business. The organization studied became the Icelandic branch of the organization now operating in Sweden, Denmark and the UK.

The workplace is located in the same building as the parent company, in a new office and business quarter in Reykjavík. The case organization is located on one floor since recently, before it was in parts of two floors. The 80 employees work in an open landscape, where only the Managing director (MD) has his own office.

Several meeting rooms are frequently used for meetings where two or more people come together. The employees are grouped in six teams, working on different solutions and businesses, developing software solutions and customer support. Each team has a leader, who is also an ordinary employee and a team member. Additionally, there is the administration team, consisting of the MD, sales manager, development manager, business manager and secretaries. The organizational structure is flat, where the MD is on top and the other managers and team leaders follow on an equal level.

There is a time clock in the workplace and a time register system, to monitor employees' working hours and overtime. The employees are supposed to fulfill their working duty each month, 37,5 hours per week for a full-time job. Less than 10% of the employees work part-time. The employees are supposed to do their work during day-time, but not at strict hours. Flexible working hours and location are common. Some employees live outside Reykjavík and do their job from home. Some employees do their job at the customer's site, i.e. they are consultants for periods differing in length, and thus are not visible at the workplace. Every employee has a laptop and a mobile phone from the company, and the internet-access at home is taken care of by the company.

5.2 Case study methodology

A case study was chosen because it can give the chance to observe, analyze documents and interview people. "...the distinctive need for case studies arises out of the desire to understand complex social phenomena" (Yin 2003). The case study method allows investigators to retain the holistic characteristics of real-life events, for example organizational and managerial processes. Organizational culture is one such complex social phenomenon.

There are many types of case studies: on individuals, community studies, social group studies, studies of events, roles and relationships (Robson 2002). Then there are studies of organizations and institutions, where the researcher studies workplaces, schools, firms etc. The focus can be different, e.g. on best practice, management, processes of change, or as in this case study, organizational culture. Case study is a flexible design, fitting for the type of research needed to answer the questions asked in this study.

Yin's (2003) definition of a case study is: "A case study is an empirical inquiry that:
-investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context, especially when
-the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident."

A case study is more a strategy than a method (Robson 2002). Doing a case study, the researcher then uses a range of methods. The central defining characteristic is concentration on a particular case, studied in its own right. Some see case study as being essentially qualitative, but others find it appropriate to use both quantitative and qualitative data collection methods.

Case studies may use triangulated methods comprising for example observation, unstructured interviews and document research, to validate the findings (Bowling 2002). In this case study, four methods were used: A questionnaire-survey, semi-structured interviews, observations and document analysis. To increase the validity, both methodological triangulation (qualitative and quantitative approach) and data triangulation (more than one method of data collection) were used. Triangulation was used in order to increase the validity and strength of the study, to decrease investigator bias, and to provide multiple perspectives (Denzin 1970).

The workplace in Iceland was visited for two separate weeks, one week in January 2008 and one week in April 2008. On both occasions, observations were made and documents gathered for document analysis. During the first visit, the employees filled in the questionnaire, and during the second visit, eight employees were interviewed for 50-80 minutes each.

5.2.1 Survey

Sample and procedures

A questionnaire with 19 questions (see Appendix 1): eight questions on background, ten statements measuring attitudes by a 5-point scale, and one open question, was constructed by the author, inspired by previous literature review. It was piloted in autumn 2007, and then handed out at the workplace, during a two-day period in January 2008. The response rate was 90%, with 72 completed questionnaires returned, 29 from women and 43 from men. This represents the gender division in the workplace, which is approximately 40%-60% respectively. Average age of the respondents was about 36 years, and 82% were married or living with a partner (n=58). 71% were parents with children living at home permanently. Approximately the same percentage of men and women were parents.

86% of the respondents hold a university degree, the same percentage for men and women. All those who hold a management position in the organization, answered the survey, whereof 30% were women. Exactly half of the respondents worked overtime, mostly men. Only a quarter of those who worked overtime were women. 63% of the male respondents worked overtime. 60% of the respondents have worked for the company less than three years. The results were statistically analyzed with the SPSS 15.0 program.

Measures

Supportive work-life culture was measured with ten statements (see Appendix 1). The statements addressed respondents' perceptions of the organizational culture and the extent to which the organization supported their efforts to balance work and private life. The three components of supportive work-life culture, according to Thompson *et al.* (1999) were measured. Those were management support, career consequences and organizational time expectations. For example, "In this organization employees can balance their work and private lives", "There is a team spirit within this organization" or "This organization supports and values the integration of employees' work and private lives".

Respondents indicated the extent to which each statement characterized their perception of the organization using a five-point scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). This is a Likert scale, which is an ordinal scale (Bowling 2002). In an ordinal scale, the items stand in some kind of relation to each other, but the distances between any two numbers on the scale are not of known size.

Analyses

Using an ordinal scale means that there are not equal intervals between categories and normal distribution is not to be expected. Therefore, non-parametric statistics were appropriate in this case, (even though parametric statistics are often used on non-parametric data). The non-parametric statistics indicate whether there is a statistically significant pattern of associations between variables (Bowling 2002).

The statistical analysis program SPSS 15.0 was used to handle the data. To test significant associations, the Wilcoxon Rank sum test (Mann-Whitney test) was run when the independent variable was two-level (e.g. male-female). When the independent variable had two or more levels, the Kruskal-Wallis test was run (e.g. different groups of overtime hours). These are non-parametric tests, appropriate for this kind of data. The decided significance level was 0.05.

5.2.2 Document analysis

Document analysis is an unobtrusive measure (Robson 2002), which is non-reactive, i.e. the document is not affected by the fact that it is used. Documents were gathered with the help of a contact person at the workplace. The documents that were analyzed, dated maximum two years back in time from the spring 2008. Those were overheads from various presentations, internal newsletters, marketing material, newspaper articles, annual report 2007, and website news. In addition, the parent company's human resource policy, as well as goals and vision, were read and analyzed. The results were then compared to the results of the other methodological approaches.

5.2.3 Observations

Observations can give the researcher direct access to every day processes and happenings in the organization (Malterud 1998).

The observations for this case study were informal, as a part of the flexible design. The researcher/observer was participant at times, but mostly unobtrusive. The defining characteristic of unobtrusive observation is that it is non-participatory in the interests of being non-reactive (Robson 2002). Unobtrusive observations can be structured but are more usually unstructured and informal as in this case study. At one meeting the observer participated in group work solving tasks, and furthermore when having informal conversations about the workplace.

In this case study, the researcher visited the workplace for two separate working weeks, was present at several meetings, and at informal conversations. Notes were taken at and after meetings, and when reflecting after each day. These notes were read and analyzed, and the results then compared to the results of the other methodological approaches.

5.2.4 Interviews

On the background of the results from the questionnaire, an interview-guide was constructed by the author (see Appendix 2). The interview-guide was constructed and intended to guide the later analysis of the data.

Eight semi-structured interviews were done during four days, using the interview guide developed for the purpose of this study. The interviews were tape-recorded and transcribed verbatim. The respondents were four women and four men, strategically chosen from various teams in the workplace. One of the respondents was the company's MD, three were team leaders and four were other employees from three different teams. Four of the respondents had children.

The interviewer sometimes skipped questions during an interview. This was because the questions were not appropriate according to how the discussion in the interview setting developed. This was however not found affecting the results. The respondents were

different in their answers, some were brief, others used many words. Information from all the respondents was valuable and added to the analysis.

Since there is no standard method through which one can reach the meaning or the deeper implications from what is said in an interview, and no standard methods for text analysis in the way that are available for statistical analysis (Kvale 1997), several approaches were considered. “The fact that a study is a case study does not, in itself, call for a particular approach to the analysis of the qualitative data which it produces“ (Robson 2002).

At first, the methods of content analysis were used to analyze the interviews. This was found limited for the purpose, as this method is often used for document analysis (Kvale 1997, Miles and Huberman 1994, Robson 2002).

The research questions were placed upon the transcripts from the interviews, and Kvale’s (1997) approach to text and transcripts kept in mind, that the researcher has a dialog with the text about the meaning, raises questions on the text’s theme, penetrates the text and tries to develop, explain and expand what is communicated.

It was decided to use inspirations from ethnographic studies, as this approach is often used for studying culture (Robson 2002). Ethnographic studies are often analyzed using grounded theory, which was not the case here, as the generation of theory was not the aim. Instead, development of descriptions and explanations was the intention. Following the method of grounded theory was furthermore set aside because it was not possible to follow the methodology of analyzing the interviews one at a time until saturation was reached, because the time in Iceland was limited. According to Robson (2002), using the techniques of grounded theory in a relatively relaxed manner is a viable approach for a case study, and this was done.

Three steps should be taken in the analysis and transformation of data in an ethnographic study (Wolcott in Robson 2002). These are: description of the culture-sharing group, analysis of themes of the culture, and interpretation. To do this, the three main tasks are, according to Robson: thinking, developing categories, and progressive focusing. More specifically: looking for patterns, key events, and triangulation.

These steps were taken with the material from the interviews. Furthermore, the techniques of content analysis and grounded theory were used. The transcripts were split into meaning units, and then coded. According to grounded theory approach, using pre-determined coding categories is not allowed. As the method was used in a relatively relaxed manner (Robson 2002) and in the ethnographic spirit, pre-determined categories (from the interview-guide) were used at the beginning. By further reading and re-reading the material, different categories and later themes emerged.

6 ETHICS

The study was announced to the Data Protection Authority (Persónuvernd) in Iceland, according to the rules in Iceland (The Data Protection Authority website 2008). The employees in the organization received a letter on the study before filling in the questionnaire, and the respondents and the researcher signed an informed consent before the interviews.

7 RESULTS

The questionnaire, the documents, the observations, and the interviews, all provided some results and answers to the research questions. The results will first be presented according to what the different methods provided, and then followed by a summarized analysis according to the research questions.

The VR survey was an important pre-study. It was the baseline for the case study described in this thesis, i.e. the work environment in the case organization has been found very positive and this study was directed from there. The factors measured in the VR survey were for example (the case organization's grade of 100, in brackets): flexibility at work (98), climate in the workplace (94), workload and demands (93)², leaders' credibility (86), pride of company (78), employment conditions (77), and independence at work (72).

7.1 The survey

The survey was intended to give an overall view of the organizational culture, and answer the question whether it was work-life supportive. In short, the answer was yes. Majority of the respondents agreed or strongly agreed to the statements in the questionnaire measuring this. E.g. "I feel secure about my career when I take such active measures [to balance work and private life]", "In general, managers of this organization have an understanding of private life needs" or "I experience time left after work to do what I have to/like to do".

Even though the response rate of the questionnaire was 90%, the sample of 72 was indeed small. The aim of the survey was to give a snapshot of the workplace. See Figure 3.

² The grade for workload and demands reflects the satisfaction with how workload and demands are in the company.

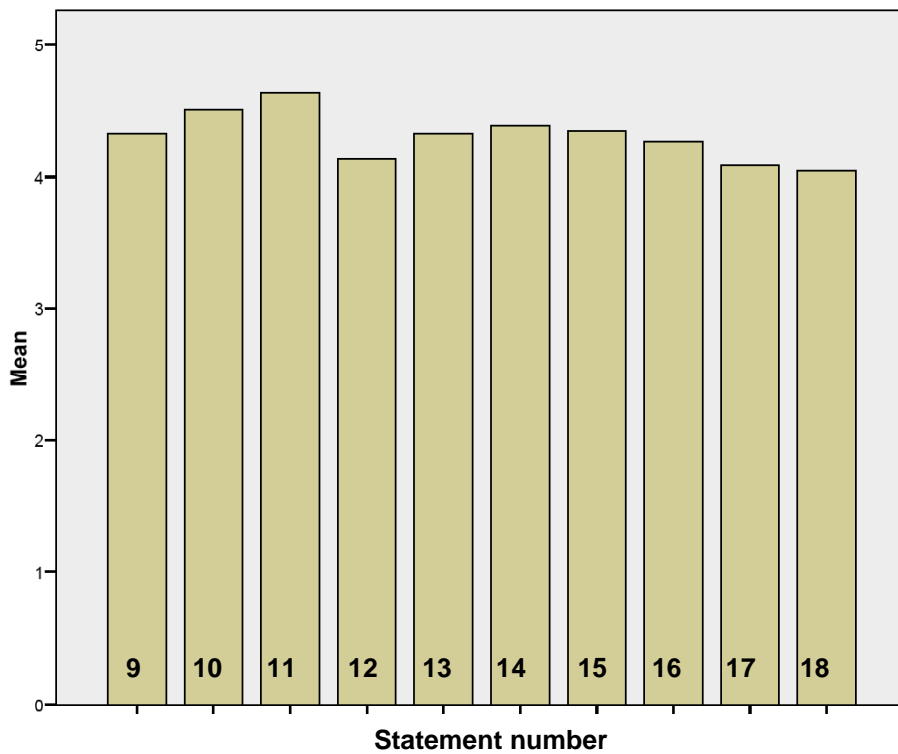


Figure 3. Mean results from answers to all statements lies between four and five, i.e. agree or strongly agree. (See Appendix 1 for the statements behind each number).

Even though the overall picture was that the employees of this organization were positive towards the organizational culture and work-life balance, it was necessary to check for differences in experiences which might be explained by background variables such as having children or not, gender, or working overtime. It is emphasized that the differences were mainly in whether respondents answered the statements as “agree” or “strongly agree”, as was pointed out in Figure 3. According to how the respondents answered the various statements dependent on their background, only two significant associations were discovered.

The above-mentioned relations were investigated by statistical hypothesis testing, using different null-hypotheses. Plots were made for the background variables about children and statements such as “I feel secure about my career when I take such active measures [to balance work and private life]”, “In general, managers of this organization have an understanding of private life needs” and “I experience time left after work to do what I have to/like to do”. As well as “In this organization employees can balance their work and private lives” and “This organization supports and values the integration of employees’ work and private lives”.

A Wilcoxon Rank sum test was run for the several statements, where the p-value always ended up over 0.05. Therefore, it was concluded that there was no difference in the perception of the work-life culture between those who have children and those who have no children, there was no difference in the perception of the work-life culture

dependent on how many children respondents have, and there was no difference in the perception of the work-life culture between men and women, or that possible difference would be by chance.

When plots were made for the background variable on overtime and the statements “I feel secure about my career when I take such active measures [to balance work and private life]” (statement 12, see Figure 4) and “I experience time left after work to do what I have to/like to do”, some significance was found. Running the Wilcoxon Rank sum test, the p-values were below 0.05, i.e. 0.035 for the career statement and 0.036 for the time statement. Therefore, it was concluded that the difference between the experience of career security and own time left, of those who worked overtime and those who did not work overtime, was not by chance.

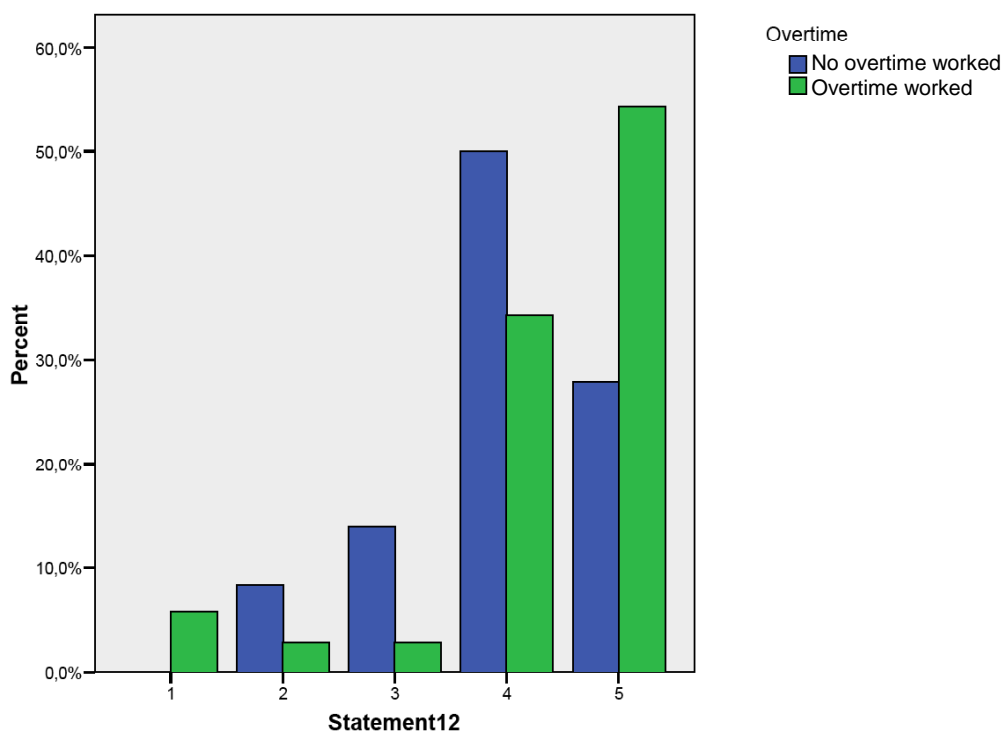


Figure 4. The association between overtime and career security measured in statement 12 (see Appendix 1).

To look closer at the overtime association, the Kruskal Wallis test was run on the above statements together with hours of overtime as the grouping variable. Five groups of overtime hours were constructed, so the number of respondents in each one was not so extensive because of the small sample. The association with hours of overtime revealed itself not significant, i.e. the p-value was over 0.05. Therefore, it was concluded that there was no difference between the experience of career security and own time left, dependent on how many hours of overtime the respondents, who worked overtime, worked.

The only significant association revealed from the statistical analysis, was between working overtime or not, and career security and own time left. I.e. the extent to which the respondents agree to the statements about career security and own time left, was related to whether they worked overtime or not. According to Figure 4, those who worked overtime in more cases strongly agreed to the statement that they were secure about their career when they took measures to balance work and private life. On the other hand, those who did not work overtime answered the statement in more cases with the second strongest possibility “agree”.

It is of importance to look at those who work overtime. There was significant difference in the gender of those who work overtime. The majority (75%) were men. And the majority of the male respondents worked overtime (63%). The women who worked overtime were divided equally between agreeing and strongly agreeing to the statement on career security. Nine women worked overtime, one of them did not answer this statement. More than half of the men who worked overtime however strongly agreed to the statement (n=15).

One open question was in the questionnaire: “Please describe what work-life balance means to you”. Two thirds of those who filled in the questionnaire, answered the open question, or 48 respondents. The analysis of the answers to this question, revealed the respondents’ understanding of the concept work-life balance.

50% of the respondents mentioned flexibility as the core or an important part of work-life balance. Control was also an important aspect of the concept, i.e. having such control over own work conditions that they don’t affect private life. Time was also mentioned as important for work-life balance. The respondents who mentioned time, did it in relation to flexibility, or stated the importance of having reasonable workload to have time left after work to be with the family or attend to hobbies.

The last but not least category revealed from the 48 answers to the open question was about trusting and understanding leaders. Trusting supervisors were one of the keys to reaching work-life balance, according to some of the answers, for example when leaders trust their employees to do their working duties in the time and space that suits the employees best. The understanding leaders were also important, those who accept that the private life conditions can affect the work performance of employees from time to time. Thus, it can be stated that the respondents’ understanding of the concept work-life balance involved flexibility, time, control, trust and understanding from leaders.

Based on the results from the questionnaire, it can be stated that the organization, the case of this study, has a supportive work-life organizational culture. Management support was existing, career consequences were minimal and overtime was not wished for by the organization, as for the three components according to Thompson *et al.* (1999).

7.2 The document analysis

The document analysis was intended to provide a view of the organization's image and identity as a part of the organizational culture.

The website of the company gave a snapshot of this. In this case, the website has been changed according to a new logo which was announced in the end of the observations period. The logo and the new website-look was respectful and modest, with grey-green and light-blue color. The news on the website were mainly about customers, but also on international expansion, the new logo, conferences and courses. The "Company of the year" is allowed to publish the diploma logo on its website, the year they hold the title. This was explicit on the website and also in various marketing materials.

In the parent company's annual report, the history of the company and its subsidiaries was tracked, and the same text was on the case organization's website. The case organization's operations were reported, the growth in the business and number of employees, and of course the nomination of the case organization as the company of the year 2007. "This was a pleasing nomination because it reflects great job satisfaction of the employees and a positive type of enterprise. The company emphasizes job satisfaction and success and attracts by that qualified individuals to tackle challenging projects in the field of information technology" (Annual report of the parent company 2007).

The workplace underwent "Corporate workout"-program last year, handled by the management academy of one of the universities in Iceland. According to the written information on the program the aims of the program were: to build a stronger team in the organization by strengthening the employees' awareness of the organization's vision and goals, to develop an even stronger organizational culture, and to strengthen the organization to be able to serve better the needs of current and future customers.

The project was run in the year 2007, where all the employees participated in the work, which included presentations from the management academy, brainstorming and group work. This work was intended to prioritize what needed to be done, according to the employees' opinions. The results were eight focus areas: project management, knowledge management, service management, location, intranet, customer relations management, logistics, and marketing.

Working groups were formed on each focus area with three or four employees in each group. This has been followed through and realized. The eight focus areas from the corporate workout program were mainly in the business field or external, i.e. diverse areas of managing relations with customers, service, logistics, knowledge and projects, as well as marketing. In addition were location and intranet, which can be characterized as internal matters. The "location" was about moving the workplace to one floor, and the intranet about building a functioning intranet for information flow within the workplace.

A part of the “Corporate workout”-program was also identifying challenges for the organization. According to the written documents, those are for example that the organization should attend more to employee health, that time register system was not user-friendly and should be dropped, and a human resource (HR) manager was missing.

The themes, which resulted from the content analysis of the documents intended to provide a view of the image and identity, and they were: ambition, fun, international character, and flexibility. Examples and related categories are provided below.

7.2.1 Ambition

Key performance indicators (KPI), are the financial and non-financial metrics, used to help an organization define and measure progress toward organizational goals. The KPIs of this organization were in five areas: employees, finance, relating to business, processes, and partners. Concerning the employees, the goals were for example that the company should be in the top 20 of the “Company of the year”-survey every year.

The ambition appeared throughout the material as well, especially slides from presentations on staff meetings: “We are doing good, we must continue and have ambition to be the best.”

7.2.2 Fun

In various power point presentations of the workplace, printed out for the document analysis, pictures of the employees were shown. They were having fun on the countryside, or at some gatherings. The image presented was: “This is an informal workplace, we have fun together. We are active, we do various things together.”

7.2.3 International character

After reading the documents on the website about the history of this organization, it was obvious that being a part of both a global software brand and an organization working in several countries, was important. The goal was to be one of the strongest consulting companies for the software solution in Northern-Europe. The Icelandic company was by no means the main point of the introduction of the company on the website, on the contrary, the international identity was central. For example, it was emphasized that the employees of this organization were 220 in four countries.

The ties between the sister companies in Iceland, Denmark, Sweden and UK appeared to be stronger in many ways than the ties between the Icelandic parent company and the subsidiary. This emerged from documents as for example newsletters, website and presentation material. There, the relationships with the foreign companies were emphasized, but the relationship with the parent company was not so visible.

7.2.4 Flexibility

There was not a documented human resource policy in this organization. However, the parent company had such a written policy. On two pages, the policy was written and the process of welcoming new people, education, equality, health, work-life balance and the company union shortly described.

The part on the work-life balance of the parent company's human resource policy, touched upon the flexibility as a synonym for work-life balance. The parent company placed emphasis on flexibility in order to decrease the probability of conflict between work and private life. Flexible working hours and the supervisors' understanding were the key-words in the policy.

7.3 The observations

The observations were intended to provide a picture of the climate in the workplace, communication between people, and leadership style. Broad and informal approach was taken, as the observations were not structured.

The organization is a subsidiary to a larger parent company, one of the first IT companies in Iceland, doing business with hardware and software and services. The whole organization is large, consists of the parent company and twenty subsidiaries with over 700 employees. The six subsidiaries in Iceland are all in the same building. The cafeteria is common for the whole building, as well as some supporting departments as marketing and HR. The HR department assists the team leaders and the MD of the case organization with recruitments, handles payroll and registers absenteeism.

The climate in the workplace was observed throughout the stay for two separate weeks. Jokes, smiles and laughter were noted in people's communication, during meetings as well as off meetings by the coffee machine or in sofas in the central space. The meetings attended during the observation time seemed goal oriented and with open communication, where questions were asked and discussion was created. The meetings were not the only platform for problem-solving, there were conversations on work-related problems in the corridors or between work-stations as well.

During the last years the workplace has been located on two separate floors, sharing space with other subsidiaries or departments of the parent company. The relocation of the office to one floor had been planned since the results of the corporate workout program were available.

During the research for the case study, in January and April 2008, the relocation had not yet taken place, but was planned later in April 2008. This was often discussed during the observations and it was obvious that the expectations were considerable. The expectations were mostly about decreasing what can be called the dichotomy of the

company. The dichotomy appeared in the two software solutions dividing the company into two departments, one on each floor, until the relocation.

An example of the flexibility observed, was at one of the meetings the author was present, where one of those attending the meeting was located in another part of the country, where he lives and works from. The meeting room was well equipped with telephone, loudspeaker, computer and projector. The flexibility in space observed at this meeting can be an example of that telecommuting works for this organization.

Another example is that all the employees have laptops, which they can take home if they want to or need to. Everyone has his or her own desk in an open landscape, and a dock-station for the laptop. The employees have access to each other's calendars and can book meetings and meeting rooms via the computer. The team leaders and management have blackberries, i.e. mobile phone and e-mail access in one, so they are accessible all the time.

During the observations, one meeting outside the workplace was attended. This kind of meeting is held two times a year and the purpose is to look back at what has happened in the company between meetings, and to look forward – where are we heading and what are the aims?

Employees are supposed to attend those meetings as a part of their job. The attendance to this meeting was however only 65% and some managers were unhappy about that the attendance was not higher. The atmosphere at the meeting was positive. The results from eight groups, who had worked on the results from the corporate workout program, were introduced by respective group members. The MD gave a presentation, was inspiring and joking.

After the presentations, group work started. This was teamwork run by an outside event firm aimed at thinking outside the box, solving problems and working together in groups of five people. The groups were arranged by names in alphabetical order, so members of the same work-team in the organization would not end up together in this group session.

The whole event was planned ahead by a marketing department employee and members of the employee club. Everyone got a yellow bag with yellow wrapped things: sportdrink, sandwich, energy bar and a yellow pin. This, to create excitement: Is this the new logo for the company...? Which it was not. Joke competition had been organized and the results were introduced after the presentations and group work. Thereafter, people could take a bath in the Blue Lagoon followed by dinner, at the company's cost.

A new logo was however introduced during the second observation period. Once a month, there is an employee meeting where all the employees gather for one to two hours, have breakfast and discuss various matters. One such employee meeting was observed. On this employee meeting, the MD introduced the new logo for the company. This was the result of work on the image of the organization, which now consists of companies in Iceland, Denmark, Sweden and the UK.

On this meeting's agenda were several presentations from employees, thereof two presentations from employees who had recently attended conferences on their fields of specialty within the software brand the company represents. One of them had attended his first conference hosted by the software brand abroad, and while introducing the findings from the conference, he expressed how impressed he was about the setting of the conference, how elegant and well prepared it was. He was evidently proud of belonging to this community and had the support of his colleagues. This pride was observed in meetings as well. It was furthermore observed how proud the employees seemed to be of the diploma "Company of the year". Many employees expressed that the employees were generally surprised when it was announced last year.

Attendance to the staff meeting was good, 65 persons, or about 80% of the employees were there. This sort of a meeting is held the first Friday morning each month in the cafeteria. People seemed generally happy about the new logo. At the end of the meeting, employees from the marketing department and the administration distributed new fleece jackets with the new logo and the name of the employee to every employee.

The MD was not very visible in the workplace during the observations. He was obviously busy in meetings and on the phone. The door to his room was most often closed when he was in there during the observations, and he was on the phone. The team leaders however, were very visible. They are both leaders and ordinary employees, sharing working space with their teams. Conversations between team leaders and other team members were observed as informal and frequent.

From the observations it could be seen that the workplace is informal, people cooperate, team leaders are accessible for their employees, there is ambition and the employees seem to have fun.

7.4 The interviews

The interviews were intended to capture the employees' experiences and thoughts about the workplace, the organizational culture and aspects of the work-life balance.

Raising the research questions upon the transcripts from the interviews, and analyzing the material according to those, five themes emerged on the workplace, the organizational culture and various aspects of work-life balance:

1. Climate of openness, informality and cooperation
2. Mutual flexibility in time, space and projects
3. Pride of the profile and history of the company
4. Supportive leadership
5. Challenges in sustaining the culture

Below are the descriptions of each theme, with quotes from the respondents to support the findings, marked with number from one to eight, referring to the respondents. They

are not identified further to secure anonymity. The interviews were in Icelandic but the quotes were translated to English trying to capture the informal manner of speech.

When using [...] in the quotes from the respondents in this thesis, this indicates that some part of the talk has been cut out because it is insignificant in the actual context. When using ... without square brackets, this indicates some kind of hesitation by the respondent. When using square brackets round a word or words, this indicates that words like “this” or “that” have been used referring to what is in the square brackets, or the anonymity is being secured because respondent is mentioning the name of the company or the software the company represents etc.

7.4.1 Climate of openness, informality and cooperation

“Open and informal climate” and “lively workplace” was a common description of the climate in the workplace. “We have the same goal” and “we thrive on solving problems together” were descriptions of the cooperation. Questions were related to team spirit and general description of the workplace and its climate.

“It is an informal and light climate. [...] we have a lot to do and you know... everyone has to make an input.” (Respondent 3).

“...we have the goal to be the best and we want to continue to be the best. And...what is nice about when unpredicted things come up, that is that everyone does their best and we are going to finish this.” (Respondent 1).

The previous quotes described the cooperation of working towards the goals. The next quote is from an employee describing the culture in the workplace. She was of the opinion that the well-educated workforce of the company was of importance in creating the open and open-minded climate. The education level in the organization is high, i.e. those who don't have a university degree are very few or only 14% of the employees.

“The people who are working here and applying for job here, they are educated people and people who want to work here. They are maybe applying for many jobs and can get many jobs but prefer to work in this company. That makes a difference.” (Respondent 2).

“[The climate] is characterized by a harmony somehow. It is a homogeneous group, if someone comes in newly recruited, they most often fit very well into the group. They are nice and you know you don't sit all day in front of the computer, there is small talk in between and everybody is nice and easy.” (Respondent 8).

The recruiting process was seen as a very important process in this organization, and new people must fit into the existing culture and this strengthened the opinion of the homogeneous group, as the below quotes describe.

“We have never recruited someone without having some reference, and the process has been carefully prepared. We have of course made mistakes in recruiting, but overall we have been very successful in recruiting. And that is a big part of the explanation [for sustaining the organizational culture].” (Respondent 6).

“When we are recruiting...we think a lot about if the candidate fits into our environment...it is a big speculation each time.” (Respondent 3).

“These words, drive, open communication and ambition. I think this attracts certain type of people who work well together also.” (Respondent 7).

An informal climate and spontaneity characterized the workplace, as well as cooperation.

“It is an climate you feel good in. And there is spontaneity. I experience it like that it is alive and people are ready to jump in as soon is something comes up.” (Respondent 1).

The cooperation appeared in comments about common goals.

“I have always experienced it as if there is little competition between people. [...] People thrive on solving problems. Usually we solve them together.” (Respondent 4).

“People are pleased when other projects are successful, and of course their own too. And people are open and discuss like friends.” (Respondent 7).

On the whole, the respondents used these words a lot in different context, but referring to the climate and way of communication: light, informal, open, funny, common goals. This seemed to catch their experience of the climate in the workplace, which is a part of the organizational culture.

7.4.2 Mutual flexibility in time, space and projects

The questions related to this theme were for instance on flexibility and overtime. “I am proud of the flexibility”, “what counts is to show responsibility and commitment”, “very few who work overtime” and “overtime is not promoted in this workplace” are examples of comments in this theme.

Flexibility was often mentioned by the respondents, as the thing that was positive in the organization, regarding work-life balance. The employees and managers seemed happy with this flexibility and even proud of it.

“I experience very much flexibility and I think we can be very proud of that...and I mentioned before that everybody has a laptop and everybody has internet access from home and everybody has a mobile phone from the company, so there is in fact nothing that ties people to the office as such.” (Respondent 5).

The company provides means for the employees to work away from the office. The mutual flexibility was also a strong theme:

“I think this works both ways actually. The company is flexible towards its people and the people are flexible towards the company. If you one day have to work longer to finish something, then you do your best to do that, and then again there is flexibility if you have to go home early or take a day off or something like that.” (Respondent 7).

Overtime or career also fitted in this theme. That was consistent with the organizational time expectations and the possible career consequences, the two of three components in the supportive work-life organizational culture, according to Thompson *et al.* (1999).

The situation in organizational time expectations, i.e. the time the organization expects the employee to spend at work or doing work, emerged clearly through the interviews. Overtime was not seen as a positive thing in the organization and was not demanded, but it is paid and unlimited. About half of those who answered the questionnaire worked overtime, differing in amount of hours. The employees were responsible for their own projects and assignments and had the freedom to work on those within their own time frame. Some found it easy, others did not and thought that overtime was necessary, in some cases because of ambition:

“There is some pressure, projects come up with short notice and so on. But...I think that is fine. What is harder is that we are quite few and it takes little to increase the workload very much for few people.” (Respondent 1).

“Of course you are ambitious. For yourself and the company. I know that if I would go to my supervisor and inform that I just can't work overtime now or the next few weeks, then all arrangements would be made. That would probably cause that we would have to let go of some projects and then you have to alternate between developing something or not.” (Respondent 1).

In some cases because of the economic motivation:

“You can see that some people just want to work a lot, this is that kind of working environment so people can benefit from that, it is not like we are putting pressure on people and they always get the same salary. If people have that motivation to get more paid, then this is one way to get it and it is a bit hard to say you know “can't you work a little less..” people maybe want...need the money or want to do something. Then it reacts against them if you do something about this.” (Respondent 5).

It was generally accepted that the last three years had been exceptional regarding number of projects and workload. Periods where overtime was requested have been quite a few, but are now more rare:

“The last three years have been abnormal in Iceland, with much expansion and a lot to do.” (Respondent 5).

“[The workload] is shifting, comes in periods. Now it is relatively balanced, but sometimes there is a lot to do. Like it has been for the last three years [...] then there is much pressure but this comes in periods.” (Respondent 4).

However, overtime as such was not promoted. Both managers and general employees agreed on that:

“There is general understanding that people just don’t work 24/7 and this is not requested.” (Respondent 7).

“It is always the same employees who work overtime. And that is their choice actually. I am not asking people to be here at night or during weekends, not at all. But they who work overtime are those who want to work overtime. Once in a while there are some periods, rarely though, and then people have been asked to work during weekend or take a session for some time.” (Respondent 6).

“Overtime is not promoted here. I have been in a working environment where overtime was promoted and you saw people working like crazy, during weekends, this creates a certain kind of atmosphere...and then when their work was analyzed, it appeared that the quality was not in line with the hours spent. I think it is important to try to promote such a work environment where people think about time spent at work and they use it well. In return they get extra time at the other side. I think that is very good.” (Respondent 7).

What seemed to count when making career was taking responsibility, finishing projects, as well as the experience and knowledge the employee has gathered during the years. In fact, career opportunities are not that extensive in this organization. The structure is flat and almost all the team leaders are people who have worked at the company for a long time and have the longest experience in their team.

“...there are not many layers in our hierarchy. There is no career upwards in this company, it is...broadening in stead. [] We often say in recruiting interviews that there is not much career move upwards in this company, here we have flat structure and informal. The career move is rather to add extensive knowledge and familiarity in your field.” (Respondent 3).

“I think what in fact counts is the responsibility the employee takes and what results.... but I think it is also the attitude, am I here for this company or am I here to work on my career and then go off to work for some other company in a few years.” (Respondent 1).

“People get respect because of their competence and years with the company...but not from the organization chart....and those who have worked long and know a lot... are prestigious with the clients and employees....[...] So I would say this was a part of the informality here.” (Respondent 5).

The results from the questionnaire were that there is a significant difference between those who work overtime and those who don’t, on to what extent they agree to the statement “I feel secure about my career when I take such active measures [to balance

work and private life]”. This was not confirmed through the interviews. The previous quotes and the following, capture the core of this relation:

“You don’t earn credit by working overtime, but instead for taking responsibility for projects and finishing those. There is a difference.” (Respondent 4).

This theme was about flexibility, a core in the work-life balance discussion. The relations to ambition for the workplace, career, overtime and workload could be seen through the interviews, as the respondents often discussed these aspects in connection with each other. From the analysis of the interviews, it can be stated that there is flexibility in this organization.

7.4.3 Pride of the profile and history of the company

The third theme was about the history of this organization. The questions, which created this theme in the end, were mostly about the organizational culture. The comments were for example something like “strong culture from the beginning” and “proud to be acquainted with this community and this software”.

This theme was not so much about work-life balance itself, or support for that in the organizational culture. Instead, it was about the original organizational culture, and how it was created in the beginning, when the organization was a department in the parent company. The purpose of this thesis was partly to explain how an organizational culture is created and sustained. Furthermore, the original culture acts as a foundation for the current one.

The history of an organization is very important while analyzing the creation of its culture as all organizations start as small groups (Schein 2004). In this case the organization started as a little department in the largest IT company in Iceland. From the start there was a strong culture, the little group of seven stuck together, had similar sense of humor and became good friends. They created a cohesive culture that they experienced positively from the very beginning.

“We were only seven when I started at the little department [in the parent company], we had fun and felt good together. Five of us are still with the company and are team leaders today.” (Respondent 3).

The foundation for this cohesive culture has been laid by the history. The organizational culture was created back then and appears to have been sustained.

“There is a certain foundation here, something that has been with us from the beginning. We have benefited from that. When we started as this company we had this endowment... and that has helped us a lot. We would never have made it if we were going to start a company from scratch.” (Respondent 6).

This small department from the beginning handled a software brand, which was new then but has grown in use and reputation in Iceland and around the world. The brand is a large software producer, who has been very successful. The producer makes partnerships with agents around the world to represent the software, according to quite strict rules. This Icelandic organization has held this partnership and nurtured the brand in Iceland for ten years now.

The organization also represents another software brand. Together they are two respected software brands, widely used in business. It is evident that the employees of this organization are proud of working with this software and attached services. The company has earned “gold partnership”, a diploma from both the software companies, for outstanding agency. This appears to be motivating, especially when the foundations are there, the pride of working with this software and bringing on the message.

“We got this agency for [the first software] very early. And this is repeated through everything we do. [The first software] is a very powerful product. You get proud to be acquainted with this community and this software...this definitely matters. This has come with all kinds of challenges and difficulties, but we have conquered those. Then [the second software] comes into the company as well. There we have another culture and another software, but you can say the same things about that as [the first software]. The challenge is maybe to intertwine this and use...the good from both to get people to identify themselves within our company. But people have been proud of what they work with from the beginning.” (Respondent 6).

7.4.4 Supportive leadership

Management support was the third component of supportive work-life organizational culture, according to Thompson *et al.* (1999). This component fitted in this fourth theme from the analysis of the interviews on organizational culture and work-life balance.

The questions were mainly on leadership, inspiration and motivation, support for work-life balance, and trust. Among the comments were: “supervisors are always open for initiative”, “we get to be a part of the decision-making”, “loose leadership, understanding and trust”, “supervisors are positive to requests for support”.

The leadership in this organization seemed not to be about giving orders, but rather making decisions together in the group:

“I feel like the supervisors are a part of the team you know. And you experience that if you need to talk about something then you can always go to them and the MD. Even though he has a thousand other things to do. [...]. I get feedback from my supervisor. You are listened to when you have a proposition and you are always a part of the decision-making. And maybe it is because of this you experience the spirit “we want to be best”, because we get to have a saying.” (Respondent 1).

Trust seemed to be a crucial part of leadership, as previous research has shown (Arnold 2005). Trust and understanding was mentioned as an important part of the leader – employee relationship, as the following quotes showed:

“[The supervisors] are not interfering, you are trusted to do your job and I think that creates this [climate]. People just know what they are doing and control their time and workload and then the work just becomes easy.” (Respondent 8).

“I am very understanding. Some employees e-mail me: Work home today. You just have to trust people.” (Respondent 3).

“There is very much and good understanding if you have to stay at home because of a sick child or have to go with your child to the doctor....this is never a problem.[...]. Everyone is very understanding and completely understand that the family comes first.” (Respondent 2).

“We take the strategy to trust people... And with loose leadership... and this understanding and of course this trust, then of course there are some few who can't deal with this freedom or responsibility [...] Then we do something about that.” (Respondent 3).

The supervisors were easily available. All but the MD were sitting in open landscape and were, as they all emphasized, general employees as well as team leaders:

“We who are team leaders...we are maybe two-faced, we are supervisors but we also do the same work as everyone else in the team, so it is two-faced to some degree. Peer leader or what you want to call it.” (Respondent 5).

“We just sit there ten people and they just have to poke my shoulder.” (Respondent 3).

“We are like equals, this is such leadership.” (Respondent 4).

And they set the example, as this respondent puts it:

“Supervisors set the example [...] ...so that the employees can see that. This can be done at employee meetings and just...by the coffee machine and in more settings.” (Respondent 7).

The key to the success in sustaining a positive culture, according to the MD of this organization was to create expectations.

“There always has to be something new, some expectations in the air. That is the key I think, it is not enough to invent the wheel once and think that that should be enough.”

The MD seemed to be conscious about the role of a leader, and has given the organizational culture a thought, as this last quote showed.

7.4.5 Challenges in sustaining the culture

While the four previous themes, which were meant to be the major body of the results from this case study, have described the existing supportive organizational culture, they also described the enablers for such a culture, according to the purpose of explaining how supportive organizational culture is created and sustained. The openness and cooperation, the mutual flexibility, the supportive leadership, and the strong history and pride, were descriptions of the organizational culture, but can also be seen as the enablers for this culture. Where there are enablers, there are probably also challenges. In consistence with that, the fifth theme of the analysis of the interviews is about the challenges in sustaining the existing organizational culture.

While stating that the basis for the existing organizational culture was created more than ten years ago, when the foundations for the current organization were laid, how to sustain it has become the main concern. This became a discussion subject in the interviews when asking about team spirit, the growth of the company, the climate, the flexibility, the leadership and the organizational culture.

The main challenge the organization has been facing is how to keep the same culture, which has been experienced so positively, in a constantly growing organization, according to the interviews. More than half of the employees have worked there for less than three years, i.e. for the expansion period. Now, when facing a downturn period, the recruitments have almost stopped.

“There are both positive and negative [effects from the organizational growth]. The positive effects are that the team grows larger, we become stronger, can do more and have more self-esteem. The negative effects can be that this becomes a larger unit and the distance between people increases and that everybody does not know everybody as we did in the old days. It is a difference between 40 and 80 people organization.” (Respondent 6).

“There are of course growing pains... We have been this entrepreneur-spirit company and that was easy with twenty people but not as easy today when we are getting close to a hundred.” (Respondent 3).

The main challenge, i.e. the growth of the organization, emerged as common in the other themes. The growth of the organization affected the openness, the flexibility and the leadership.

Regarding the openness:

“...this [openness and talking things through] could be changing, you know this company is growing and becoming a bit more formal, I think it is inevitable...” (Respondent 4).

And the employees experienced the growth as a challenge, for example to the informal organizational culture. When the organization has become larger, informality can be a negative thing.

“Well, the informality can have the effect that the work itself is not formal enough. And I think this can be hard especially when we have become so many.” (Respondent 5).

Growth was also seen as a challenge to the flexibility, because parallel to organizational growth, the teams could develop their own culture, affecting the culture of the whole organization.

“..this maybe has something to do with the size. ...I think this does not bother us yet, but it could have the effect that there are like silos and people just belong to their group. And because you were discussing flexibility before, I think that this could undermine the flexibility. That people can't as easily jump between projects because they are stuck in one silo. I would like to watch out for this.” (Respondent 5).

Another challenge the growth has posed to the flexibility offered in the workplace, were the periods in projects where increased workload and overtime followed. The organization has responded to this with heavy recruitments in the last three years. In addition, the period of continuous growth is now coming to an end. Nevertheless, this can be called a challenge, worth being aware of.

“What happens with flexibility is that you maybe have to work longer some days when unforeseen projects come up. But I think this is OK. [...]There are times when you experience that you cannot stay home with a cold one day you know. But that is partly because we are so few and it is hard to back up everybody.” (Respondent 1).

The leadership can also be affected by the organizational growth in many ways. The team leaders in the organization are also ordinary employees. The growth during the last three years has meant increased workload for everyone and perhaps less time for leaders dealing with people.

“There is much pressure on the leaders. They maybe don't have time to attend to... you know people need different tendance. Some need more and the leaders just don't have time for that.” (Respondent 6).

This also applied to how to attend to new employees.

“Because of the success of the company and much workload, then maybe it has fallen behind to assist new employees in what they need. This is different between groups but I know of some cases where a new employee didn't get necessary assistance and then it has taken longer time to fit in.” (Respondent 8).

The team leaders may have had a hard time in between, because they are both leaders and employees. They have the professional responsibility as well as the administrative, but they are foremost professionals.

“The leader’s responsibility is completely professional, not with administrative emphasis. The question is whether this is a drawback in a company of this size, but that has not appeared yet, but it is a thought.” (Respondent 5).

Even though the leaders in this organization were experienced as trusting, understanding, accessible, and the employees’ peers when it came to decision-making, the support to the employees could be more visible, according to some:

“It is the supervisors’ job to monitor employees workload. And if they become aware of too much workload, they could maybe approach the employee and tell him or her to take some time off.” (Respondent 1).

“What would be good, what I have been thinking about, is if we had some kind of support if we felt like we were losing control, we could turn to somebody. Not to the supervisor, but someone who could provide some little advice about how to reach balance. How do you go home from work at seven o’clock and not think about it until ten o’clock?” (Respondent 1).

“Employees have to call for acknowledgement themselves.” (Respondent 3).

The respondents seemed to have the opinion that the employer should attend to the employees’ health and work-life balance:

“I think this [employees’ health and work-life balance] is one of the most important interests for organizations. This affects how long people work for the organization [...] So I think this is without doubt in the interest of the company. Then you can do this in many ways. ...” (Respondent 7).

“The more job satisfaction and better climate in the workplace, the better the business goes, that is no question.” (Respondent 6).

“I think it is our business [how the employees feel]. We do it in annual employee assessment and also by praise and informal conversations, which are frequent.” (Respondent 3).

Whether those measures should be proactive, or only taken when the employees show some signs of imbalance or ill health, was not agreed on:

“I think the employer should attend to this if it has become obvious.” (Respondent 4).

“We can’t cross the line and begin to push people around too much... but to suggest something and maybe host some information meetings, that would be fine, I think..” (Respondent 6).

“The employer can support in various ways...for example by financial support to sport activity. That is maybe something that could be more emphasized... [...] I don’t know

how many use their right to this support. It should be introduced more visibly.” (Respondent 7).

The following quote comments on the visibility and policy:

“...that the policy should be that ... it is somehow public that you as an employee should think about those things [work-life balance]” (Respondent 1).

Overtime was found one of the aspects of work-life balance. It was not promoted in the organization but it was not limited either.

“I have thought about it, if we should decide a maximum overtime per month or decisively decrease it. I think overtime is not necessarily positive...” (Respondent 6).

“I think employers can promote [less overtime] by reminding employees not to work 24/7.” (Respondent 8).

Some were of the opinion that a special HR department is necessary for the organization, others thought that the parent company should handle all HR matters. The opinions on the matter differed, so this was definitely a challenge for the organization: how can the HR affairs best be solved?

“We have an HR manager in the parent company. [...] He should attend to these matters.” (Respondent 1).

“I would approach my supervisor [if I had any issues]. [...] I am not aware of a need for [a special HR department within this organization].” (Respondent 7).

“I am not sure it is the supervisor’s problem to deal with. The leaders have more than enough work to do.” (Respondent 1).

“I think we should have our own HR manager... [...] I mean we are over 80 now, and... [another company] when they were 40, they recruited their own HR manager. The team leaders carry the responsibility which HR managers usually carry.” (Respondent 3).

The challenges were quite a few. The growth of the organization seemed to have been the biggest challenge, as regards the welcoming of new people and holding on to the informality and openness. And there is the challenge whether it is sustainable to continue to run the flat structure with team leaders acting as HR managers as well.

7.5 Summarized analysis according to the research questions

During the previous analysis, it seemed clear that the first three themes from the interviews seemed to answer the first research question: What are the components of the existing organizational culture? The fourth theme provided some answers to the second research question: What is the managers’ role in creating and sustaining this

organizational culture? And the fifth theme listed the challenges asked about in the third research question: What are the challenges in sustaining this organizational culture?

Nevertheless, the themes and the research questions were intertwined and this distinction was not clear-cut. Together they provided answers to the research questions asked. Below is a summary of this, as the results from all the methodological approaches are connected to the research questions.

7.5.1 What are the components of the existing organizational culture?

The three first themes seemed to provide some answers to this research question. The document analysis included the category "fun" which fitted into this theme of climate of openness and cooperation. The document analysis included the organization's values and goals on responsibility, courage and success, which were accessible by the employees in some of the meeting rooms and via the intranet.

It were the goals on courage which were found rhyming with the first theme of openness and cooperation:

"Courage

- We work enthusiastically, with bravery and vision
- We work together and have respect for each other
- We are open to changes and innovation"

And according to the interviews, the values were easy to follow, as they represented the culture.

"This fits to the way we think" (Respondent 2).

"This was built by how the company is. It is not so different, it is not like the values are opposite to the culture. I think there is harmony" (Respondent 4).

"The colleagues...they just work like this, the projects are like this and the company is marketed like this. So it just becomes like this, rather than someone is standing with the bible and shouting" (Respondent 7).

As described before, the climate of openness was observed in the workplace. In all, the observations gave a positive impression of the climate in the workplace. The employees looked busy, but there was often someone standing by the coffee machine or somewhere in the central space, smiling or laughing at some story being told by a colleague. The employees seemed to have fun at work, the meetings gave the impression that people are genuinely interested in their work and projects, and really want to solve problems together.

Statements number 13, 15 and 16 from the questionnaire (see Appendix 1) could fit into the theme on the climate, and thus the first research question on the components of the

culture. As shown in Figure 3 (see p. 23), the mean average answer of every statement lay between 4 and 5, i.e. between “agree” and “strongly agree”. In all, 87,5% of those who answered the questionnaire agreed or strongly agreed to that there was team spirit within the workplace (statement 13), see Table 1. The results for statement 15 about understanding from colleagues, and statement 16 about control over job, were similar.

Table 1. Answers to the statements from the questionnaire on climate.

	Strongly disagree %	Disagree %	Neither nor %	Agree %	Strongly agree %
Statement 13	0	4,2	6,9	38,9	48,6
Statement 15	0	5,6	5,6	36,1	52,8
Statement 16	1,4	6,9	2,8	45,8	43,1

As for the second theme of flexibility, many aspects fitted there. Two categories from the document analysis fitted into this theme: flexibility and ambition. The theme was about mutual flexibility, where organizational demands in forms of workload and overtime, were flexible. At the same time the private life needs of the employees were taken into account. The employees themselves also seemed to be flexible and have ambitions for the workplace.

Ambition was observed in the meetings, and through informal conversations. The common goals of doing the best for the customer and the company were evident. And the vision of success fitted into this theme:

“Success

- We prepare carefully and organize the work procedure
- We are ambitious and demand results
- We strive for acquiring the most extensive knowledge in our field”.

Overtime was not observed, because the observer was only present in the workplace during day-time. Some working stations were empty during the observations, due to meetings or consults working at the customer’s workplace.

Statements 9, 11, 12 and 17 from the questionnaire (see Appendix 1) could relate to the second theme and thus the first research question. Those were statements on balance between work and private life (statement 9), whether it is accepted that employees take active measures to balance work and life (statement 11), career security (statement 12) and time left after work (statement 17). See Table 2 for results.

Table 2. Answers to statements from the questionnaire on work-life balance.

	Strongly disagree %	Disagree %	Neither nor %	Agree %	Strongly agree %
Statement 9	2,8	0	6,9	43,1	47,2
Statement 11	1,4	1,4	2,8	20,8	73,6
Statement 12*	2,8	5,6	8,3	41,7	40,3
Statement 17	1,4	5,6	12,5	48,6	31,9

*One answer was missing (=1,4%)

The strong agreement for statement 11 on whether it was accepted that employees can take active measures to balance work and private life, was obvious. The interviews confirmed this as the respondents referred to the flexibility.

The third theme from the interviews on the pride of the profile and history of the company could be linked to the category on international character from the document analysis. This was seen from the image of the company, in marketing material and on the website. The pride of belonging to this international community was also observed on and off meetings.

The questionnaire did not capture this theme, but this emerged through the other methodological approaches.

Part of the purpose of this thesis was to explain what creates and sustains a supportive work-life culture. One of the themes above recognized the history of an organization as the strongest creator. Pride related to that history and pride of the profile of the company seem to be important components also.

The three first themes from the analysis of the interviews, as well as the other methodological approaches, gave some answers to the first research question on the components of the existing organizational culture. To sum up (in random order): fun, ambition, flexibility, international character, openness, cooperation, informality, responsibility, trust, understanding, support, and pride. These were found to be the components of the existing organizational culture. In addition, the leadership in the organization emerged as an important characteristic of the organizational culture: a supportive leadership in flat structure.

7.5.2 What is the managers' role in creating and sustaining this organizational culture?

As for providing answers to the second research question, the theme on supportive leadership was the source, as well as the related aspects from the other methodological approaches.

The leadership style of this organization could be found in all the company's values, but the third focus of the company's values is emphasized, as the other two have already been presented:

“Responsibility

- We nurture long time relationships, which rely on mutual trust
- We are fair and honest
- We relate to valuables with rationality”

Leadership was not mentioned in this goal's text. Nevertheless, the values described seemed to be important for a leader to bear in mind when attending to his or her employees: Trust, fairness, honesty and rationality.

The day-to-day observations related to leadership, included mainly team leaders, who are easily available for employees. The MD was on the other hand observed during other occasions, i.e. the two meetings where he presented what has happened and where the organization was heading. There, the vision and goals of the organization seemed to be intertwined to his presentations, when he talked about ambition, customer relations, work procedures and cooperation.

Statements 10, 14 and 18 from the questionnaire (see Appendix 1) could relate to the theme on supportive leadership and the research question on management role. Those were statements on management's understanding (statement 10), management's trust (statement 14), and organizational support (statement 18). The results are presented in Table 3.

Table 3. Answers to statements from the questionnaire related to management's role.

	Strongly disagree %	Disagree %	Neither nor %	Agree %	Strongly agree %
Statement 10	1,4	1,4	4,2	30,6	62,5
Statement 14	2,8	0	9,7	29,2	58,3
Statement 18	0	5,6	18,1	41,7	34,7

The different methodological approaches all provided some answers to the second research question on the role of managers. The answers, which can be seen, are support, responsibility, availability, understanding, trust, and feedback.

7.5.3 What are the challenges in sustaining this organizational culture?

Informal conversations the author/observer had as a part of the observations in the workplace, illuminated the fifth theme on the challenges the organization has been facing. They were for example on welcoming new employees, sustaining the informality and flat structure, and on how much workload and growth it has been for the last three years. This was confirmed in the interviews, as described in the fifth theme.

The growth and the success of the company were visible in the documents analyzed, for example in newsletter-articles on the growth and the increased number of employees. But the challenges that can come along, were on the other hand not visible in the written material.

The results from the questionnaire on that those who worked overtime felt more secure about their career when they took measures to reach work-life balance, than those who did not work overtime, could also be linked to this fifth theme. It was on the grounds from these results that overtime became a discussion subject in the interviews, and eventually, that one of the challenges recognized was the overtime situation and the possible need of limiting overtime.

The questionnaire did however not capture this theme as a whole, but this emerged through the other methodological approaches.

As for the third research question, this fifth theme provided some answers. The challenges seem to be foremost the growth itself, welcoming new employees, sustaining the informality, as well as possible policymaking on overtime.

8 DISCUSSION

In this case study, the organizational culture of an Icelandic software consulting company, has been analyzed and an attempt has been made to explain how a supportive work-life culture can be created and sustained, according to the purpose of this study.

The discussion chapter is divided into two main parts: discussion of results and methodological considerations. The discussion of results has four subchapters and in each of them the results are connected to other research, challenges are highlighted and unsettled points are discussed.

8.1 Discussion of results

The key components of the organizational culture of the case organization were found to be (in random order): fun, ambition, flexibility, international character, openness, cooperation, informality, flat structure, responsibility, trust, understanding, support, and pride. This represents the results of data analysis from all the methodological approaches used in this case study: the document analysis, the observations, the interviews and the questionnaire. This is the foundation for answering the first research question on the components of the existing organizational culture.

Answers to the second research question have also been provided, by recognizing leadership as an important component of organizational culture, and explaining managers' role in creating and sustaining organizational culture, consisting for example

of support, feedback, trust and understanding. Furthermore, the challenges in sustaining this organizational culture have been accounted for, and thus provided answers to the third research question, by suggesting that the growth of the organization has posed some challenges to the organization as for instance on the informal culture and welcoming new employees.

Thompson *et al.* (1999) stated that cultures that are supportive of employees in multiple ways may also be “family-friendly”. Thus, it was found relevant to make a general picture of the organizational culture in the workplace, to decide whether it was a work-life supportive culture. It was found generally supportive and it was also found supportive of employees’ work-life balance, when filtered through the three components identifying such a culture: management support, career consequences and organizational time expectations. It is though important to emphasize that the organization is not following an extensive policy in this matter, or a declared health promoting program of any sort.

The culture in this organization was found to be experienced as positive and constructive. The identity can be stated as clear, and thus a stable ground for health in the workplace, as according to Menckel and Österblom (2000). The pride of for example belonging to the international community that has been the case in this study, could also be a ground for wellbeing.

This study confirmed previous research on the importance of leadership for organizational culture and work-life balance, as for example Eversole *et al.* (2006) have done. It is however important to bear in mind that the leaders have not done all by themselves as the employees do have their saying, and both parties have the responsibility for wellness in the workplace, as for instance Hillier *et al.* (2005) have pointed out.

The purpose of this thesis was to explain how a supportive work-life culture could be created and sustained and it became clear during the analysis, that it was not enough to account for the enablers only. The challenges became a large part of the discussion during the interviews, therefore it was found of interest to illuminate those as well.

8.1.1 Work-life balance and flexibility

The employees’ understanding of the concept work-life balance, was revealed first of all by the questionnaire. It involved flexibility, time, control, trust, and understanding from leaders. The traditional understanding is about the balance between the demands associated with different domains of work and private life, as according to the definition of Allen *et al.* (2000) that refers to work-life conflict.

Having a balance between work and private life, for some means total division between the two in time and space. For others, the borders are not that strict, the most important is that there is a feeling of some kind of balance. This is drawn from the respondents in the interviews. In this context, it is interesting to reflect on whether flexibility in time

and space is positive for work-life balance, or maybe even negative, as it can increase stress (Rosengren 2006). It is possible to state that the respondents in this study experienced the flexibility as positive.

As for the union study done in the workplace prior to this case study, flexibility was the strongest factor of this organization's work environment with the grade 98 of 100 (VR website 2008). The employees seemed proud of this flexibility, it seemed like a characteristic of this workplace, which emerged through observations, document analysis and the interviews. Flexibility was furthermore recognized as an important factor in supporting employees' work-life balance. Flexibility alone was however not enough to create a supportive organizational culture, as the themes from the interviews described. The climate in the workplace and the leadership were found very important too.

In relation to the leadership and the climate, the culture is important. According to Balthazard *et al.* (2006), constructive organizational culture, can have positive impact on both organizational and individual level. The culture in this organization can be labeled as constructive, and thus flexibility can have greater impact when deciding whether the culture is supportive of work-life balance or not. Had it been a dysfunctional culture, the flexibility would probably not have made the same difference.

There are two sides to this flexibility. On one hand it can help employees to do their jobs theoretically whenever, wherever or however. On the other hand it benefits the employer who has access to the employee in the same way. This may in some cases even increase the conflict between domains, which has not been the main issue in this study.

According to Callan (2007), studies have shown that few workers apply for benefits which offer more unconflicted time at home. The measures taken are more frequently about flexibility, i.e. doing work at home, or doing work at night, which does not provide unconflicted time at home. Benefits which offer more unconflicted time at home can be a part-time job, or working regular hours and one or two evenings a week, at the workplace. Only very few work part-time in the organization studied.

The fact shown in the previously mentioned study (Callan 2007), that few workers apply for benefits which offer more unconflicted time at home, was not recognized as a problem with the respondents at the case organization. They all seemed satisfied with the flexibility offered. This could be related to the type of work in this organization, i.e. the software solutions and consultancy, which could be a better platform for flexibility than some other type of work, as for instance working in a shop. Some of the respondents from the interviews held the borders between work and private life clear and never worked at home.

What Callan (2007) describes as the aim of organizational policies or benefits in the field work-life balance, seemed more important to the respondents: Having the control over their conditions of work and being allowed to attend to private life needs themselves. The employees in the organization described in this study, were responsible

for drawing the line between work and private life themselves, as the employees in Kristensen's study on teleworkers (2007). If the employees experience control, then this is positive, according to Callan (2007). If they however don't experience control over the conditions of work, the autonomy can become negative. The results of this study suggested that the employees had control and the flexibility needed to attend to private life matters.

The theme on flexibility from the interviews, referred to the flexibility as mutual. The respondents described it as mutual, i.e. the organization is flexible towards its employees and vice versa. From some informal sources as well as the documents from the corporate workout program, some wishes on further flexibility from the organization were revealed. Those were for example on shutting down the time clock and getting more flexibility to attend to physical exercise during working hours. This is worthy of consideration, even though the grounds for drawing conclusions are not stable.

8.1.2 Overtime

Overtime came to be a more central issue in this case study than foreseen. The results on overtime are however mixed, and were found difficult to draw conclusions from. As previously stated, the women in the workplace worked much less overtime than the men. The reasons for that might be various, but it could be of interest to look closer at the private life situation. Are the people who work overtime parents? Do they live with a partner? However, there were no significant differences in these background variables for those who work overtime. The only significance relates to the gender, and the question of cause and effect remains.

The gender difference in overtime in the case organization may have something to do with the demands from other responsibility areas, i.e. that the women tend to work less overtime because the demands in the private life are more extensive than those the men face, referring to Frankenhaeuser et al. (1989).

The gender difference in overtime could be related to the background on Iceland from Mósedóttir (1998). I.e. that motherhood in Iceland means reduced hours of work until the youngest child is over 7 years old, and fatherhood in Iceland involves increased hours of work to compensate for the drop in income for the family. However, the new legislation on paternal leave, seems to have changed this tradition to some extent (Valdimarsdóttir 2005). Since the legislation in year 2000, employers seem to have become gradually happy with this regulation. International interest in the Icelandic legislation in this field has been positive. In this organization, informal conversations revealed that the agreement on paternal leave was good.

There is a tradition for long working hours in Iceland, as can be seen from the OECD numbers referred to earlier (OECD 2004, Gylfason 2007). This has a strong connection with the economic situation in Iceland, where it is absolutely necessary for families that both partners work full time, because of relatively low productivity in the economy (Gylfason 2007) and weak purchasing power. Long working hours are associated with

greater perceived conflict between job and family responsibilities, according to OECD (2004). It is worth investigating whether Icelanders experience greater work-life conflict than the nations which work shorter hours, or that the work-life balance is even differently perceived in Iceland because of the tradition of working long hours.

The reasons for working overtime are though not entirely economic, even though the motivation for some may be economic. The economic situation in Iceland for the last three years has been characterized with growth and expansion in the labour market and the general economy. Companies have expanded, recruitments have increased and the workload as well. This has meant increased overtime for some employees in this organization as well as in many others in Iceland.

The results from the questionnaire about overtime and career, i.e. that those who work overtime were more secure about their career when they took active measures to balance work and private life, than those who did not work overtime, were not confirmed through the interviews. Even though the organization does not promote overtime, certain employees still worked overtime and many of them felt more secure about their career, according to the questionnaire. It was not possible to trace the reason for this with the methods used, but a possible hypothesis seems to be that this could depend on something else than the situation in the workplace, for example personality, personal choice or motivation.

The respondents referred to ambition for themselves and the company as well as the responsibility for projects as some of the reasons for working overtime. Overtime was not promoted in the organization, unless in periods of many projects and workload over average. So the projects sometimes demanded overtime, even though overtime was not demanded in general in the organization. Doing career was never mentioned as a motivation for working overtime. The structure in the organization was flat and the leaders were those with the longest work experience in their specialty. Employees seemed to earn respect by taking responsibility for their projects and showing results. This responsibility could also be a motivator for working overtime, as some employees might have felt that taking responsibility demanded more time. This might have been the explanation of the results from the questionnaire on the connection between overtime, career and taking measures to balance work and private life.

The company's values about responsibility were related to the theme of supportive leadership, as responsibility is an important factor for leaders, according to Drucker (2001). The responsibility can also be connected to the theme of flexibility, where overtime and career fitted in, and where it was stated that the career in this organization was done via taking responsibility for projects and showing results.

This can also relate to the control people experience over their job and bearing the model of Karasek and Theorell (1990) in mind, it is fair to say that the employees here felt that they had control. In this organization, the employees seemed to have a saying in decision-making. The workload (demands) was overall reasonable and the employees experienced management's and colleagues' support. Therefore, the employees in this organization seemed to be healthy in this sense.

8.1.3 Challenges

The last three years have been characterized by economic expansion in Iceland, almost no unemployment and a strong growth for this organization, as well as many others in Iceland. In the year 2005 the employees were about 30, but were over 80 in the mid year 2008. At the time of this research, recruitment had decreased, because of beginning economic downturn in Iceland. In relations to recruitment and welcoming new employees, it was found of importance to prepare recruitments carefully, as the respondents in the interviews expressed. Research has shown that selective recruitment, favoring those who are able to adapt to the organization, was one of the components of the situation in a successful organization (Eriksson *et al.* 2008).

During the three years of growth and expansion, the challenge has been to withhold the informal original culture, as well as the flexibility and flat structure, as was recognized through the interviews. The respondents were aware of these challenges, and some of them have been discussed within the organization. Whether these challenges were only related to the past growth, or also to the future of the organization, was more unclear. Winning the diploma “Company of the year” 2007, after being number three in the year 2006, was a positive sign of accomplishment, i.e. that the organization has been able to stay flexible, according to the results of the union survey.

The growth of the organization could be seen as a challenge to the informal culture. However, business organizations tend to grow in size and are intended to bring increased earnings. The challenge for the organization studied has been to sustain the informal culture as the organization has grown larger. Most organizations start as small groups and continue to function in small groups within them, and the organizational culture may evolve through small-group subcultures (Schein 2004).

It is worth noticing that when the employees of this organization got the opportunity to affect the development of the organization, as in the corporate workout program, the outcome was mainly focusing on the business, and less on the internal environment. This could be a sign of that everything was fine within the organization regarding the internal working environment, or perhaps that the employees felt that the internal focus should not be as important as the external one. According to informal discussions, the next focus area coming up in the corporate workout project, was how new employees are welcomed to the workplace. Furthermore, during informal conversations, the limited resources working on various internal matters, were mentioned. It was not possible to draw a conclusion based on this, but it could be of interest as an example of an internal area of importance, as well as a challenge.

8.1.4 Health and wellbeing

Worker wellbeing must be at least as important a goal for the future as profit, according to Karasek and Theorell (1990). They state that humane work environments are entirely feasible and the direction to those are summarized in seven dimensions. One of them is

the work-life interface. In the “good jobs” of the future, “work-load sharing between sexes promotes sharing of family responsibilities and allows more energy for family activities.” (Karasek and Theorell 1990). Their book was published in 1990, so the future described there, can be now. Whether the reality is according to this, will not be discussed here. But, the work-life interface is still as important for the wellbeing of workers and worthy of being looked at as an important aspect of health.

A large body of the literature on work-life balance as one aspect of health and wellbeing comes from the field of stress research (Arnold 2005, Frankenhaeuser *et al.* 1989). Another source is organizational research, where changes in working life with for example increased flexibility have been prominent (Eversole *et al.* 2007, Lewis 2001). In this thesis, an attempt has been made to connect work-life balance both as an aspect of health but also as an aspect of organizational culture.

Management and leadership style are important when it comes to employee health and wellbeing. However, previous management studies have mostly targeted job satisfaction to increase productivity, but not health issues such as the quality of working life and how to create supportive environments for health (Eriksson *et al.* 2008). Management style is one of the indicators for organizational features as a category of workplace health assessment, according to Tones and Tilford (2001).

The management style in this organization was found on peer level, in flat structure and with emphasize on employees taking responsibility for and control of their work assignments. Previous studies have shown that having control and being a part of the decision making process, is positive for health (Karasek and Theorell 1990). Furthermore, this is in line with the health promoting factors in leadership, according to Nyberg *et al.* (2005) on for example allowing subordinates to control their work environment and providing opportunities for participation, autonomy and control.

According to both Nordenfelt’s holistic definition of health, where health is related to people’s social and cultural ability to fulfill their goals (Medin and Alexanderson 2000), and Hillier’s *et al.* (2005) definition of wellness as a sustainable state that allows us to thrive and flourish, it can be suggested that wellbeing at work is important. The key elements that must be in place within organizations to foster a wellness culture, according to Hillier *et al.* (2005) are for example conducive, welcoming and supportive environments that enable staff to form social networks. Also, the creation of trusting relationships and a sense of control over one’s own working practices. This could also be assessed as important for people’s social and cultural ability to fulfill their goals and thus be healthy. The results from this case study seem to point to this same direction with some of the key words: cooperation, trust and support.

As previously mentioned, flexibility is not enough to create supportive work-life culture. Even though employees seemed to be generally happy about the flexibility, and even talked about flexibility as a synonym for work-life balance, there were some challenges to be met. For example, more visible or proactive support, and the need for a policy on overtime and work-life balance that employees would be familiar with. This could be a field for workplace health promotion.

The initiatives for improving work-life balance through workplace health promotion can be to increase employee satisfaction and motivation in the company, raise employees' levels of health and feeling of wellbeing, and improve the image and public reputation of the company (ENWHPa 2008). The improvement of image was done in this case organization, through marketing and the diploma "Company of the year". Employee satisfaction and motivation seems high and has possibly been reached through leadership, flexibility, corporate workout program, and the organizational culture. The second-mentioned initiative of raising levels of health and feeling of wellbeing, has been reached to some extent through serving healthy food in the cafeteria or going out walking or running with the colleagues after work.

The way to raise levels of health and feeling of wellbeing, could be workplace health promotion. According to Menckel and Österblom (2000), the employer must see to that there are conditions for good health in the workplace. Creating good working environment is not enough, according to them, health promotion initiatives must be added. The case organization has a good working environment as has been described, but the conditions for good health could be strengthened further, by proactive workplace development activities, like WHP (Hämäläinen and Lindström 2006).

8.2 Methodological considerations

The results of this case study have been positive and the different methods all point in that same direction. When that is the case, rigorous methodological considerations are needed.

The ethnographic stance, which was decided to follow doing the analysis, is wider than the grounded theory approach (Robson 2002). It was found useful when developing categories, that pre-existing theory, previous empirical research, the researcher's expectations and hunches may play a part in ethnographic studies, whereas the data is the driving source in grounded theory.

There can be various threats to validity when doing flexible design research, as for instance a case study. Reactivity refers to the way in which the researcher's presence may interfere with for example the behavior of the people involved (Robson 2002).

To avoid threats to validity, various measures were taken. First, to provide a valid description, the interviews were tape-recorded and transcribed verbatim. Second, to provide a valid interpretation, the transcripts were read and reread many times, and coded according to the methodology previously described. "The main threat to providing a valid interpretation is that of imposing a framework or meaning on what is happening rather than this occurring or emerging from what you learn during your involvement with the setting" (Robson 2002). Third, to counteract the threat of not considering alternative explanations or understandings of organizational culture and work-life balance, this was actively sought in the data. However, the notion of the "researcher-as-instrument" emphasizes the potential for bias.

To deal with those threats, the triangulation was the most important. The intent of using triangulation is to strengthen the design to increase the ability to interpret the findings (Denzin 1970, Thurmond 2001). It was for example important to use the different methods when interpreting the findings from the questionnaire on overtime and career security. The results from the questionnaire were interesting and important to discuss, but were not backed up by the other methodological approaches. There the deficiency of a single strategy clearly appears.

The different methodological approaches also strengthened the validity of the study when results from one method were viewed in the light of another. The observations for example illuminated the results from the questionnaire on flexibility and team spirit in the workplace. The document analysis also reinforced the results from the interviews on for example ambition and flexibility.

The threat of observational biases was kept in mind. It is important to counteract selective attention, selective encoding, selective memory and interpersonal factors with according strategies (Robson 2002). The strategies are “make a conscious effort to distribute your attention widely and evenly”, “try to start with an open mind – and keep it open”, “write field notes into a narrative account promptly” and “seek to recognize and discount all biases”.

Respondent bias can range from obstructiveness and withholding information to trying to give the answers that the researcher wants to hear (Robson 2002). There was a possible threat of this kind of bias to this study because of the aim of the study to look behind the positive results of the previous survey. The employees might have been trying to prove that their workplace was indeed an excellent one. The results from the questionnaire pointed to this direction, but the results from the interviews revealed some nuances and raised some challenges. Therefore, it would not have been strong ground for interpretation to only use the questionnaire and it was found necessary to use triangulation to validate the results. The results from the different methodological approaches however point to the same direction and thus strengthen the positive results.

The questionnaire had only positive statements, where “strongly agree” always meant the most positive. The overall results from the questionnaire were more positive than the overall results from the other data collection methods, but those were also positive. Negative aspects, or the challenges, were though quite many. Doing this study with one method only would not have been the ideal methodology, and the importance of triangulation should not be underestimated in reducing the threat to validity.

Researcher bias refers to what the researcher brings to the situation in terms of assumptions and preconceptions (Robson 2002). This may affect the way in which researchers behave in the research setting, how respondents are selected, what questions are asked, or the selection of data for reporting and analysis.

To respond to the threat of researcher bias, the selection of respondents was carefully done. The respondents in this case study were chosen to represent both management and

general employees, men and women, new and experienced employees, employees from various teams, employees with families or not, and employees in different age groups (although the age distribution is rather small in this workplace). The interview-guide (Appendix 2) was extensive, developed after the results from the questionnaire had been drawn.

The interview-guide was constructed in sections, which were used in the analyzing of the data. However, the interviews revealed some information, which changed the analyzing-process. The results were presented in the themes, which in fact differentiated from the sections in the interview-guide. The sectioned interview-guide was a gesture to answer Kvale's (1996) question on how the researcher shall conduct her interviews so that their meaning can be analyzed in a coherent and creative way? Then, when analyzing the interviews, the research questions were asked, and answers searched for in the transcripts.

The selection of data for reporting and analysis, is very important, and there is a possible threat of researcher bias. This was reflected on during the analysis process. Balance in quotes from respondents was sought after, the sections from the interview-guide were used in the analysis to some extent, but new themes were also allowed to emerge. This study was concerned with rigor, and measures were taken to reduce the threats to reliability and validity.

External generalizability may not be an issue in qualitative research. However, when doing a case study, it is possible to reach some kind of generalizability beyond the specific setting studied (Robson 2002). This can for instance be recognizing patterns, which can help in understanding other cases or situations, as for example the components of a supportive work-life organizational culture in general. The results from this case study could for example provide theoretical insights into the phenomenon in another context, i.e. the organizational culture and work-life balance in other workplaces.

9 FINAL REMARKS

According to Robson (2002), doing flexible design research calls for flexible researchers. Even though this study contains a fixed design component: the questionnaire, it is mainly flexible. Flexible design involves the "researcher-as-instrument" rather than relying on specialist tools and instruments. Ideally, this kind of research calls for experienced investigators, which is not the case with this researcher. But Robson points out that personal qualities such as having an "open and enquiring mind, being a 'good listener', general sensitivity and responsiveness to contradictory evidence are needed." Those are the skills of a journalist, which is the profession of the researcher in this case. That working experience has been very helpful.

The balance between work and life can be important for employee health. Supportive work-life organizational culture can be the means to reach that balance. By creating and sustaining such a culture, it may also be possible to reach the balance between

organizational effectiveness and human needs of the employees. An organization's productivity depends on the employees. Happy, healthy, balanced employees seem to perform better than the unbalanced ones.

Organizational interventions have advantages over approaches that focus on the individual. They have a wider scope: they are not solely oriented toward eliminating a problem but directed toward improving the effectiveness of the work setting. They focus directly on the work environment rather than implicitly blaming the victims for experiencing problems. Doing so, they treat quality of working life as a management issue and stress or burnout as an organizational problem (Hillier *et al.* 2005). By promoting supportive organizational culture, health and work-life balance can also be promoted in organizations.

Further research is needed in this field. For example, on how individuals experience work-life balance, whether leaders see it as their business to attend to employees' work-life balance, the difference in the organizational cultures in the Nordic countries in relation to work-life balance, and the difference in the working culture in general in relations to occupational health. These subjects are all related to this thesis, which has only touched the surface of this field with one case study in Iceland. Hopefully, it will bring some insight into what is well done and what the challenges can be.

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Appendix 1: Questionnaire on organizational culture and work-life balance
Please fill in the boxes with appropriate alternatives. Feel free to add relevant information.

1. Sex man woman

2. Age years

3. Family status

married /living with a partner single widow/widower divorced

4. Do your children or your spouse's children live in your home?

yes, permanently yes, regularly (for example every other week) no

Number..... Age..... Number..... Age.....

5. Education

- Have not finished obligatory education
- Have finished obligatory education
- Have finished more than obligatory education, but not finished college
- Have finished college
- Have finished more than college but not finished university
- Have finished undergraduate degree from university (BA/BS)
- Have finished postgraduate degree (MA/MS) or a Ph.D.
- Other, what?

6. Do you have a management position in the company yes no

7. Do you work overtime? (Over 40 hours a week based on full time job) yes no

If yes, how often? (Please fill in relevant frequency, only one box)

- monthly: approximately hours
- weekly: approximatelyhours
- daily: approximatelyhours
- other:

8. For how long have you worked at the company (including the parent company)? ...years

Please mark in the scale 1-5, to what extent you agree with the following statements:

1. strongly disagree, 2. disagree, 3. neither disagree nor agree, 4. agree, 5. strongly agree

9. In this organization employees can balance their work and private lives.

1 2 3 4 5

10. In general, managers in this organization have an understanding of private life needs.

1 2 3 4 5

(1. strongly disagree, 2. disagree, 3. neither disagree nor agree, 4. agree, 5. strongly agree)

11. In this organization, it is accepted that employees can take active measures to balance work and private life. (Examples can be various: work from home in the morning and come in late, not work overtime, go early and compensate in the evening).

1 2 3 4 5

12. I feel secure about my career when I take such active measures.

1 2 3 4 5

13. There is a team spirit within this organization.

1 2 3 4 5

14. I feel that management has trust in the employees doing their job.

1 2 3 4 5

15. I feel that I can rely on understanding from my colleagues.

1 2 3 4 5

16. I feel that I have control over my job.

1 2 3 4 5

17. I experience time left after work to do what I have to/ like to do.

1 2 3 4 5

18. This organization supports and values the integration of employees' work and family lives.

1 2 3 4 5

19. Please describe what work-life balance means to you.

Thank you!

Appendix 2: Interview guide

Introduction:

- A study on organizational culture and work-life balance.
- Ask for permission to tape-record the interview.
- Underwriting of informed consent

1. Background questions

Age

How long have you worked for the company or the parent company? What position(s)?

Manager or not

Which team

Education

Family status

Children, how many, age

Partner's work

Hobbies/spare time

How is your typical day?

Is the workload at the workplace reasonable?

Do you have demanding family duties (for example young children/old parents/sick relatives)?

2. The characteristics of the workplace

How is the climate in the workplace? (Do you talk things through, can you say your opinion, do you fight about things?) How do you feel about it?

Is the information flow good or bad? How/why?

Is there a dress code in the workplace? Outspoken or not?

Do you feel that face time is demanded in this workplace? Or can people do their job from other places?

Do you experience flexibility at work? How?

Do you think that work-related social events should be with or without employees' family members in general?

Do you think you will feel difference in the social relations in the workplace when all employees have moved to one floor? How?

Is there a team spirit in this workplace? How would you describe it? Is everybody a part of the team (different age groups/those with children or not/men/women/managers or not)?

Do you think that those who have children feel less team spirit? Do the childless take more part in social activities? What do you think about this?

Do you think the “Corporate workout”-program had some effect on the workplace culture? Which? Negative/positive? How did you experience the program?

The company has grown fast. Which effect do you think that has had or will have on the climate in the workplace?

Are the company values visible in the workplace/do you keep them in mind when you are working?

3. Questions on management

Do you think that the leaders in the workplace are inspiring? How?

OR

Do you as a leader try to inspire the employees? How?

Is your supervisor available? (Is he or she around to answer questions/is it easy to talk to him or her?)

OR

Do you try to be available as a leader?

Do you feel trusted to do your job?

OR

Do you trust your employees?

What does in your opinion characterize this workplace’s organizational culture? (By culture I am referring to organizational culture which can be defined as what controls how employees behave and respond to different situations, as well as traditions and routines.)

How did you experience this culture when you first came to work at this organization?

Have you as a leader been conscious about creating some kind of organizational culture?

What kind of organizational culture did you want to create/have you been trying to create? – As a leader or if you were a leader?

Has this been so from the beginning of your career here?

Does the parent company’s organizational culture interfere or support this company’s organizational culture?

4. Questions on work-life balance experience

You can say that the balance between work and private life is when you feel you can meet the demands in both fields: fulfill your duties at work, and attend to yourself, hobbies, friends and family in an acceptable way.

Do you agree to this example of definition on work-life balance? Would you like to change it or add to it? How?

How would you describe your work-life balance/interface?

Do you experience that there is a sharp line between the two spheres, or do they converge?

Do you take some measures to improve/affect the work-life balance/interface? Which?

Do you get support from your supervisors when you try to balance work and private life?

OR

Do you provide support when employees try to balance work and private life?

Do you feel that managers have a prior understanding of this or do you have to remind them or apply for support?

Do you feel support or understanding regarding work-life balance from your colleagues?
How?

Do you think there is a difference between men and women in how they manage the work-life interface or take measures to affect it?

Do you think it is further accepted or supported when women take measures?

Is there a difference in this sense between age groups? Between those who have children or not?

Do you think it is further accepted or supported when you work overtime?

What do you think is well done in this workplace when it comes to employees' work-life balance?

What do you think could be better at this workplace in that sense?

Do you think it can affect your career when you take measures to balance work and private life? How?

Do you think there is difference between men and women in this aspect? How?

Do you work overtime? If you do, do you think this affects whether you feel career security? How?

If you don't, do you feel career security?

What is your opinion on the association between this?

Do you think there is an association between how employees feel (for example work-life balance or other wellbeing) and how the organization performs? How?

Do you think the organization should make it its business to promote employee health and wellbeing, for example work-life balance, or is it every employee's private matter?

Do you have time to do what you want/need to do after work? How does work and overtime affect this? Do you get support from family, how does that affect this? What would you like to have more time to do?

5. To summarize

You have been quite positive/negative towards the workplace. What are the causes do you think? (Is it the workplace or is it your personality?)

If it is the workplace - What makes it so positive or negative?

Did you feel that this was so positive/negative from the beginning of your career here? How? If not when did it change if it did?

6. If you were asked to describe this workplace to others in just a few words, how would you do that?

7. I have no further questions. Do you have anything to add or bring up, before we finish the interview?

Thank you!

