

Work Hard – Play Hard

Recovery from Work Stress among Knowledge Workers in Talent Factories

Abstract

Nobody can work without recovery. Stress at work, 'the wear and tear on mind and body', can have significant negative impact on physical and mental health as well as productivity. Therefore recovery is required to oppose it. The effects of insufficient recovery are well established. However, the mechanism of how effective recovery is achieved by individuals is sparsely researched.

Building an attractive, recovery-friendly work environment is a key challenge modern organizations face; professional service firms and talent factories in specific. Their organizational success relies primarily on human resources and they exhibit exceptionally high work stressors. Effective recovery from work stress is paramount to sustain performance in these organizations. The research presented here focuses on recovery in that particular context. An exploratory study was conducted to understand how knowledge workers execute and perceive recovery methods. We built and applied a theoretical framework based on literature about recovery as well as on talent factories and conducted 15 qualitative interviews across 4 organizations.

The findings indicate a possible classification of recovery experiences in two categories: enablers, which are fundamentally required, and drivers, which improve recovery. In a contextual analysis certain recovery behavior among employees of talent factories was discovered; they favor psychological detachment from work and pursuit of challenging activities during leisure time among the recovery experiences. This thesis advances the research on recovery from work and on talent factories.

Key words:	<i>Recovery, talent factories, work stress, knowledge worker</i>
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ABBREVIATIONS

PSF = Professional Service Firm

HRM = Human Resource Management

ER = effort recovery

CLARIFICATION OF TERMS

Recovery experience = underlying psychological mechanisms behind methods/activities for achieving of recovery.

Activities/methods of recovery = all activities applied to approach recovery on an individual level.

Knowledge worker = Employees that "think for a living".

Professional = is used interchangeably with knowledge worker.

Talent factory = a specific type of PSFs which is described in the literature review.

Insecure overachiever = a type of personality which by their self-doubt are driven to excel and constantly prove themselves. A high percentage of knowledge workers in talent factories are argued to be insecure overachievers.

Participants/interviewees = knowledge workers who were interviewed for your study.

WORK HARD – PLAY HARD

1 INTRODUCTION

Nobody can work without recovery. If an individual exerts effort, an allostatic load is build up. This load is defined as 'the wear and tear on the body' caused by stress (Ogden, 2012). Unbalanced by recovery allostatic load can have significant negative impact on physical and mental health as well as productivity (Sapolski, 2004). Therefore it requires a recovery to oppose effort and to reduce allostatic load (Meijman & Mulder, 1998; Ogden, 2012).

Effort and recovery each consist of a different set of factors. Factors constituting effort are called stressors. Subjective workload and perceived pressure is a common and powerful stressor (Ilies et al. 2007). Workload and pressure have been found to be high in the context of knowledge work (Berglas, 2006), and particularly the context of "talent factories". These are organizations that operate with a large percentage of young professionals who are offered prominent development opportunities but at the same time are put under intense pressure to perform (Werr & Schilling, 2011).

The aspect of stressors in the context of these organizations has been subject to extensive research (Sapolsky 2004; Geurts et al. 2005; Karasek et al., 1998; Kristensen et al., 2005). Despite being scrutinized to a lesser degree, there is still substantial research on the factors constituting recovery (Sonnentag & Fritz, 2007; Demerouti et al. 2009; Meijman & Mulder, 1998; Thornhill et al., 2006). To the best knowledge of the authors, recovery in the specific context of knowledge workers and in talent factories has not been researched. This is surprising since the stressors have been found to be exceedingly intense in this context (Berglas, 2006), and intuition dictates that recovery, therefore, be attached similar attention in this environment. Despite this, the perceived recovery and the approach to recovery by knowledge workers remains a plain playing field and under-researched.

1.1 Background

The stress originating in the working context of talent factories has been intensified as the boundaries between job and home life blur. Changes in family structures, increasing participation by women in the workforce, and technological changes (e.g., mobile phones and portable computers) that enable job tasks to be performed in a variety of locations have contributed to this (Boswell & Olson-Buchanan, 2007).

Modern communication technologies permit organizations to exercise control over their employees outside of office hours. An expansion of work duties beyond the physical boundaries of the office and temporal limits of office hours is a characteristic manifestation of this control (Geurts et al., 2004; Oswald & Olson-Buchanan, 2007). Specifically the distribution of smartphones and similar communication technology to employees gives them the opportunity to receive work-related information at home or anywhere outside the office space and hours. It has been found that the utilization of this opportunity is highest among those employees that display high degrees of ambition and job involvement (Oswald & Olson-Buchanan, 2007; Dierdorff & Ellington, 2008). It can therefore be concluded that the boundaries between work and life is vague at best and differs with varying involvement and ambition (Oswald & Olson-Buchanan, 2007), which has been hypothesized to be especially present in professionals working in PSFs (Maister, 2007) and in talent factories (Werr & Schilling, 2011).

These professionals feel the need to constantly and continuously prove and challenge themselves (Alvesson, 2004; Maister, 2007). This is said to be an expression of low self-worth (which is never expressed in public by these professionals) (Berglas, 2006). Leading to a constant need to test their skills against problems with unsecure changes of success. They need to proof that they still "got it". This type of personality is termed "insecure overachiever" (Maister, 2007), which is reinforced by measures such as the "up or out"-principle (Werr & Schilling, 2011). It entails that a professional will be either promoted or fired within the first years of tenure at the organization.

If these pressures are not managed, they may lead to a feeling of stress, which has significant negative impact, as it is associated with serious consequences including depression, psychosomatic complaints, and reduced marital satisfaction (Allen et al., 2000). In line with this, organizations have realized that the concept of balanced working responsibilities that allow recovery is an important concept to consider for the welfare of their employees; that it is in the

organization's best interest to address such issues, as it may result in the development and growth of intellectual capital and return on investment (Barnett, 1996; Kotzé, 2005; Parasuraman & Greenhaus, 1999).

1.2 Problem

Establishing and understanding a balance between effort and recovery necessitates an analysis of both aspects. Understanding how, or if, such a balance is achieved in the context of talent factories requires a contextual analysis of both aspects. The aspect of stress has been well researched as a concept (Sapolsky, 2004; Geurts et al., 2005) as well as investigated in the context of knowledge workers (Berglas, 2006). The other side of the medal, recovery, too, has been subject to conceptual research (Sonnentag & Fritz, 2007; Demerouti et al., 2009). Academic or empirical application of such concepts to the context of talent factories could not be found.

Factors causing stress and their relative influence on knowledge workers have been established (Ilies et al., 2007, Thornhill et al., 2006). Resulting in a comprehensive understanding of the causes of stress for knowledge workers. Recovery in itself has been researched (Demerouti et al., 2009), and recovery experiences, which reduce stress, have been deducted (Sonnentag & Fritz, 2007; 2012). Recovery and effort both are highly dependent on the context (Sonnentag, 2012). As little contextual research on approaches to recovery has been conducted, the understanding on how recovery functions in context is less comprehensive.

Another aspect of recovery function that is under-researched is the interplay between separate recovery experiences on an individual level (Sonnentag & Fritz, 2005). Synergetic or counter acting connections could be present; creating a comprehensive recovery mechanism that may differ from the sum of individual approaches.

Without such insights it is vastly difficult to explain how work is pursued and stress coped with, avoiding burn out. We hypothesize that a comprehensive, contextual theory on approaches of recovery among knowledge workers in talent factories will help explain this puzzle.

1.3 Purpose

The research gap where literature fails to properly address the recovery process in the context of talent factories and create understanding of the individual response to increased stress is apparent. The dimension of recovery is therefore the target of this research.

The recovery process itself has been subject to research (Sonnentag and Fritz, 2007; Demerouti et al., 2009) and factors influencing recovery have been deducted. The application of such framework to the context of knowledge workers in talent factories and the expansion of the framework to take interactions between factors into account is the purpose of this research. Thus, the influence of environment towards recovery and a comprehensive understanding of recovery in a particular context can be produced.

We aim to contribute to the theoretical field of talent factories, human resource management and in specific to recovery by creating a framework, which can be used to describe recovery in a talent factories context comprehensively. The practical relevance of our research consists of helping talent factories and knowledge worker to gain an improved understanding of how they recover. As explained previously, this is an important factor in the performance of these organizations and individuals.

1.4 Research Question

We are assuming that differences in stressors, as research has revealed, in the context of talent factories is mirrored in different recovery strategies. The lack of research into the application of such recovery strategies in this context motivated us to pursue the following research question:

How do knowledge workers in talent factories perceive and execute recovery experiences to balance the impact of exerted effort and how does the context influence their perceived recovery?

The answer to the research question will create an insight into common recovery approaches in this context. It will also provide an understanding that may be very applicable to human resource strategies in these talent factories.

1.5 Disposition

2. Literature Review

In the *second chapter* relevant literature is depicted and relevant theory disclosed. Here the research gap, too, is elaborately addressed.

3. Theoretical Framework

In the *third chapter* a theoretical framework is introduced, which is inferred from current literature on recovery experiences.

4. Methodology

In the *fourth chapter* methodological approach, selection of interviewees and organizations, data collection & analysis, data quality and methodological limitations are covered.

5. Findings

In the *fifth chapter* empirical findings from the interviews are presented.

6. Analysis

In the *sixth chapter* application of the presented theoretical framework and relating findings to literature analyze the empirical findings.

7. Discussion

In the *seventh chapter* variations between findings and existing recovery literature as well as extensions in findings to existing literature are discussed in view of available literature on knowledge workers in talent factories.

8. Conclusion

In the *eighth chapter* an answer to the research question is presented. Theoretical and practical implications, as well as research limitations are shown. Finally, an outlook on future research in the field of recovery is depicted.

2 LITERATURE REVIEW

The purpose of this chapter is to identify a literature gap by reviewing the literature on recovery. Talent factories, a specific type of PSFs, represent the context of recovery in this research and literature on these is taken into consideration therefore.

2.1 Approach to Literature Review

Sustained performance requires a balance between effort and recovery. This balance is hypothesized to be particularly distinct in talent factories, as stressors, such as high workload, have been identified to be abundant (Berglas, 2006; Werr & Schilling, 2011). It is an individual challenge to exert effort and perform professionally in the short-term, and to include recovery to sustain such performance. Depicting the research gap concerning this individual challenge is the purpose of this literature review.

First, the context of our research is portrayed. This starts with a description of PSFs in general and continues with a portrayal of our research subject, talent factories. The purpose is to establish an intimate understanding of the dynamics that form the context in which our research participants perceive recovery.

Subsequently, previous research on recovery is reviewed. Two fundamental models that set recovery in relation to effort are portrayed. They are the effort-recovery model (ER model) (Meijman & Mulder, 1998) and the resource conservation theory (Hobfoll, 1989; 2002). From here a conclusion is drawn and gaps in literature identified.

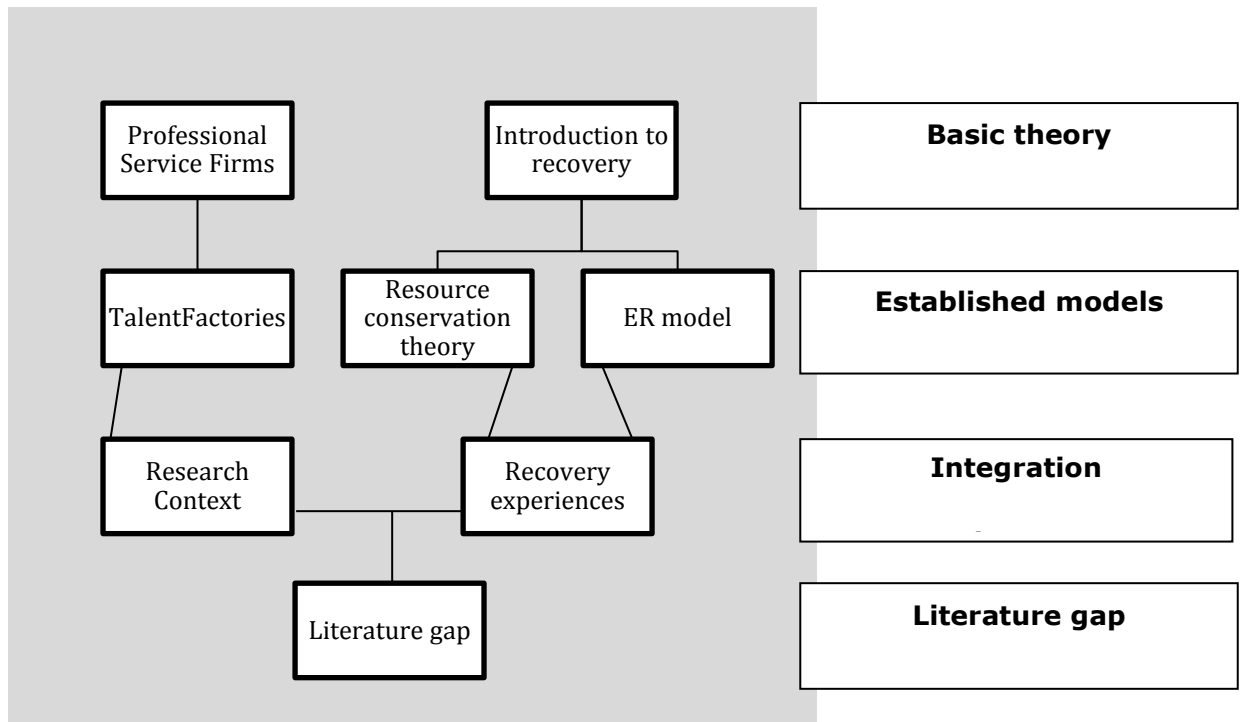


Figure 2-1. Identifying the Research

2.2 The Context of Recovery

Stress and recovery from stress are highly dependent on the environment and on the context in which they are studied (Geurts et al., 2005; Kristensen et al., 2005). Work demands in terms of working hours, control over work demands and so forth vary between different industries and between different types of organizations. Sonnentag (2012) suggests studying recovery experiences, and detachment specifically, in non-traditional work environments, in which boundaries between work and life blur. The importance attributed by management to matters of human resource (HR) and individual performance represents another aspect that is highly contextual. We deem it particularly interesting to study a context in which work demands are high and human resources are crucial for organizations' success. Thus, we decide to study talent factories, which are a particular type of professional service firm (PSF), and the knowledge workers, which are employed by them.

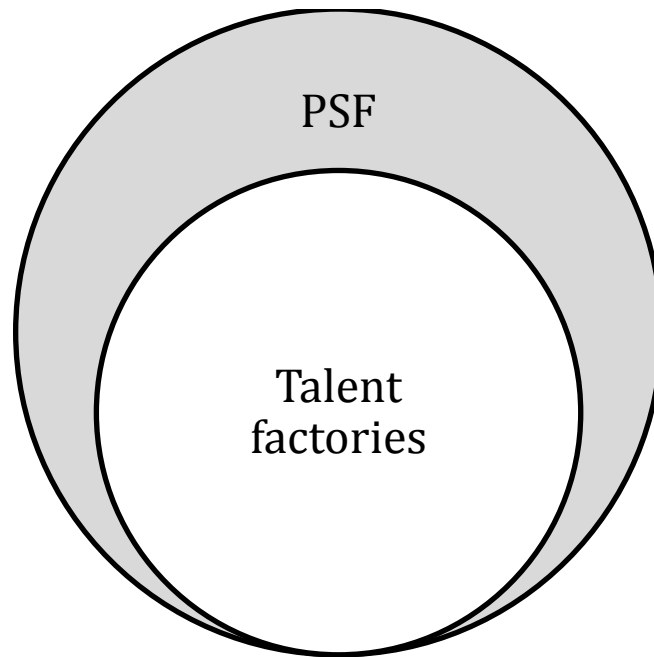


Figure 2-2. The Research Context

2.2.1 Professional Service Firms

The three key defining characteristics for PSF are: knowledge-intensity, low capital intensity and professionalized workforce (von Nordenflycht, 2010). These three criteria should not provide a dichotomous definition; they rather give an indication on the degree of professional service intensity (Ibid.). A firm does not have to fulfill all three characteristics in order to be classified a PSF. Knowledge intensity is the most crucial defining factor and this factor has to be present for a firm to be classified as a PSF (Ibid.). Thus, PSFs can be broadly defined as firms that principally employ knowledge workers whose primary task is non-routine problem solving that requires a combination of convergent, divergent and creative thinking (Reinhardt et al., 2011; Anand et al., 2007; Teece, 2003).

Traditionally the term PSF has been used for law firms and accounting firms (Werr and Schilling, 2011). Its application has recently expanded to a wider range of firms, including management consulting firms or architecture bureaus (von Nordenflycht, 2010). It is evident that law firms and accounting firms fulfill all three of Nordenflycht's criteria of a PSF, while management consulting for instance lacks a highly professionalized work force. Unlike in law or accounting, management consulting is not regulated by a professional body, such as one requiring entry exams and/or code of conducts.

In PSFs human resources are key assets, as skills and knowledge of professional workers constitute for the production of the services that PSF offer (Maister, 2007). These types of organizations are the embodiment of the phrase *our asset*

are our people. PSFs sell the time of specific individuals or teams within the organization (Ibid.).

2.2.2 Knowledge Workers

A high percentage of the work force in PSFs consists of knowledge workers, the type of personnel of interest to our research. They are characterized by being highly educated, highly mobile and “think for a living” (Cooper, 2006); they conduct non-routine problem solving that requires a combination of convergent, divergent and creative thinking as a primary chore (Reinhardt et al., 2011; Anand et al., 2007; Teece 2003). Studies suggest that these workers are under constant pressure and more prone to burnout than other employees (Jemielniak, 2012).

2.2.3 Talent Factories

Talent factories are a specific type of PSF that are defined by their particular human resources management practices (Werr & Schilling, 2002).

As human resources carry outstanding importance in PSFs, their management becomes an important predictor of organizational success. There have been several different models to classify the human resource management (HRM) practices of PSFs. Alvesson (2004) identified *career model* as a HRM concept. It is characterized by predominantly hungry, ambitious employees that are motivated by the pursuit of clearly defined career advancements. Werr and Schilling’s concept of talent factories is partly based on Alvesson’s career model.

The HR methods that comprise the concept of talent factories are depicted in table 2-1. Conjointly they form an environment of hard work, high pressure, long hours and of elitism (Werr & Schilling, 2011).

As a consequence, and reinforcing this predisposition, employees in talent factories are continuously screened and subject to an ‘up or out’ principle. It dictates that employees that do not satisfy the high standard of the organization are forced to exit. Employees that do fulfill the standard move up in the organizational hierarchy. These perceive a notion of being part of an elite and are financially well rewarded (Werr & Schilling, 2011; Maister, 2007; Alvesson, 2004). Big law firms, accounting firms and management consulting firms are typical examples of talent factories (Werr & Schilling, 2011). McKinsey & Company or Goldman Sachs serve as specific examples.

<u>Criteria</u>	<u>Requirements</u>
Recruitment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - New graduates - Based on grades 'the best' - 'hungry'
Career system	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Well defined career steps - 'Up or Out' - Partnership as the ultimate target
Reward system	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Set salary - Performance based bonuses
Image / Identity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Elite - Achievement oriented - Hard working - Part of an institution
Evaluation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Frequent - Formal - Multidimensional
Competence development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Formal, well defined packages - Learning by doing - Apprenticeship

Table 2-1 Characteristics of Talent Factories (Werr & Schilling, 2011)

2.2.4 Identity and Mentality of Employees in Talent Factories

Ron Daniel, a former managing director of McKinsey & Company, the blue-chip management consulting firm, once told the magazine *Fortune*: "The real competition out there isn't for clients, it's for people. And we look to hire people who are first, very smart; second, insecure and thus driven by their insecurity; and third, competitive" (Berglas, 2006).

Recruitment focuses on "hungry" newly graduates with exceptional academic credentials (Table 2-1). These types of professionals are likely to fit a mentality described as that of an "insecure overachiever" (Maister, 2007), exhibiting the constant need to prove themselves to others and to themselves. This comes from the feeling of being a "superior worm" - a paradoxical combination of superiority and inferiority complexes, which for psychologist Alfred Adler were two sides of the same coin (Berglas, 2006). They exhibit an inflated self-confidence but also constant anxiety of being inferior to others. This results in a constant need for

proving themselves and also to an inability to set boundaries. Such internal drive and desire to please are argued to lead to burn outs (Ibid.).

This personality of an insecure overachiever is specifically targeted in the recruitment process of what Werr and Schilling term talent factories (Maister 2007).

2.2.5 Summary Context

The characteristics of knowledge workers in talent factories, who are argued to often be "insecure overachievers", and the set-up of the talent factories, exhibiting copious stressors, produces a context context that is particularly relevant to studies regarding recovery mechanisms.

2.3 Introduction to Recovery

It is well established that stressing working conditions without recovery have negative effects on employees' health and performance, which leads to a decrease in organizational performance (Jemielniak, 2012; Demerouti et al. 2009, Sonnentag and Geurts 2006). Stress-related physiology plays a strong mediating role when it comes to the link between working conditions and negative effects on health and performance (Demerouti et al. 2009). An activation of stress-related mechanisms due to work is perfectly normal and not unhealthy. Work stress becomes unhealthy and can lead to serious diseases such as hypertension or depression only if prolonged during periods in which the stressor is absent i.e. outside work (Thornhill et al. 2006). Recovery is a way to neutralize these negative consequences of stress and avoid detrimental effects to health and performance. Knowledge about recovery is not comprehensive, yet, and scholars request additional research (Demerouti et al. 2009). Nevertheless, some theoretical models have been established and are reviewed subsequently.

2.4 Effort-Recovery Model

The effort-recovery model was developed by Meijman and Mulder (1998). In it they assume that humans need to devote effort in order to fulfill responsibilities. This effort leads to several physiological and psychological changes. Such as the development of an allostatic load, defined as "the wear and tear on the body", through chronic stress (Ogden, 2004).

It is argued that one has to recover from efforts in order to decrease allostatic load. The model suggests that it is necessary to cease the effort, which was generating stress in order to recover. Thus, activation of recovery requires an

abstinence from exerting demands on the same psycho-physiological system as effort (Meijman & Mulder, 1998; Odgen, 2004).

Effort and strain can still be sustained after the actual source, the stressful demand, has ceased. Reminiscing about past and future stressors is considered stressing and thus causing strain and requiring effort, too. It is important that stressors cease and that the psycho-physiological systems are truly recovering after the occurrence of the stressor (Borsschott, Pieper & Thayer, 2005).

The ER model distinguishes between two different kinds of factors that influence the development of negative consequences from stress. One type of factors comprises of factors causing effort, stressors, and the other of factors influencing recovery.

2.4.1 Factors causing Effort

Subjective workload can be seen as an important stressor (Ilies et al. 2007). It has to be noted that subjective workload, meaning perceived workload - not actual workload, measured in numbers of work hours seems to be decisive (Ibid.). Other factors that shape work demands are actual workload (time pressure, overtime), role ambiguity and situational constraints.

Moreover, lack of predictability and control over work demands influences effort created (Sapolsky 2004, Geurts et al. 2005, Karasek etl a. 1998, Kristensen el al. 2005). Job control refers to an individual's possibility to choose the timing and methods of his or her actions and is seen as a resource in the action regulation process.

2.4.2 Factors causing Recovery

Leisure activities, such as interaction with friends or reading books, can facilitate recovery (Sonnetag, 2001). While most recovery factors take place during leisure time, some can take place in breaks during work hours, albeit such are less effective and frequent (Sluiter et al., 2000).

2.5 Conservation of Resources Model

The conservation of resources model considers that humans aspire to retain and build resources, and that stress develops when those resources that are highly valued by the individual are threatened (Hobfoll, 1989; 2002). Resources are herein defined broadly. Hobfoll distinguished between four categories of resources: objects, conditions, personal characteristics and energies. Object resources are material objects such as a house or a car. Conditions are circumstances, such as tenure, marriage or seniority. Personal characteristics are

attitudes and skills, especially the ones that are useful in handling stressors. Energies are time, money, knowledge or levels of vigor and are often more valued for what they can be utilized for rather than for their intrinsic value.

Unfavorable working conditions and high work demands can threaten several resources, for example vigor (Hobfoll, 2002). Due to their desire to retain and build resources employees are expected to engage in activities during non-work time that help to do so. Retaining resources refers for instance to "recharging" ones batteries and regaining vigor while building resources could refer to learning new skills and gaining new personal perspectives. Thus, according to this model people recover from stress by regaining resources or building new resources.

2.6 Determinants of recovery from work

The factors that have an effect on recovery lie predominantly in the home domain (Sluiter, Frings-Dresen, Meijman & Beek, 2000), as it is argued that work stressors need to be ceased for recovery to be possible (Meijman and Mulder 1998). The field of research on recovery from work stressors emerged only quite recently. Early proponents of this field such as Westmand & Eden (1997) focused on the general effect of vacation or on specific activities without connecting it to a framework (Strauss-Blasche et al., 2005, Sonnentag & Fritz 2005). Only Sonnentag & Fritz (2005, 2007) took the approach to assume that there are underlying mechanisms such as relaxation or detachment from work, which lead to recovery from work stressors. A framework categorizing activities such as taking a walk or reading a book according to underlying psychological principles was absent (Sonnentag & Fritz, 2007). Sonnentag and Fritz brought research of recovery to a new conceptual level and still continue to be leading among the few researchers, which focus on this field.

2.7 Sonnentag & Fritz' Model of Recovery Experiences

Sonnentag and Fritz (2007) have determined that the effectiveness of active recovery is dependent on four recovery experiences: detachment from work, relaxation, control and mastery. They base their theory both on the ER model and on the resource conservation theory. To date it is the only known model examining the underlying psychological mechanisms behind recovery.

These four "recovery experiences" have been identified as being different phenomena, but it has been established by the same authors, Sonnentag and Fritz, that there is a positive correlation between all four of them. Furthermore, it is said that these recovery factors help to recover from work but there is also an

influence from work stressors on these recovery factors. Work stressors are detrimental for achieving relaxation, detachment, control and mastery.

2.7.1 Psychological Detachment from Work

It is argued that it is not sufficient to be physically distant from work. In order for recovery to take place through detachment a subjective feeling of being "away from work" is required, a psychological detachment from work. (Sonnentag 2012) This is particularly challenging in times of IT and 24-hour accessibility. Examples of a lack of detachment from work would be checking e-mails while spending time with one's family or thinking about work situations while engaged in leisure activities. Psychological detachment is seen as critical when it comes to achieving recovery. It is argued that if psychological detachment is not achieved then the stressor has not ceased and no recovery can occur. Sonnentag and Bayer argue that the benefits of detachment are particularly high when intense time pressure is present (Sonnentag & Bayer, 2005).

2.7.2 Relaxation

Relaxation relates to activities that require low social, physical or mental demands on the person. Typical examples are meditating, talking a walk, casual dinners or watching TV. It is argued that relaxation helps the recovery by stopping the activation, which was caused by work and by inducing a positive mood (Sonnentag, 2001). Relaxation is seen as particularly effective as a recovery experience in a situation when stress is anticipated. This is the case, for instance, when an individual worries about future work tasks in the home domain (Sonnentag, Binnewies, Mojza, 2008).

2.7.3 Control over Leisure Time

Control refers to the extent a person can decide on what to do in her leisure time , when to do it and how to carry it a certain activity of choice. It is said to contribute to a positive evaluation of stressful events, which leads to lower distress and to higher psychological well-being (Lazarus, 1966). It may also increase one's feeling of competence and therein increase well-being. It can also contribute by providing freedom to choose the leisure activities that lead to the best possible recovery, taking individual and environmental factors into account.

2.7.4 Mastery

Mastery relates to challenging experiences and learning opportunities in leisure time. These off-work activities distract from work and offer the experience of competence and proficiency. They challenge the individual by overtaxing their

capabilities and are usually not effortless. Mastery requires a certain degree of self-regulation. Examples provided by Sonnentag are climbing a mountain, taking a language class or learning a new hobby. Mastery contributes to recovery by providing new skills, self-efficacy and by improving mood.

Such activities led to feelings of mastery, which facilitate recovery. Fritz and Sonnentag (2006) found psychological well-being among participants experiencing a vacation including the learning of a new skill or similar mastery experiences to be exceeding of those that have returned from vacation without such experience. However, mastery experiences in routine everyday life have also been shown to be recovery aiding (Sonnentag, Binnewies, & Mojza, 2008).

2.8 Literature Gap

Literature has established the impact of recovery for individuals and subsequently for the performance of organization. It has also established how recovery interplays with stressors and what broad factors influence recovery.

However, specific research about recovery experience is in its adolescence. The dominant researchers in this field, Fritz and Sonnentag, who have produced the only available model concerning recovery experience, acknowledge three gaps in literature. Mechanisms within the recovery experience, interplay between experience, and contextual factors have so far not been addressed adequately in research.

The complex mechanisms within each the four recovery experience are acknowledged to not have been subject to sufficient attention (Sonnentag & Fritz 2007). This can be exemplified by taking a closer look at detachment as a experience. While the framework treats detachment as a necessary and solely positive factor towards recovery, other research suggests that certain types of attachment – such as aspirational attachment – may indeed have a positive impact on recovery (Fritz & Sonnentag, 2007), implying that detachment could have both positive and negative impact on recovery, depending on the kind of detachment and the context. This is neglected in the framework, as a one-dimensional relationship between the experience and recovery is depicted, ignoring the constituting factors.

The interplay between the four separate recovery experience has not been established in the research. Sonnentag and Fritz mention relaxation in this context. They show how a connection to mastery can be hypothesized but is yet to be researched: Relaxation may exhibit factors such as purpose (purposeful relaxation could be progressive muscle relaxation), thus be potentially connected

to mastery. A person could purposefully train towards developing the skill of progressive muscle relaxation. As a consequence a single activity would fall into two recovery experience (Mastery & Relaxation in this case) and potentially create synergetic output. Such complex patterns and linkages have been ignored in the theoretical framework.

Finally, as a conceptual theory, contextual factors are ignored. Context such as job stressors is acknowledged to have an impact on the necessity of recovery in the model (a direct positive correlation between stressors present and recovery necessary is established), but the impact on the experience, how it is pursued under differing circumstances is ignored. Additional contextual factors such as personality are not taken into consideration. This shortcoming is also acknowledged by Sonnentag & Fritz (Sonnentag & Fritz, 2007).

3 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

In the previous chapter we reviewed the literature in the context of effort and recovery and the context of talent factories and derived the literature gap. In this chapter we will outline our theoretical framework to address this gap.

In our theoretical framework we examine the recovery process of knowledge worker on an individual level rather than on an organizational level and at one point in time, rather than over a period of time. For this purpose we look through the lens of Sonnentag and Fritz's model on recovery experiences: mastery, control of leisure time, relaxation and psychological detachment from work.

We assume that this four recovery experiences are indeed the underlying psychological mechanisms that lead to recovery, as stipulated by Sonnentag and Fritz. This framework is seen through having the ER model by Meijman and Mulder (1998) and the resource conservation theory by Hobfoll (1989, 2002) as the backbone of Sonnentag and Fritz's model. Thus, we imbedded the four recovery experiences to the ER model as the mechanisms which lead to recovery from effort (job stressors). The resource conservation theory is hypothesized to be able to partly explain the use and interdependencies of these four recovery experiences.

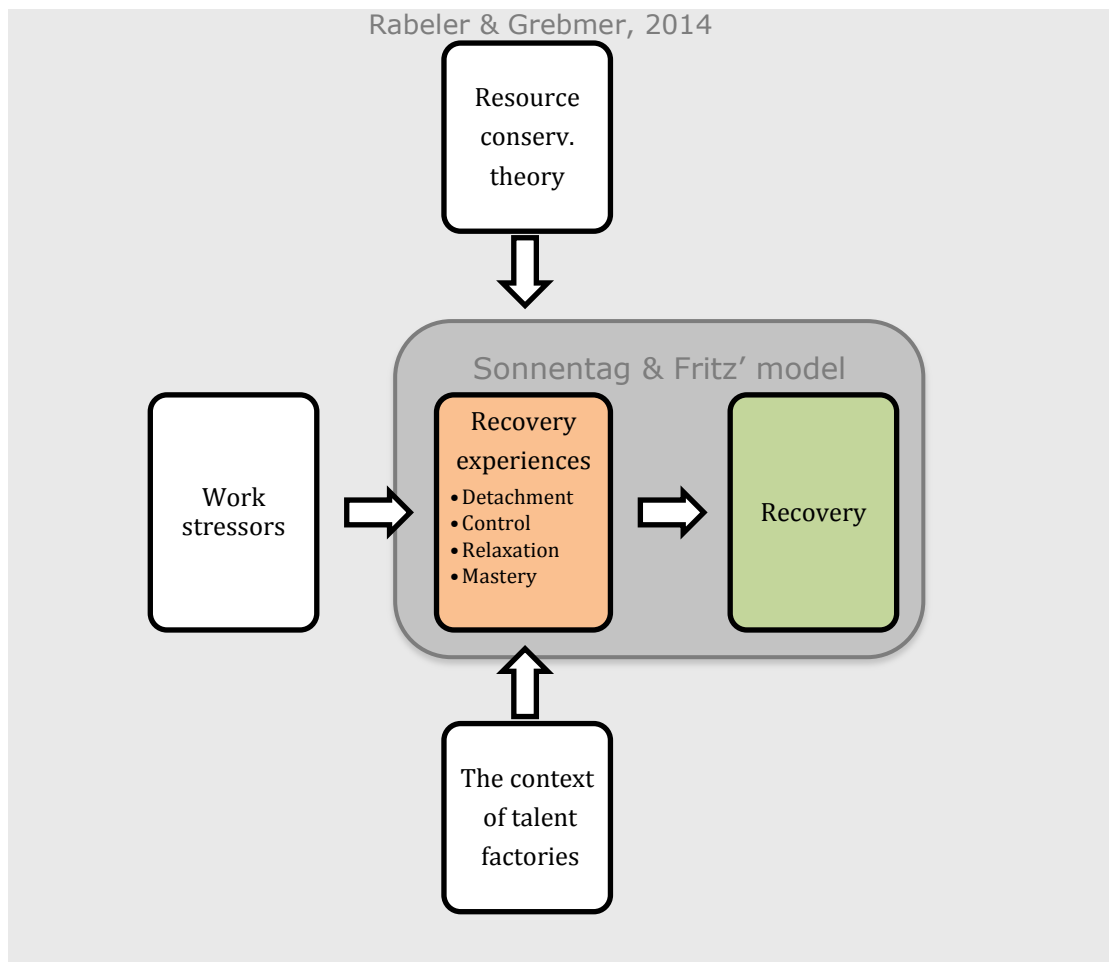


Figure 3-1. The Theoretical Framework

Knowledge workers in talent factories do not only constitute the context of our theoretical framework. The characteristics of both talent factories as organization and of knowledge workers as individuals are seen as potential explanation for the mechanisms within the recovery process. In specific, the HRM practices in talent factories and the personality of knowledge worker. For this purpose we mainly rely on the talent factory concept of Werr and Schilling (2011).

We are specifically interested in which interdependencies exist between the four different recovery experiences, how they relate to each other. Sonnentag and Fritz (2007) do not draw any conclusions on the interaction between the four recovery experiences they have established. They consider them individually. We, however, consider them comprehensively.

4 METHODOLOGY

The methodology section of this research portrays the method of research conduction and exhibits the rationale behind methodological choices made.

4.1 Methodological Approach

The literature review revealed that an application of modern recovery models to the section of knowledge workers has thus far been omitted from research. It is intriguing that research on knowledge professionals, and talent factories in particular, suggest that the dynamics in this field do indeed differ systematically from the norm in terms of work pressure and other acknowledged causes of stress, but the consequences for perceived recovery and approach to recovery have not, yet, been explored empirically. Therefore, we elected to take an explorative approach to develop theory on how recovery for professionals in talent factories is perceived and approached.

For the purpose of developing theory concerning the 'how' of a process highly contextual, such as recovery, research based on qualitative techniques is to be preferred to quantitative data (Berg & Lune 2004, Patton 2005)

Recovery is a personal and potentially sensitive topic. Research subjects are likely to be insecure overachievers that put high importance on being portrayed as high achievers (Alvesson, 2004), potentially reluctant to admitting shortcomings. A qualitative approach will mitigate the risk of biased to some extent, when put into the context of story and individual topics pursuit by follow-up questions that descriptive, not valuing.

Recovery in talent factories requires further theory building in the real context of everyday work situations and patterns across individual's reactions to different stimuli should be identified. Different recovery experiences are therefore researched and compared. A cross analysis with multiple recovery aspects as well as multiple cases, representing diverging contexts, epitomizes a relevant tool to pursue this objective (Maxwell, 2012). Therefore, we opted for interviews with professionals employed at various different talent factories. This is particularly appropriate as it helps to isolate company specific differences and to collect less organization based data. We aim to establish a holistic picture on the group of knowledge worker in talent factories rather than a theory on a single organization.

4.2 Selection of Interviewees and Organizations

In order to procure only relevant data, case selection is based on a set of criteria. Hence we screened companies for the criteria for classification of a talent factory, as this is the environment of interest for this research. In order to be classified as talent factories, organizations had to match at least five of the six aspects of talent factories, as established by Werr and Schilling (2011). These selection criteria are summarized in Table 4-1. (see Table 4-1 'Selection Criteria').

Each organization was first assessed based on the criteria in a separate, perfunctory analysis based on publicly available data. Subsequent to data collection, each participating company was scrutinized again, taking the insights from the interviews into consideration and to potentially eliminate false prior assessment. No organization had to be excluded.

<u>Criteria</u>	<u>Requirements</u>
Recruitment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - New graduates - Based on grades 'the best' - 'hungry'
Career system	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Well defined career steps - 'Up or Our' - Partnership the ultimate target
Reward system	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Set salary - Performance based bonuses
Image / Identity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Elite - Achievement oriented - Hard working - Part of an institution
Evaluation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Frequent - Formal - Multidimensional
Competence development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Formal, well defined packages - Learning by doing - Apprenticeship

Table 4-1 Selection Criteria

4.2.1 Selection of Participants

In participant selection we intended for a representative sample in terms of gender, age, hierarchical status and tenure at company. We excluded interviewees with less than three months of experience at a talent factory, assuming that adjustment and familiarization with the environment and procedures was ongoing and their accurate judgment of the situation in talent factories not developed appropriately, yet.

<u>Company</u>	<u>Participants</u>
Company A	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 9 interviewees <ul style="list-style-type: none"> o 4 senior, 5 junior o 100% male o Tenure ranging from 1 year to 15
Company B	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 1 interviewee <ul style="list-style-type: none"> o Senior o Male o Tenure 7 years
Company C	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 1 interviewee <ul style="list-style-type: none"> o Senior o Female o Tenure 4 years
Company D	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 1 interviewee <ul style="list-style-type: none"> o Junior o Male o Tenure 6 months
Total participants	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 12 participants <ul style="list-style-type: none"> o 50% junior positions, 50% senior positions o 8.3% women, 91.7% men

Table 4-2 Summary Interviews

4.3 Data Collection

In order to collect quality data, a semi-structured interview approach guided by an interview guide was pursued. Both are presented here.

4.3.1 Semi-structured Interviews

Semis-structured interviews were chosen as primary data collection method for the reason that they retrieve personal views and insights efficiently, which are deemed important for the research. This approach allows for a dynamic reaction to employee input and to maneuver between different aspects of recovery without significant restriction of interview input. An interview guide was developed and applied to streamline and focus data collection towards relevant aspects (see 10.1 Appendix I., 'Interview guide').

Other secondary methods, such as observation were ruled out, as deemed unfeasible; employees' reluctance to participate, time constraints and lacking approval by organizations substantiate this apprehension. Similarly, cultural artifacts, description on homepages etc. were excluded.

To guarantee anonymity of participants and organizations, organizations are labeled A-D and participants not named. This was chosen to guarantee reliability by enabling interviewees to speak freely without having to fear negative consequences for their career. We argue that this is especially important for driven knowledge worker in talent factories, as they strongly care about how they are perceived and in their career in general (Maister, 2007). Likewise the organizations were kept anonymous to guarantee that we were allowed to conduct the research without focusing on a specific aspect, which might show organizations in a good light. During the process of acquiring partner companies we made the experience that these organizations are really protective of their branding as an employer. We refrained from assigning quotes to specific interviewees. (See Appendix II: list of interviews) This was done to guarantee anonymity of interviewees as we opted for an approach with rather few but in depth interviewees.

4.3.2 Interview Guide

Application of a story telling approach is the distinct feature of our interview guide. We asked participants to provide a story about an especially distinctive experience they have made in relation to a number of prescribed topics of interest. In order to extract information in relation to specific situations and to prevent interviewees from being abstract and generalizing, we designed a follow-

up procedure that involved a redirection to relevant topics through the posing of a number of open questions. We have decided not to adhere to a strict chronology and set of questions, but rather to have a catalogue (see 10.1 Appendix 1, 'Interview Guide') and respond to the interviewee's circumstances and perceptions.

We anticipated interview participants to exaggerate their achievements and ability to recover, as well as downplay the pressures of work and the difficulties. This prediction is based on the A-player traits of self-esteem previously depicted (Maister 2007). Such self-serving bias is mitigated by avoiding value-based question and rather providing factual, situation relevant follow-up questions

4.3.3 Data Analysis and Coding

Pattern recognition was applied to draw generalized conclusions from the collected data. Patterns were sought in three contexts: First, across participating interviewees concerning specific recovery methods; second systematic linkages between these patterns identified; and third between contextual influences and recovery methods.

Such a setting of dimensions as a foundation to scan for similarities and differences among respondents is in line with suggestions from previous research on pattern recognition (Bazeley. 2013).

Subsequent to interview conduction, data was therefore coded according to the four primary recovery experiences identified in the theoretical framework, which are recovery, detachment, mastery and control.

4.4 Data Quality

Data quality has been a driving consideration behind our methodological approach. We considered the following dimensions to guarantee data of highest quality was made available.

4.4.1 Validity

There are numerous threats to the validity of the research. One is to draw conclusions on objective judgments. In order to avoid this, we attempted to create a clear connection to evidence in form of quotes, attempting to find numerous quotes to support any conclusion. Additionally, each drawn conclusion was debated between the authors.

Another risk is inherent is the false drawing of causal relationships between two occurrences. However, due to the explorative nature of this research, which is not

attempting to prove any causal relationship between two events, but rather to create a comprehensive understanding of a context, this is deemed less of a problem.

4.4.2 Reliability

Reliability describes the extent to which a research could be replicated with the same results by the authors or other authors, using the same methodology.

In order to increase reliability of the research, we conducted interviews according to a procedure previously established in great detail, guaranteeing that the interview circumstances were as near identical as possible between interviews. Furthermore, the interviews were conducted and subsequently separately coded by both authors (Bazeley, 2013). Variations in coding were discussed and their root causes revealed. A clear definition for our codes and patterns helped explain these variations and create a standardized interview and data handling procedure. This mitigated the primary threat to reliability in quantitative research, which is biased interpretation of the data. (Patton, 2005) Despite these precautions measures, we acknowledge that it is unlikely that bias has been fully removed; such is the nature of explorative, qualitative research (Elliot & Timulak, 2005).

4.5 Methodological Critique

Despite emphasizing a systematic approach to gathering data of highest quality, some limitations are apparent. First, despite guaranteed anonymity, certain information on recovery was still perceived sensitive, creating data limitations that we did not anticipate to this extent. Second, the high self-esteem of the insecure over achiever type (Maister, 2007) was anticipated and we attempted to mitigate it, as described above. However, the interviewers did not succeed in eliminating self-serving bias fully. Third, our data source, the participants, could have been selected in more equal proportions from different organizations and representing gender distribution more accurately. The limitations in the sample are result to organizations' and individuals' reluctance to participate in such research, which further motivated us to conduct this research and create knowledge of the functioning and impact of recovery in this context. Finally, our data was received from one method only. Research suggests increased quality can be achieved through a triangulation approach (Maxwell, 2012), utilizing different sources. However, resource constraints and, again, organizations' unwillingness to participate more closely did not allow us to consider other sources of data, such as observation.

5 FINDINGS

The empirical data is arranged according to the framework derived from the theoretical section of this research, as stated above. The following section displays data that emerged in patterns, such as repetitive mention of a specific phenomenon or opinion across interviewees.

Next to patterns in the data, recording of contradictions and systematic omitting of certain topics was paid particular attention, as both are considered significant contributions to empirical data.

Additionally, individual cases that delve deeper into certain patterns across individual interviews are also displayed to create an intimate familiarization of the intuition behind statements.

Relevant data that was collected from the interviews and followed patterns, contradiction or omission and could not clearly be associated with one of the four sections established in the theoretical framework was collected and captured under 'auxiliary empirical data' at the end of this section.

5.1 Detachment from Work

The data was scanned for any signs of work expansion into leisure time situations, which prohibited leisure, or work expansion that prohibited leisure time. The outcomes are displayed below, introduced by an exemplary case for reference.

5.1.1 Exemplary Case

One of the interviewees has recently entered COMPANY as a newly graduate. Her/his view on detachment from work is fresh and thus serves well to exemplify the particularity of her/his occupational environment.

An aspect that is quite obvious to the interviewee is that his occupation now has more reach, blurring the boundaries of work, when compared to his responsibilities as a student.

When I studied, when I was at campus I was working; when I was at home, I was not. I try to do the same at COMPANY, but it is hard. If I need to work more I try to do it at the office.

Time away from work is suddenly perceived scarcer than during studies. It therefore is seen as more valuable and the interviewee attempts to make better use of this time. In this context she/he perceives kite surfing and golfing to be the most effective in helping him to detach from work.

When I come home I feel that it is my environment - I can do whatever I want in it. I plan this time better now, it seems more valuable'

I can really immerse myself [in these tasks]

5.1.2 Challenges in Attaining Detachment

Several interviewees state that detachment from work during leisure time is not automatically or easily attained. Hint towards four primary challenges in attaining attachment. They are perceived importance of work, blurring of work boundaries, liking towards occupation and competitive pressure.

5.1.2.1 Perceived Importance of Work

Some participants point towards the importance their work has in their life, which naturally spans across working and leisure time. It is seen as defining for professional and personal identity.

Work has a huge impact on my personality

Work defines who you are a lot. That means if you get better at work, you get better as a person

You always have work in your mind, so it's difficult to make a distinction. Work is a big part of my personality [...] it is a huge part of your life. It really defines who you are

Indeed work is stated to have such a central and comprehensive role that thoughts return to it automatically.

You always have your work in our mind somehow. This can cause some tension in your life, of course.

5.1.2.2 Blurring of Work Boundaries

A constant presence of work in the mind is seen as a consequence of the fact that the boundaries of their work are becoming increasingly blurred. The reasons for this phenomenon are numerous and include integration of social circle and professional connections, extension of work responsibilities beyond the physical and time limits of the office. Additionally, the workload is often large enough to

require that the interviewees spend extensive periods of time completing their tasks and meeting their responsibilities. As a consequence the interviewees attach significant importance to their work and their responsibilities. And once such importance is assigned, it is deemed to carry a degree of urgency even during leisure periods.

The social activities at COMPANY are definitely improving your position.. So it is kind of work time, it benefits you. [...] You go there because you feel it makes you grow.

You can't really use your free time in the same way because there is not much to do but do work related things

All the time you have some parts of your work in the back of your mind. When you are at home you are still processing things.

It's hard to tell whether competence cells are free time or work.

This weekend is not so good [in terms of getting time away from work]. Well, that's how it is, hard work

Juggle too many balls.

Sometimes I am watching a movie and answering some e-mails at the same time and it feels like I is working.

5.1.2.3 Liking towards Occupation

Another pattern of statement implies that the interviewees often display intense liking and a keen personal interest in their occupation and job-related activities they are engaged in. This is also seen as a reason that attention regularly returns to such matters and tasks. Despite the stated affection, all of the cases state the necessity of prohibiting constant attention to work during leisure time periods to be negative.

I try to abstain from thinking work relating things during the evening. But it is hard. You like what you do. The problems are interesting, what solutions these problems may have

On the other hand if you really like your job it is not a big problem.

5.1.2.4 Competitive Pressure

The workload intensity and span of workdays is seen as a consequence of a highly competitive environment. The interviewee states the importance of detaching of work as primary recovery experience and essential to evade stress.

There are not many companies were you work that much as we do at COPMANY, I mean like 70 hours a week.

[...] there are others who are willing to work at least as much as you do. If you want to have a future in the company, you have to perform and be good to some extent with a competitive climate.

You can't really use your free time in the same way because there is not much to do in terms of work related things. It can become a stress in the long term to never really disconnect from it.

5.1.3 Approach to Detachment

During the interviews three approaches to creating detachment from work have been referred to by the interviewees: Detachment through activity, detachment through goal setting and detachment through social integration at work.

5.1.3.1 Social Integration at Work

Close social integration of work was seen as beneficial to detach during working hours. Having social ties to professional peers was seen to result in proximity towards non-work conversation. Options to retreat briefly and detach, at least to some extent, during working hours was seen as beneficial to recovery.

I grab coffee with OTHER EMPLOYEE, he works in my team and we train together [when I need distraction]. [we do this] often, even during pressure periods.

Among the participants, such social integration was common and included the all their professional peers. A feeling of belonging to a specific group of people, a feeling of 'us' was repeatedly mentioned. Interviewees see an attachment to their occupation beyond the contractual obligation. They state a personal connection. Homogeneity is mentioned and individuals outside of the field are referred to as 'they', much as people inside the field are referred to as 'us'.

I definitely feel that I spend more time on things which other people would call work. At other companies people work 9 – 5, they are not really caring about their job. That's how I see it. COMPANY is perfect for me. People at COMPANY are really learning.

Consequently, social ties are seen as predominantly forming among employees in the same area, people from the 'us' group. Such people are facing similar challenges in recovery, such as time constraints. Conjoint recovery activities can be pursued, increasing efficiency. It is therefore stated that being positive towards the work and towards the colleagues seems to help recovery, too.

My friends' amount of free time has developed in the same way as mine has [become less], therefore I do not mind that also his became less. It would be a problem if I had little free time and all my friends did cool stuff in their free time.

My preference regarding work-life balance is highly dependent on my social environment.

5.1.3.2 Detachment through Activity

Several participants pursue an active approach to detachment. The mind is occupied with intense activities to prevent thoughts from relaxing, which in turn obviates attention returning to work related matters. Interviewees find it difficult to stay detached from work whilst idle and find that attention returns to work in such conditions of inactivity. Therefore, they systematically schedule leisure time to be centered on activities clearly different from work. Physical activity is mentioned as especially efficient in creating such detachment, or a participant's words to tell the body 'when it is in work mode and when not'. The scheduling of active conduct becomes particularly important for the interviewees during periods of stress, as recovery gains importance then. Finally, it is stated that such detachment of work is particularly unattainable in the domestic environment of the interviewees home.

There is probably a relation between how much stress you have at work and how active you have to be in you free time.

Often the best way to relax is to actually do something, but something totally different [from work]. With added stress levels at work it becomes more important.

When you are at home you tend to think about problems, about would could have done or said. [This is the case] especially in tough political projects. Then it becomes more important to do something active in your free time.

My exercise time is the time which is "holy" during which I really do not work.

When I am at home I am in a "grey zone" between work and life. Sports activities on the other hand are clearly associated with time off; they represent a form of freedom of work.

5.1.3.3 Detachment through Goal Setting

In order to improve the recovery process, some interviewees found being active in itself insufficient. They attempted to be active, tried running and swimming for physical exercise. However, these exercises did not improve the recovery process at first. This positive effect was only felt once a goal was attached to the activity.

The feeling of building towards something really helped me focus. [...] now I can push work away.

At work you have only a limited amount of time with each client. The focus is usually more immediate than the one I have in my training [towards a goal (towards completing an ironman)], I think this differentiation helped me [switch between work and detached activity]

The quality of free time improved immediately [upon deciding on the goal]

In this context it is noteworthy that working towards a goal is an aspect of the recovery experience *Mastery*, as depicted in more detail below. The reason it is integrated here is specific repeated reference by participants towards the contributed goal setting had towards detachment from work, and therefore had to be considered here. The setting of goals not as a distraction or detachment technique, but rather to the end of mastering a specific skill is displayed in the section *Mastery*.

5.1.4 The Role of Detachment

Participants acknowledge both the difficulty they are having towards attaining detachment as well as the importance of being detached from work, at least to some degree. A minimum level of detachment is perceived essential to recovery. Detachment is seen to also have a close connection to mastery.

5.2 Relaxation

The data was scanned for any quotes related to relaxation, such as idleness, non-active behavior and generally task of no physical, mental or social demand. The outcomes are displayed below, introduced by an exemplary case for reference.

5.2.1 Exemplary Case

One of the interviewees has discussed the field of relaxation, both in every-day situations as well as in holiday situations in depth and therefore serves well to exemplify a potential role of relaxation in recovery.

The interviewee describes behavior of no physical, mental or social demand as anxiety causing and not contributing towards recovery. When she/he is on holiday, forced idleness on a beach feels like a burden rather than relaxing.

When I am on vacation on the beach and I lay down... I don't know what to do. I get restless.

However, when questioned further, the interviewee admits to occasionally enjoying and even requiring such periods of non-demanding behavior. She/he has casual dinners and conversation with her/his partner regularly and feels direct positive responses in his body after these.

If I have a good dinner and conversation the night before a workday, I am in a better mood and more energized the day after.

5.2.2 Challenges in Relaxation

5.2.2.1 Restlessness

Relaxation was also described as counter productive in relation to recovery. Several interviewees mentioned that activity that required low physical or mental demands installed in them a sense of anxiety and restlessness, which clearly prohibited relaxation.

I need to do stuff.

I rarely really do not do anything. I guess I simply do not like it

You have to see a set of ideas here [in recovery] proactive life and non-action life. Everybody has to find his or her balance. Mine is heavy on action-oriented life.

5.2.3 Approach to Relaxation

5.2.3.1 Peripheral Attention

Of the interviewees none mentioned a primary experience of recovery that was based on relaxation. It was mentioned on numerous occasions, as a peripheral

recovery aid though. The benefits of recovery through relaxation related activity were stated clearly in this context.

I can really turn my mind off during gaming. Then I forget time. But that is ok, sometimes wasting time helps me charge my battery. (K)

[on relaxation...] I spend time with my girlfriend, family. That gives helps something good. (A)

5.2.3.2 Low-intensity Activity

Interviewees found the entertainment through activity of low intensity activity, be it physical, mental or social efficient in diverging attention from performance requiring matters and therein freeing up renewed capacity for such matters upon return to work engagements. Social activity, be it among friends or family, was found particularly relaxing.

A frequent approach was to choose activities and influence topics of conversation actively in a way that prohibited them from becoming too strenuous. Such an approach could take the form of casual meetings over coffee and brunch, or activities such as watching a movie at home or playing computer games. One interviewee mentioned explicitly that homogeneity of social circle represented a contributing factor to establishing a social situation conducive to relaxation.

I enjoy doing something purposelessly. Something not project based or long-term goal oriented. [...] actually, I seek these situations to turn my mind off.

The social ties are strong [way to relax]. Homogeneity is certainly an influencing factor.

5.2.3.3 Social Integration

Generally, relaxation methods involved other people. Even activities that could theoretically be conducted alone, such as playing computer games or watching movies was stated as relaxing only in groups. Strictly individual activities of low intensity, be it tranquil jogging, reading a book or such were fully absent from the methods mentioned in relation to relaxation.

I enjoy, you know, hanging out with people. Sometimes I training on my own [...] but generally I like to spend my little free time with people, with people I like to hang out.

5.2.4 The Role of Relaxation

Even though relaxation is repeatedly, explicitly given low priority in the context of recovery, some contradictions in interviewees statements hint at a less well-defined positioning of relaxation. Direct questioning of participants about specific relaxation situations led to more positive feedback. It can be assumed that participants require frequent, if not extensive, relaxation in order to recover.

5.3 Control over Leisure Time

The data was scanned for references to the extent interviewees were able to decide what and when to do in their leisure time as well as when and how to carry out a certain activity. The findings are displayed below, introduced by an exemplary case.

5.3.1 Exemplary Case

During one of the interviews, a participant answered a question about an ideal state in detailed depth, making this a suitable case to exemplify the perceived role of control over leisure time.

The employee was happy with the flexible hours he enjoyed at his employer. She/he felt that they gave her/him a fair degree of control over scheduling both her/his work and her/his leisure time and the activities she/he could pursue during leisure time.

I would maybe find another job if we were not offered the benefits we are [benefits in terms of flexible time and freely scheduling projects]

However, the interviewee stretched that an ideal environment had not, yet been attained, and that limitations are still present. The participant would have liked to work intensely for a period of time, radically scaling down leisure time in order to later gain 'total freedom' to pursue travel adventures.

If I had total freedom, I would like to work more but then take off a longer time to travel.

5.3.2 Challenges in Gaining Control over Leisure Time

Gaining control over leisure time was generally stated to be an important task to achieve. However, some challenges were mentioned frequently. Extensive and expanding work responsibilities and need to gain comprehensive control are the two major challenges and are depicted here.

5.3.2.1 *Work Responsibilities*

Among the interviewees, it has been repeatedly mentioned that control over leisure activity was limited by work responsibilities. Such disruption may be caused by the sheer workload of the job, which limits actual time available for leisure and creates a situation that requires on-call availability during leisure time. In either case the leisure activities are limited through work influences. Having limited time available forestalls time intense activities, and required on-call availability prohibits activities that are inappropriate to potential interruption through calls. Such situations and circumstances are generally seen as having a negative impact on the interviewee's well being.

It can be that you feel a really good flow in your music and then "no, I have to work now". You don't have enough time, but hey that's life.

When I studied, when I was at campus I was working, when I was at home, I was not. I try to do the same at the company, but it is hard. If I need to work more I try to do it at the office.

When I come home I try to make that my environment; I can do whatever I want with it.

5.3.2.2 *Comprehensive Control*

There seems to be a strong connection between control of the professional environment and responsibilities with control over the personal leisure time. The boundaries are blurred and interviewees feel in control if they have firm control over both elements. Once either one is not under control, control over the other seems unlikely, too. Indeed, the connection between work and leisure in the context of control is so strong that numerous interviewees answer questions about control over their leisure time with responses about control over their work schedule.

Factors that prohibit control over leisure time therefore are stated to have their source in both non-work activities and work activities. Interviewees need to gain a certain degree over their occupational responsibilities before they can attain and maintain control over their leisure time.

I have to spend time at the customers, I have to give value to them. It is not the time but the value I gave them what counts. If I spent more hours at work this week, I can spend more hours at home next week. I have a degree of power over my own schedule.

(In answer to a question about control over leisure time) 'You have to earn your credibility at COMPANY. But then when you have that you can also hand things on, you don't have to accept everything. You can also choose to not do something. That gives a sense of control.

5.3.2.3 Leisure Responsibilities

Control over leisure time is also seen as limited by responsibilities originating within the non-work sphere. Tasks that are not freely chosen, and instead perceived as obligations, are received as disturbing control over leisure time, too.

Free time is exactly that, time in which I am free to do whatever I want. If I need to take care of my 1 year old, that is not free time.

5.3.3 Approach to Gaining Control over Leisure Time

Systematic approaches to gaining control over leisure time are not commonly accommodated among the interviewees. However, one approach was seen repeatedly, acceptance.

5.3.3.1 Acceptance

Participants find circumstances in which a disruption of work towards their leisure time is acceptable. Once a work task reaches high-perceived levels of interest for the interviewee, sacrificing leisure time to pursue the task further is acceptable. In this context the interviewee stresses that this was a choice he had made, that it was under his control.

Some parts in work, such as the ones that he could find a lot of meaning in, are so attractive to me. These I choose to do even during free time, or some parts of my free time.

5.3.4 The Role of Control

Control was seen as desirable across nearly all interviewees. Regardless whether it is control over work or free time, the element of freedom was strongly represented across the sample of interviewees. It seemed to be a fundamental requirement.

I would maybe do it like in Norway; choose your hours and work less hours but be more focused. I would like to try it.

I think quality of free time is most important. What can I actually do when I am off? Do I actually have any freedom?

We have flexible hours at COMPANY. 'That's exactly how I want it to be

I don't want to work less nor more [...] I definitely do not want less flexibility in the times I work

It is also noteworthy that the employees mention their generally generous financial compensation favorable in allowing them to pursue more financially demanding activities during their leisure time, thus establishing a certain degree of control.

5.4 Mastery

The data was scanned for quotes related to challenging experiences and learning opportunities during leisure time. The findings are depicted below.

5.4.1 Exemplary Case to Mastery

Interviewee x plays music and is a member of a band and describes music as her / his 'second life [next to work]'. The interviewee is passionate about music and ambitiously practices. The improvement and gained skills are important to the participant.

I am usually taking quite a leading role in my music practice. Being a consultant is much about being a leader, taking charge.

[this way] my hobby improves my skills as a consultant, because of that, because of the teamwork and leadership training from just being in a band.

You go there because you feel it makes you grow

The interviewee stated that music was his primary source of recovery and that it is such an effective recovery tool since it is so detached from his work activities.

I play a lot of music. I have a band. It gives me something. It is completely different from what I do at work.

There is a lot of stuff going on in my life beside works, especially when it comes to music. It is my second life almost.

5.4.2 Challenges in Mastery as a Recovery Experience

Participants stated mastery as inherent to their nature and could mostly not point towards any struggles. However, one could be identified: work interference.

5.4.2.1 *Work Interference*

Interviewees mentioned interference of work in their pursuit of mastery as a common occurrence. However, some did not perceive such a hindrance as purely negative. In such cases limitations were seen as stimulating achievements and actually increasing the effects of mastery.

It can be that you feel a really good flow and then "no, I have to work now". You don't have enough time, but hey that's life.

I think creativity is a lot stimulated by limitations and demands. It is not only a bad thing to have demands and feel pressure. That is one very important ingredient in creativity, but of course if you get too stressed, or the demands get too high, then it can be a really limitation. That's something you need to balance. But in general I think limiting factors are quite good for creativity. I think most nobel price laureates would agree.

5.4.3 Approaches to Mastery

Two underlying pattern could be identified in participants approaches to mastery: external merit and synergy.

5.4.3.1 *External Merit*

It seems that recovery is more likely if leisure activities contribute towards a merit that was socially acceptable and approved externally. Showcasing success both in professional occupation as well as in leisure circumstances was repeatedly mentioned as important to the interviewees. One interviewee suggested that merits external to the working responsibilities should be rewarded and shown. He stated that a publication of his personal sports achievement in a newsletter to the colleagues helped him boost his moral, and indeed gave him a better feeling, which he said energized him further.

Today it's not a Porsche in your driveway which shows that you are successful. It is that you do stuff such as marathons, Lidingöloppet, that you are able fulfill yourself.

COMPANY rewards people for achieving personal goals through a mention in a regular newsletter. [...] yes, I liked being mentioned here. I drew some energy from it. In fact, I think we should reward personal achievements more, yet.

Work defines who you are quite a lot. That means if you become better at your work you get better as a person, in a way

5.4.3.2 Transferability and Synergy

Mastery seems to be an especially effective tool for recovery if the development opportunities and the experience gained in overcoming challenges is beneficial not just to overcome the next hurdle in that field of activity (example.: Ironman preparation), but rather to a number of other fields as well, preferably also professionally (example.: Ironman training improves posture, which improves presentation skills).

When I have interesting, challenging work I am also more energized in my free time and feel like going to the gym etc. And when I master challenges in my leisure time, then I have more energy to carry to work.

Once I accepted the challenge, I got stronger mentally. [...] I recovered and found new energy – for work also.

As a consultant you have a limited amount of time with each client. You do not feel like you really build something. You do not see how the challenge is actually overcome. I balance this shortcoming in my spare time.

You also get a lot of training in expressing yourself and communication. Music is basically communication. It is a refined way of communication. It enables you to communicate in a more refined way as a consultant.

It is a lot about teamwork. It is constantly training for your work.

5.4.4 The Role of Mastery

The pursuit of challenging activities during leisure time has been stated as important in recovery repeatedly among the interviewees. There are cases in which overcoming challenges in leisure time are seen as synergetic to work and other cases in which they are seen as complimenting to work. In both situations, the effect is seen as immensely positive and most of the interviewees that mentioned mastery over challenges as a recovery experience attached heavy weight to it in relative terms to other recovery experience.

6 ANALYSIS

The empirical findings give an overview over the perceptions that have been stated by the interviewees. In the following section, these findings related to the four recovery experiences are assessed individually and holistically. They are then related to the theoretical framework. Interesting connections between the four recovery experiences are highlighted and a non-delated view on the overall perception on recovery and recovery experiences is given.

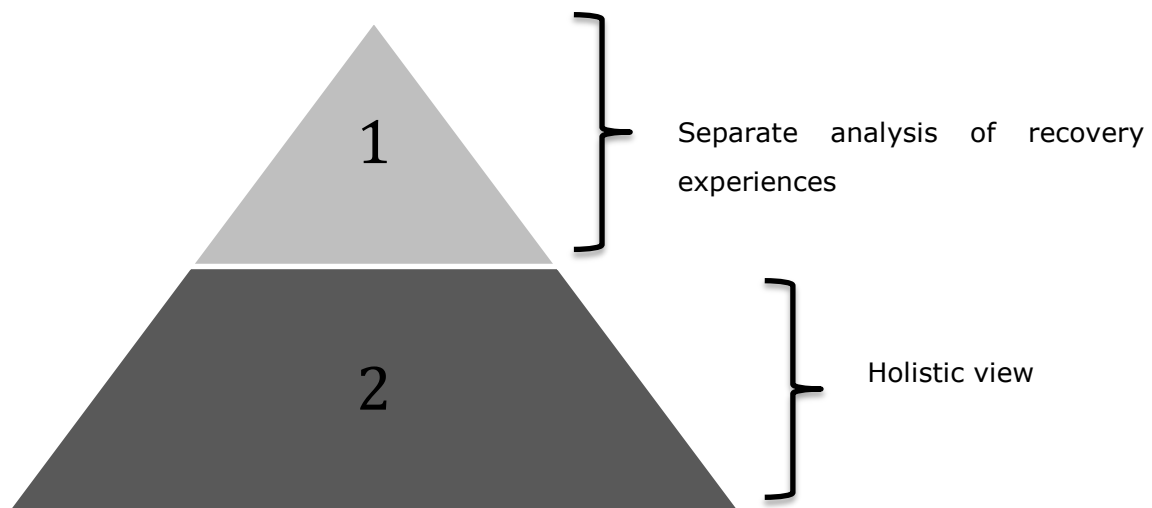


Figure 6-1 Approach to Analysis

6.1 Separate Analysis of Recovery Experiences

The four recovery experiences and the relation are separately paired with existing literature and observations explained as well as deductions related to established theory.

6.1.1 Detachment from Work

Challenges in detaching from work, approaches towards it and the role of detachment in recovery have been inspected and depicted in the findings section and are related to existing theory here.

6.1.1.1 *Challenges in Detaching from Work*

Interviewees regard their jobs with high esteem and identify themselves with their work. This regard is seen as enhancing the obstacles to detachment from work. Such regard for their profession is common in the field of knowledge work and especially for talent factories (Alvesson, 2004). High job involvement (i.e. the centrality of ones occupation in life) is argued to be correlated with low levels of psychological detachment from work (Kühnel et al., 2009; Sonnentag & Krueger, 2006).

Numerous factors have been stated that blur the boundaries between work and non-work activities. This perception is very much in line with existing literature regarding the balance between work and leisure activities (Sonnentag & Fritz, 2007). Globalization of business activities and progressing use of IT technologies are seen as drivers behind an expansion of work into traditional non-work fields and, thus, beyond the office. Such is in line with literature, too (Fritz et al., 2011).

A competitive work environment and the resulting pressure, and high-perceived importance of their work further lead to a blurring of work boundaries. Available literature, too, has predicted this, in arguing that high work load and time pressure are the strongest predictors of a low detachment from work (Kinnunen, Feldt, Siltaloppi & Sonnentag, 2011). This is in line with predictions that the elite identity in talent factories triggers anxiety (Gill, 2013).

6.1.1.2 *The Approach to Detachment*

Literature is said to be at an early stage when it comes to individual strategies for detachment from work while work stressors exist (Sonnentag, 2012). Nevertheless, some correlations between findings and existing literature could be found:

Social activities in a familiar environment have been stated has a context in which one is detached from work. Literature classifies social activities with low social demands (which is true for familiar environment) as methods for relaxation. (Sonnentag & Fritz, 2007) The positive role of breaks during work was already established (Fritz et al., 2011).

It is found that high non-work engagement can contribute to recovery if it draws on different resources than work (Meijman & Mulder, 2011). Furthermore, active leisure activities are seen as a good for recovery (Sonnentag, 2001). It was

suggested to study hobbies and the likes in the context of detachment (Sonnentag, 2012).

6.1.1.3 *The Role of Detachment*

The data showed a homogeneous output for this method. Detachment was seen as an important tool for recovery and necessary to sustain a healthy mind. This is mirrored in the literature; Sonnentag (2007) points out that detachment is a crucial aspect of every recovery process. Etzion et. al (1998) showed that detachment moderates the relation between stressors and burnout. However, a minimum threshold of detachment as a basic requirement to recovery with decreasing benefits of additional detachment beyond this threshold represents an extension of existing literature. Looking at the approaches to detachment it became clear that all of them involve carrying out another activity which required being to some extent detached from work.

6.1.2 Relaxation

Challenges in relaxation, approaches towards it and the role of relaxation in recovery have been inspected and depicted in the findings section and are related to existing theory here.

6.1.2.1 *Challenges in Relaxation*

Restlessness has been identified as a major challenge in detaching from work. This is related to available theory here.

The findings depicted a difficulty in being relaxed through a feeling of anxiety and restlessness that overcame participants when pursuing activity of low social, physical and mental demands. This was partly caused by a lack of detachment. Detachment is argued to increase well-being of which positive affective status such as relaxation is part of (Sonnentag 2012).

6.1.2.2 *Approach to Relaxation*

Literature concerning the approach towards attaining relaxation and utilizing it for recovery is available and some correlations, in particular for low-intensity activity as an approach, can be derived.

Low-intensity activities were pursued to achieve relaxation, which is in line with literature. This is due to the fact that it helps to reduce the increased activation, which is caused by work (Broschott, Pieper & Thayer, 2005). This is interesting

for the reason that literature clearly points towards activities of low physical and mental demand as a powerful tool for relaxation (Tinsley & Eldredge, 1995).

The strong preference to carry out relaxation activities with other people by our participants is in line with literature. Most individuals see activities as relaxing which put little social, physical or intellectual demand on them and constitute no challenge to them (Tinsley & Eldredge, 1995).

6.1.2.3 *The Role of Relaxation*

Participants did not perceive relaxation as an important mechanism for recovery or at least it was not their preferred way to recover. Literature asserts that relaxation is an important tool for recovery (Sonnentag 2007). Secondly, it elevates mood which can undo negative emotions (Stone et al., 1995). The fact that relaxation was perceived as causing, rather than undoing negative emotions (such as restlessness and anxiety) among the participants is therefore contrary to suggestions from literature.

6.1.3 Control

Challenges in gaining control over leisure time, approaches towards it and the role of control in recovery have been inspected and depicted in the finding section and are related to existing literature here.

6.1.3.1 *Challenges in Gaining Control over Leisure Time*

Major challenges in attaining control over leisure time have been found. These are here related to existing theory.

Work responsibilities were perceived to be interfering with leisure time, making control over it more difficult to attain. This is in line with literature, which argues that job stressors may also decrease the perceived control during non-work time (Sonnentag & Fritz 2007).

Leisure time could only fully be controlled if work was perceived to be under control, too. This aligns with literature, which suggests that strain from work can also increase fatigue (Zohar et al. 2003), making control during leisure time more difficult. This is because it might reduce the amount of internal resources available and thus perceived control.

6.1.3.2 *Approach to Control*

As with detachment, literature in this field is said to be limited (Sonnentag, 2012). Nevertheless, connections between findings and literature have been established.

Phrasing obligations as freely chosen was found to be a common approach to gaining control, at least perceived control by participants. Literature shows that people who believe that they generally are in control (internal locus of control) are less effected by negative consequences of stress (Rodenberry and Renk, 2010).

6.1.3.3 *The Role of Control*

Control over ones leisure time is also seen as an important factor in research (Rosenfield, 1989; Larson, 1989; Bandura, 1997). This is reflected in the empirical findings, which suggest that control over leisure time is perceived as a fundamental requirement to recovery. Lack of control was seen as an obstacle in pursuing leisure activities.

6.1.4 *Mastery*

Challenges in pursuing mastery, approaches towards it and the role of mastery in recovery have been inspected and depicted in the finding sections and are related to existing theory here.

6.1.4.1 *Challenges in Mastery*

Work interference has been found to be perceived as a major challenge in pursuing mastery. This is related to existing literature here. Findings showed work to perceivably, frequently interfere with the pursuit of mastery. This relates to what was said in terms of detachment and to the challenges to control over leisure time.

6.1.4.2 *Approach to Mastery*

The approaches to mastery are here compared with what was seen in literature.

Interviewees stated that mastery-related activities which are merited by others are more effective. This can be related to Hobfoll (1989) and his resource conservation theory. Social status and the improved self-esteem coming from it can be seen as resources that can be gained with mastery activities.

Pursuit of mastery was perceived to be most efficient if the resulting skills and knowledge were transferable to work or created synergies with work. Gaining

new skills and competences has explicitly mentioned as an aspect of mastery (Sonnentag and Fritz 2007, Bandura 1997). On the other hand being engaged at work is argued to also help with recovery. (Sonnentag 2003)

6.1.4.3 *The Role of Mastery*

Typical examples for mastery would include learning a new language, a new hobby or climbing a mountain. (Sonnentag & Fritz 2006) There is first evidence that mastery is indeed a powerful recovery mechanism, especially through increasing mood (Rook & Zijlstra, 2006; Sonnentag & Natter, 2004). Such theoretical implications are mirrored by empirical findings, which homogenously point towards mastery as a primary recovery experience among participants.

6.2 Holistic Analysis

In this section we will connect the findings to a bigger picture. The most important interactions and interdependences between the four recovery experiences (relaxation, mastery, detachment from work and control over leisure time) are depicted. This is all put into a comprehensive model, in which differences are then explained. The comprehensive model builds on Sonnentag and Fritz's model and adds important findings. The main contribution is this model to establish connection between the four different recovery experiences, which was not done by Sonnentag.

In the individual analysis of the four recovery experiences it could be seen that they are weighted and perceived differently. Taking a holistic view produces some interesting observations and results in the depiction of interactions and relative perceived roles of the different recovery experiences. These are shown in a comprehensive model, which builds on Sonnentag and Fritz' model, expanding it primarily through the inclusion of the connection between the four different recovery experiences, as illustrated in Figure X.

6.2.1 Comprehensive Model

We discovered that the four recovery experiences could be divided in two different sets of factors - "enablers" and "drivers". The enablers are a prerequisite for recovery. If present, they allow for a recovery process to commence. Subsequently, the drivers impact the recovery process and determine the quality and effectiveness of the recovery.

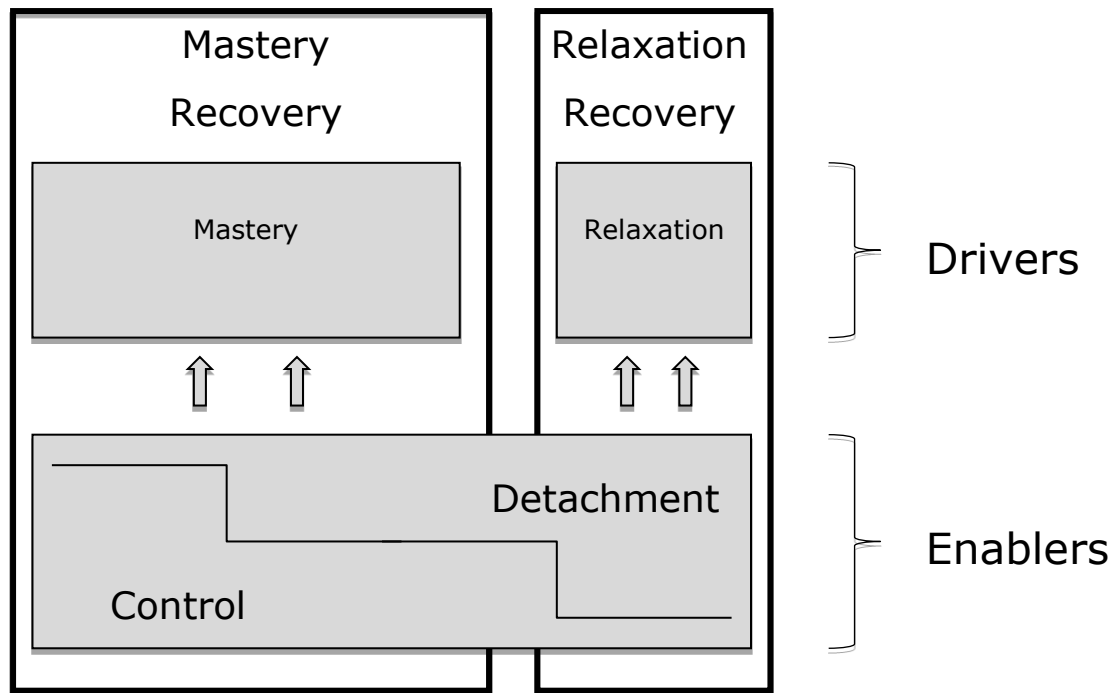


Figure 6-2 Comprehensive Model

6.2.1.1 *The Enablers*

The enablers are factors that are a prerequisite for any recovery to take place. A minimum threshold needs to be surpassed for each of the enablers in order for recovery to eventuate. Once activated in this sense, additional development of these recovery experiences produces diminished effect on recovery. Empirical data shows both detachment and control to be of similarly significant influence and essential to recovery.

6.2.1.1.1 Detachment as an Enabler

The essential role of psychological detachment from work has been shown both in the empirical findings of this research as well as in previous research (Sonnetag, 2012; Etzion et al., 1998). Sonnetag points out that detachment is a crucial aspect of every recovery process (Sonnetag, 2007) and Etzion et al. point out that it moderates the relation between stressors and burnout (Etzion et al. 1998). Additionally, the empirical data homogeneously depicts a central role of detachment. Interviewees generally came up with numerous strategic approaches and exerted significant effort to achieve at least a minimal degree of occasional detachment.

6.2.1.1.1.1 Detachment and Mastery

Empirical findings also depict that failure to achieve detachment interferes with mastery on several occasions. This has been exemplified for instance by the music case, in which the interviewee required detachment from work in order to immerse herself/himself fully in the pursuit of music mastery.

6.2.1.1.1.2 Detachment and Relaxation

Relaxation shows a dependence on detachment. While such a connection has not become apparent from reviewing the available theory, empirical data clearly shows that participants experienced activities of low physical, social and mental demand as restlessness – rather than as relaxing. Therefore, we find that relaxation can only occur once a certain degree of detachment from work has been established.

6.2.1.1.2 Control as an Enabler

Control has been shown by available theory to be central to recovery (Rosenfield, 1989; Larson, 1989; Bandura, 1997). Similarly, empirical data depicted control over free time as central to recovery. A repeat mention of 'quality of leisure time' was particularly apparent, which indicated that amount of leisure time was of secondary importance to the freedom experienced during leisure time.

6.2.1.1.2.1 Control and Mastery

Control over ones free time enables individual to engage in free time activities. If an individual has no control over ones free time then mastery can conceivably be pursued. Empirical findings show that a lack of control over leisure time may result in interferences, preventing an effective pursuit of mastery. No connection between control and mastery could be found in available theory.

6.2.1.1.2.2 Control and Relaxation

Empirical data showed that utilization of relaxation as a recovery experience was not possible for interviewees unless they were in control of their leisure time. If not in control, inactivity, or activity of low social, physical and mental demands were perceived as agitating, causing a restlessness and anxiety, counterproductive to recovery. No theory in connection to this interaction could be found.

6.2.1.2 *The Drivers*

Mastery and relaxation are only attainable if a degree of detachment and control is established. While control and detachment compliment each other, the drivers – relaxation and mastery – are mutually exclusive in any given moment. By

definition relaxation is an activity of low demands and mastery an activity of high demands. Thus, an activity cannot be classified as both a relaxation experience and a master experience.

We argue that the drivers for recovery are mastery and relaxation. They are called drivers because the more these two factors are experienced the more recovery is achieved. This is in line with current knowledge, which sees a positive correlation between these two factors and recovery (Sonnentag & Fritz 2007).

An interesting relation between mastery and relaxation was evident from our interviewees: they displayed a clear preference towards mastery as primary recovery experience over relaxation.

6.2.1.2.1 Mastery as a Driver

From our data it was apparent that mastery was commonly seen as the primary driver of recovery. It was also generally, looking at all recovery experiences, the most prominent one. This is in line with literature, which suggests mastery to be a powerful recovery mechanism (Rook & Zijlstra, 2006; Sonnentag & Natter, 2004).

6.2.1.2.2 Relaxation as a Driver

Relaxation was seen as a less prominent driver of recovery. This may be due to one of two factors of influence. First, empirical data showed a preference for mastery, the pursuit of which obstructs relaxation. It could be hypothesized that participants simply prefer mastery to relaxation.

We also saw that relaxation was often perceived as causing restlessness and counter-productive to recovery. It may be hypothesized that relaxation requires higher levels of detachment and control, as it is – by definition – an activity of low engagement, offering little occupation of the mind/body. This could make loss of control over leisure time/psychological detachment from work more likely. The data does not suffice to establish which causes the prevalence of mastery, be it preference or ease of attainment. It does, however, depict such a preference clearly.

7 DISCUSSION

In this section findings on the specific perceptions of recovery experiences are related to research on the contextual frame. This frame is represented by the characteristics typically displayed by employees of talent factories and their occupational environment. In light of the research question a comprehensive recovery model including contextual factors is then discussed.

7.1 The Enablers and Contextual Factors

The findings concerning control over leisure time and psychological detachment from work are correlated to the context and discussed comprehensively as enablers.

7.1.1 Identity building at Talent Factories

The finding that employees find detachment from work difficult in the context of talent factories can be substantiated by existing theory. Identity building through occupation and competitive pressure among employees result in an expansion of work into leisure periods, thus exacerbates the issue of detachment difficulties.

Talent factories carry an image, an identity. Alvesson (2004) states that an elite identity is demanded for knowledge workers. Employees feel that they are part of an institution. The fact that an identity building process had indeed taken place among our participants became clear when they repeatedly referred to the group of employees as 'us' and employees working in other occupations as 'them'.

[...] it definitely feels that I spend more time on things which other people would call work. At other companies people only work 9 – 5. They are not really caring about their job, that's how I see it. COMPANY A is perfect for me. People at COMPANY A are really learning. They really like what they do.

For these professionals in talent factories work becomes life, part of their identity. Integration of work into self-image therefore may contribute towards increasing hurdles to detachment.

7.1.2 Competitive Pressures at Talent Factories

Another finding suggests that competitive pressure at work increases work demands that lead to a constant 'on call' situation, which furthers difficulty in

detachment, but also causes significant complications in achieving control over leisure time. Such competitive pressure is inherent to talent factories, the 'up or out' career system, recruitment of 'the best', frequent evaluation and performance based rewards are all conducive to a competitive environment.

In theory the pressure resulting from the competitive environment are connected not only to a difficulty to attain these two recovery experiences, but also connected to creating more stressors (Berglas, 2006), which generally necessitate recovery. In this context, findings produced the concept of 'quality of leisure time'. It seems that employees at talent factories respond to such pressure by minimizing leisure time, but requiring it to be of high quality when it occurs. In order to achieve such high quality, recovery-conductive leisure time, a certain degree of control and detachment becomes necessary. Therefore, we labeled them 'enablers'.

7.2 The Drivers and Contextual Factors

The findings concerning pursuit of mastery and relaxation are correlated to the context and discussed comprehensively as drivers.

7.2.1 Identity Building at Talent Factories

Sonnentag and Fritz do not consider negative effects of relaxation on recovery as a possibility. However, the research presented here explores this possibility and indeed shows its presence in the perception of participants. This may be specific to the field of talent factories, as idleness and inactivity could be seen as conflicting with their self-image of achievement and hard work.

Contradicting statements concerning relaxation of participants substantiate the assumption. It suggests that relaxation has more influence towards their recovery than they admit. It may be hypothesized that they want to be perceived as utilizing relaxation for recovery to a minimal extent, albeit they do so more extensively. The self-image of being elite and hard-working contradicts with activity of low demands and relaxation. Gill (2013) states a constant need to proof oneself for knowledge workers at PSFs, such as in talent factories.

Such identity could also be the cause of favoring mastery over relaxation – a finding of this research. Being achieving in leisure as well as work time is simply more coherent with their self-image.

7.2.2 Competitive Pressures at Talent Factories

Participants describe the efficiency of mastery as a recovery experiences dependent on the applicability of the gained abilities to their professional environment. This is particularly interesting, as Sonnentag & Fritz do not establish any connection between the subject in which mastery is achieved and the effectiveness of the recovery experience. The process of pursuing mastery is assumed to be the recovery-aiding tool. Our research suggests that the end-goal of mastery, too, is influential in the context of talent factories. Such an approach to mastery might well be an approach to dealing with the increased competitive pressure, caused by the 'up or out' career system, recruitment of 'the best', frequent evaluation and performance based rewards, as depicted above.

8 CONCLUSION

This section will answer our research question and present the theoretical and empirical contribution of our thesis.

8.1 Addressing the Research Question

This study identifies a clear literature gap when it comes to execution and perception of recovery experiences as suggested by Sonnentag and Fritz among professionals in talent factories. For this purpose an exploratory study was conducted, guided by the following research question:

How do knowledge workers in talent factories perceive and execute recovery experiences to balance the impact of exerted effort and how does the context influence their perceived recovery?

Generally our study confirms Sonnentag and Fritz's framework of four recovery experiences and asserts its applicability to the context of knowledge workers in talent factories. However, three observations beyond Sonnentag and Fritz's framework are made. First, we produce a framework that builds on Sonnentag and Fritz's framework yet distinguishes between "enablers" and "drivers" of recovery. Second, we observe that detachment is the key challenge to be overcome in activation of recovery. Third, mastery is the most chosen recovery experience for knowledge worker. These conclusions are summarized in the three following sections.

8.1.1 An Expansion to the Model of Recovery Experiences

We propose a categorization of the four recovery experiences into enablers and drivers of relaxation. These relate to each other and lead to effective recovery only when activated together. Enablers alone fail to produce recovery and drivers cannot be activated if enablers are not activated. Thus, both factors are needed to achieve recovery. See Figure 6 – 2, Comprehensive Model for an illustration of the concept.

Enablers have to pass an initial threshold in order for drivers to be executable. Only if an employee is detached and in control of his leisure time, is she/he able to pursue mastery or relaxation. If not detached and in control, then such driving recovery experience will be disturbed and positive factors such as elevated mood or sense of achievement will be prevented. If enablers are in place, then the extent to which recovery drivers are pursued is found to be determinant for the effectiveness of recovery.

8.1.2 Detachment is the Key Challenge

Psychological detachment from work is identified as the key challenge in achieving relaxation for knowledge workers in talent factories. These knowledge workers experience strong difficulties to get through the threshold of required detachment that is prerequisite for successful recovery.

We propose that this perceived importance of detachment in the difficulty to attain it have two origins in the inner workings of talent factories themselves and the personality of knowledge workers working for them.

First, knowledge workers in talent factories are likely to have personality traits of insecure overachievers (Meister, 2007). This means that they are driven by the constant need to prove themselves which leads to a close attachment to work and consequential difficulties in psychologically detaching from work. Second, talent factories exhibit several characteristics in their HRM practices that make detachment from work difficult. They put employees under high pressure and long hours and they cultivate an elite image, which employees have to live up to. This drives knowledge workers in talent factories to be anxious about performing in line with high quality standards and notion of being part of an elite institution.

8.1.3 Mastery is the Driver of Choice

We argue that mastery and relaxation are mutually exclusive at one point in time. Mastery requires high physical or mental demands to further a skill and relaxation

low demands to foster good mood. The research findings show a strong preference of mastery over relaxation. We propose that this preference is partly caused by the characteristics of talent factories and the personality of knowledge workers employed in them.

First, talent factories cultivate the image and identity of being an elite institution. From our findings it seems as this elite identity spills over to leisure time. Due to the fact that employees are expected to perform and behave as part of an elite at work they are pressured to act accordingly in their leisure time as well. From that perspective it makes sense that spending one's vacation lying on the beach relaxing does not fit into the identity of talent factories – running an ironman does.

Secondly, the personality traits of an insecure overachievers are at odds with the concept of relaxation. They have the need to constantly proof themselves. Relaxation is, by definition, an activity of low demands – in every aspect. Mastery on the other hand is, by definition, challenging and gives the opportunity to grow, to develop and to proof oneself.

8.2 Theoretical Contributions

Our thesis provides theoretical contributions to two streams of literature: recovery from work stress and talent factories. We expand recovery literature by extending and refining Sonnentag and Fritz's framework of recovery experiences. We identified that their framework neglects interdependencies between the four recovery experiences and propose a framework that poses a solution to this (See 8.1.1.). It draws a more comprehensive picture on how recovery can and is achieved.

We contribute to the literature on talent factories in showing how their characteristics on organizational and individual level are influencing how recovery experience is achieved and portrayed. This gives a better understanding of talent factories as it extends the available knowledge on the behavior and perceptions of employees beyond the work sphere into the sphere of non-work and recovery.

8.3 Managerial Implications

Recovery of employees is a critical aspect of human resource management. This is especially the case for talent factories whose main resource are their employees. Firstly, recovery is critical for keeping employees motivated and productive. It is well established that a bad recovery leads to low job satisfaction,

lowered productivity and even burnout and depression. Secondly, a balance between effort and recovery becomes more and more important to attract the best employees.

The main managerial implication from our thesis is that firms that aspire to support their employees in achieving recovery should consider supporting them in psychological detachment.

8.4 Limitations

We are aware of several limitations to this research. These are listed here.

8.4.1 Hypothetical Nature

Our advancement of Sonnentag and Fritz's framework is extensive and of hypothetical nature. More extensive qualitative and quantitative research would be needed to critically test our hypotheses. We would like to stretch in this context, that it is not our intention to prove causal correlations, but rather to explore and understand potential influences.

8.4.2 Generalizability of Findings

Theoretical generalizations drawn from qualitative data in small sample size lead to restricted robustness. There were clear patterns identified in our findings. Despite a methodological approach to mitigate this risk, a larger number of data would be necessary to increase their validity.

8.4.3 Data Bias

Our data was only based on qualitative interviews, with a non-representative gender distribution. We did not observe participants first-handedly during non-work time or gather information drawn from artifacts. A triangulation approach was, thus, not possible with the resources available for this research, as well as unwillingness to participate by individuals and organizations' limited data sources.

8.5 Further Research

Our study poses several opportunities for further research.

A validation of our analysis and especially the progression of Sonnentag and Fritz's model could be executed. It could also be examined what role antecedents of recovery experiences play in this context.

A more organizational view of recovery in talent factories could be applied. It could be examined how talent factories as entities stand towards recovery, such as in, for instance, recovery transmission through organizational rhetoric. The cautious response to our numerous unsuccessful requests of participation to individuals suggests that the point of view is indeed not one of priority towards recovery.

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10 APPENDICES

10.1 Appendix I: Interview guide

Story telling: stress and recovery

Can you please explain a situation in which you felt that you recovered especially well from work stress?

Can you please explain a situation in which you felt that you recovered especially badly from work stress?

Can you please explain a situation in which you felt especially stressed?

Can you please explain a situation in which you felt especially balanced and not stressed?

Story telling: four recovery experiences

Can you please explain a situation in which you felt especially psychologically detached from work?

Can you please explain a situation in which you felt particularly relaxed?

Can you please explain a situation in which you followed a particularly engaging activity in your free time? (mastery)

Can you please explain a situation in which you had particularly good control over your free time?

Follow up questions:

Story related

How did this situation relate to recovery?

Did this situation help you to recover?

Why do you think did you feel that way?

How do you think did this help in recovery?

How do you think does this connect to other aspects of recovery?

General questions

How do you feel about work stress?

How do you feel about recovery from work stress?

How do you recover from work stress?

How do you usually spend your free time?

How would you define free time?

10.2 Appendix II: List of interviews

Number	Company	Date
1	A	08.07.2013
2	A	10.07.2013
3	B	10.07.2013
4	A	11.07.2013
5	A	12.07.2013
6	A	16.10.2013
7	A	11.08.2014
8	A	13.08.2014
9	C	19.08.2014
10	D	19.08.2014
11	A	02.09.2014
12	A	05.09.2014
13	D	15.10.2014
14	C	16.10.2014
15	D	16.10.2014

