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# Employee participation in a self-managing organization

A qualitative study about how the framework of a self-managing organization influences employee motivation to participate in decision-making.

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# Foreword

Writing a master thesis about how the structure of a self-managing organization influences employees has been a complex and timely process. It started with an IT organization reaching out to the institute I am affiliated a year and a half before I started writing, voicing a desire for students to investigate how this organization could foster more participation in its employees. Due to a lingering interest in empowering leadership and innovative organization structures, I was immediately hooked.

Throughout this process, my supervisors Anne Iversen and Marit Christensen have been hugely knowledgeable resources and have provided many insightful comments. I especially appreciate the perspectives they have given in situations throughout the year where writing has presented itself as a challenge. I would also like to point out and state my appreciation for their eagerness over the data my research collected, and by extension the potential of this master assignment.

Furthermore, I would like to thank the participants taking their time to be interviewed which provided insightful data. Not to mention the organization and its leader for facilitating such a seamless process and making themselves available to answer any questions I had. I would also like to thank my friends and classmates for helping me realize the joy of maintaining a satisfying social life beside completing my master thesis. Finally, I would like to thank my parents for their encouragement and support throughout this process.

Joakim Helle Olsen

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**Abstract**

This qualitative study investigates how the framework in a self-managing organization influences employee motivation to participate in decision making. From conducting qualitative analysis on nine interviews with employees in a self-managed organization, it was ascertained that the framework of this organization through its aspects of equal ownership, leaders' role as a coach and internal participatory processes opens for employees to involve themselves. With respect to the research question exploring how this framework influences employees' motivation to participate in decision making, self-determination theory was used to build an understanding of what contextual situations may reinforce self-actualized behavior. This theory maintains that intrinsic motivation is dependent on individuals' fulfillment of three needs as autonomy, competence, and relatedness. Seeing the organization framework as the contextual situation, this study will ascertain how it may stimulate intrinsic motivation. It was found that levels of autonomy may be stimulated from an equal ownership-model, role of the leader and self-managing teams. Further, higher relatedness could be a consequence of the self-management experienced in the organization and the formalized cultural norms. Yet the fulfillment of the needs laid forth by self-determination may not guarantee that higher self-determined motivation levels will lead to employees participating in decision making. Challenges to further employees' participation in decision making was found to be organization growth, consultant outplacement, difference in individual interests and a potential lack of competence in decision-making. This study contributes with qualitative insights to the field of research within self-managing organizations still under development.

Keywords: Self-managing organizations, employee participation, decision-making, empowerment, participatory management, self-managing teams, organizational democracy

**Sammendrag**

Denne kvalitative studien ønsker å kartlegge hvordan rammeverket i en selv-ledende organisasjon påvirker ansattes motivasjon til å medvirke i beslutningsprosesser. Ved å utføre kvalitativ analyse på ni intervjuer av ansatte i en mellomstor selv-ledende organisasjon, var det avduket for at rammeverket i denne organisasjonen gjennom sine aspekter som delt-eierskap, lederens rolle og demokratiske beslutningsprosesser åpner for ansatte å bli involvert. Denne studien fokuserer på ansattes motivasjon til å medvirke i beslutningsprosesser og dermed ble selv-bestemmelses teorien anvendt for å bygge en forståelse om hvilke kontekstuelle situasjoner som vil understøtte selvaktualisert atferd. Denne teorien forklarer at intrinsisk motivasjon er avhengig av at individers tre behov er oppfylt: autonomi, kompetanse og tilhørighet. Med det organisatoriske rammeverket som den kontekstuelle situasjonen, avdekker denne studien hvordan rammeverket stimulerer intrinsisk motivasjon. Det var funnet at nivåer av autonomi kan være stimulert av en delt eierskapsmodell, lederens rolle og selv-ledende team. Videre, kan tilhørighet være en konsekvens av selv-ledelsen opplevd i organisasjonen og de formaliserte kulturelle normer. Likevel kan ikke oppfyllingen av disse tre behovene garantere for at høyere selv-bestemte motivasjonsnivåer fører direkte til medvirkning i beslutningstaking. Utfordringer avdekket i å forsterke ansattes deltakelse i beslutningstaking ble identifisert som organisasjonens vekst, konsulent utplassering, forskjell i individers interesser og en potensiell mangel på kompetanse i beslutningstaking. Denne studien bidrar med kvalitative funn til et forskningsfelt under utvikling om selv-ledede organisasjoner.

Nøkkelord: Selv-ledende organisasjon, medvirkning, beslutningstaking, myndiggjøring, medvirkende ledelse, selv-ledende team, organisasjonsdemokrati

# Contents

**Employee participation in a self-managing organization**

Several thousand years ago in a period devoted to Greek history, the ancient city of Athens demanded a spot of political and economic power in world history on behalf of its citizens being given a direct voice and active role in governance of this city. Even though this system had its flaws, the uniqueness attributed to the participative system of democracy facilitated realizing the potential of Athenian citizens, channeling this potential for the greater good of the city (Manville & Ober, 2003). It is said history repeats itself, and especially in maximizing potential of people, setting the stage for an ever-increasing trend of knowledge-based work in our current society to meet a dynamic and changing environment (Lee & Edmondson, 2017). Although ancient Greece faced different challenges compared to organizations today, the incidence of organizations operating in this knowledge economy may grow even further. In this situation production of material goods will start becoming less important, and primary sources of creating value is comprised from ideas and expertise by individuals (Blacker et al., 1993). Mary Barra, CEO of General Motors supports this view stating, "people are the key to the success of any company" and "if you can be yourself and be your best self, that's going to lead to people doing their best work, which will advance the company." (Tangen, 2022).

With people as the primary producers of value, it is assumed importance must be placed on facilitating their value creation. Ergo, a context that allows for individuals on all levels to participate by contributing with information and ideas in decision-making, may set organizations up to succeed in a knowledge economy. With a context like this, and employees as the experts in their field, there may be complications for top-down approaches, where answers are handed

down from further up a hierarchy. Furthermore, the rapid pace of change accompanying the prevalence of knowledge-based work could place further demand on organization context. This pace of change brings about a presence of disorder and ambiguity, with a dynamic state which brings complications to organizations with a managerial hierarchy (Ancona et al., 2002; Martin et al., 2013; Starkey et al., 2000). With the previous points in mind, it is assumed a solution which eases the reliance on a hierarchy of command can bring answers to the challenges posed by the growing trend of knowledge-based work and the rapid pace of change. Lee & Edmondson (2017) point to the shift towards post-bureaucratic organizations, which encompass methods in accommodating frequent change by decentralizing authority systematically throughout the organization to allow for employee influence.

In Norwegian assessments of the degree of employee participation by individual influence it is shown 62 percent of employees overall state they have authority to decide how they work (Dalen & Bye, 2020). An increase in the experience of influence has perhaps driven this result, yet this still leaves room for more opportunities to participate in decisions throughout the organization. In the continuing development of participation in the workplace, four challenges to address were put forth, one of which being: (2) including more employees in present processes (Svalund et al., 2020). Yet it might not be as simple as only making sure the right framework exists for employee participation. Literature points out the two initiators for increasing employee particiaption in decision-making. Nielsen et al. (2012) proposed viewing this from two sides as employees initiating participation themselves or organizations facilitating for participation by proactively involving employees. In this paper, a qualitative study has been carried out with a purpose in increasing understanding of the mechanisms facilitating employees'

motivation to participate in decision-making processes in an organization marked by principles pertaining to self-management. The research question was therefore formulated as such:

*"How does the framework of a self-managing organization influence employee motivation to participate in decision making?"*

The measures taking precedence for exploring this research question will first integrate relevant theoretical and empirical framework, starting with an overview of how the organization studied is structured. Following this, theory alluding to what employee participation entails, how it is actualized and perceptions of facilitators or hindrances for participating will be presented. It will also be relevant to thereafter understand what the framework consists of in other self-managing organizations which may provide insight to how they influence employees' motivation to participate. Literature around different methods of decentralizing authority will be reviewed such as organizational democracy, humanistic management, and autonomous teams. Due to the research questions interest in how the individual is affected by this framework, there will be a brief exploration around the theory of self-determination (Ryan & Deci, 2017). After a thorough review of literature this studies method is presented, followed by results obtained through rigorous interviews with employees representing a small-medium sized IT consultancy from several levels ranging from employees to employee/safety representatives, middle-managers, to senior management. The latter half of this assessment will explore the research question by discussing relevant theory presented earlier towards results obtained, uncovering possibilities and challenges in the framework of a self-managing organization in influencing employees' motivation to participate. After attempts to answer the research question, there will be an exploration of the studies generalizability and contribution to the research area. To conclude the discussion, there will be a paragraph detailing implications and areas for further research.

**Theoretical and empirical framework**

The research question for this thesis is grounded in studying the perceptions of participation of employees in a small-to-medium sized enterprise. Firstly, the framework of the organization as described by employees will be presented. Before assessing other factors emphasized in the problem description, deconstructing *participation* will provide a framework around what these terms entail in the context of organizational psychology. Due to the unique nature of the organization as resembling a *self-managing organization,* there are certain theoretical and empirical considerations regarding the structure of which will be explored. In the sense that it will be prudent to consider how a similar structure could stimulate levels of motivation to participate. Although the structure of an organization may facilitate for participation, there is value in considering the mechanism of motivation to which may predict employees carrying out that behavior, with regards to *self-determination theory*.

**Empirical framework of the organization**

As mentioned, the existing structure of the organization is important to the degree of which employees are allowed to participate. From when the organization was founded in the early stages of the 2000s, it has nurtured an ownership model that does not give any one external or internal entity a majority share. Instead, only the employees that work for the company are allowed to own a stake represented as ownership, and moreover, on equal terms as all other employees. This stake as ownership is represented in yearly shareholder meetings, where employees use their right of vote to affect large strategical decisions for the company in the future. It is suspected that this degree of ownership of the company also translates into increased interest in involving oneself and participating in the organization. Employees may also use their voting right to affect the company board. For instance, most of the board – individuals working

for the organization – is chosen by the owners (employees) to represent their interests as employee representatives. Otherwise, a smaller portion of the board is externally sourced. The idea behind this principle is to lower the threshold for employees to raise their thoughts, considerations, or concerns.

Another important aspect that is considered to affect participation in the organization is the compensatory system. With a competitive baseline salary in place, this system further monetarily rewards employees by adhering to the organizations cultural values (mentioned as "life-rules" in the organization) among other aspects such as independence, problem solving, leadership/responsibility, communication as a representative of the organization, and formal qualification. The values are as such: *help each other, be curious, take initiative, show passion,* and *create value*. Employees are measured on their contribution to the cultural values including other aspects mentioned above and rewarded thereafter. It is assumed employee participation could be stimulated due to the incentive gained from helping each other, showing independence, taking initiative/responsibility, and creating value. With the three principles of the ownership-, salary model and life-rules making up the overarching framework of the organization, there is an indication of reduced hierarchy. Though it may not be obvious that leaders are present, they are still an important part of this organization. On first indication, leaders have a varied and broad set of roles ranging from taking most of the decisions in the organization, working to empower the employees and facilitating democratic processes happening either from the bottom-up or at management incentive. While leaders encourage employees to bring their ideas to the table and take initiative themselves, most processes are initiated by senior-managers.

The processes initiated by leaders are generally decided based on meetings between management or based on feedback from employees. For instance, a recent process around

increasing the firm's levels of sustainability was carried out based on external pressure from customers and government guidelines, as well as internal pressure from employees concerned about sustainability. These processes are laid out with employees' ability to participate and influence in mind. This is done by setting up a small collaborative task force consisting of voluntary leaders and employees in the company. The selection is carried out prioritizing new members every time a process is run. With a topic as the basis for the framework for the process, this task force then goes out in the organization (sometimes with aid from an external consultancy), collecting data about the current situation and how the employees want to proceed forwards. In the following step, the task force creates the framework for monthly department meeting workshops, where all employees are invited to provide feedback, based on a varied set of methods. Their input is then handed back to the task force or management, taking it into account in decision making on a higher level. These participatory and collaborative processes are run from time to time, while on a regular day-to-day basis employees organize in self-managed teams. The nature of how these teams work is very different, due much in part to leaders encouraging employees to organize this themselves and the way the organization operates. The organization operates by renting out their employees to external customers as consultants, meaning that employees could be outplaced at customers either by themselves or together with the rest of their team. This outplacement could last anywhere between months and years, depending upon the project taken. As for which project and customer the organization will provide their services to, this is usually decided in conjunction with the employer and employees wishes. This process is categorized as go-no-go criteria, where the sales department and team leader (responsible for employees) decide together based on a varied set of criteria if the project is a good fit for the organization and consultant, including whether the consultant is a good fit for

the customer. These processes allow for a limited degree of participation, with the team leader taking their employees' values and wishes into account. Thus, an empirical framework for how the organization operates has been established as well as which aspects seek to involve employees. The next step will be to deconstruct the term employee participation and investigate what it entails and how it is actualized in the workplace.

**Employee participation in the workplace**

There is much overlap between terms denoting employee participation, as one can participate in several different ways such as by influencing a process or strictly being involved. However, according to a large public assessment of influence in Norwegian working life, the debate around terms is summed up as follows. Employee participation between different parts of working life is covered by several terms, such as co-determination, involvement, influence, co-influence, self-determination, information, discussion, negotiation, consultation, and organizational democracy (Norges offentlige utredninger, 2010). It has however been pointed out that the definition could be split depending on which party initiates inclusion of employees in processes. For instance, Nielsen et al. (2012) proposed referring to "Participation" when employees take initiative and show interest to influence important decisions regarding their current and future work situation. On the other hand, employers taking initiative to include employees in processes is represented by "Involvement". Employers will set employee inclusion into motion with interest in building employee commitment, motivation and productivity pertaining to their work situation (Nielsen et al., 2012). As reflected in the previous section, the empirical framework of the organization suggests there exists measures allowing involvement. In working life, being involved is a premise for all opportunities to influence processes (Levin et al., 2014), in this sense involvement should be a precursor to participation. With the pertinent

research question investigating how organizational measures influence employees' motivation to participate, there is interest in understanding the mechanisms of how employees are motivated to seek out participating. When studying employees' opportunities to participate, terms like autonomy, influence, and authority over one's own work situation are central to experience participation (Engelstad et al., 2003; Leiulfsrud & Dahl, 2005). It is suggested these aspects of one's experience must be in place to realize participation. To bring out these aspects of an individual's work experience, the organization's structure and the way in which businesses set up framework for decision making is said to be of importance for formalized and real participation (Norges offentlige utredninger, 2021). Likewise, it is not a question of whether involvement or influence is possible, but to what degree it is (Levin et al., 2014). This passage establishes an understanding around how participation may exist in the workplace, but thus far it is not understood how it may affect the organization and its constituents.

With underpinnings of the increase in knowledge-based work alluding to the importance of participation in the workplace, it is understood what motivated the adoption of participatory processes. Amundsen and Kongsvik (2016) suggest that the concepts of involvement and influence is a central and often necessary condition for success in an internal process, especially a transformative one. For instance, Amundsen and Kongsvik (2016) consider the point a senior-manager makes, involving employees in a process creates powerful potential for implementation. Aside from the implied benefits of involving employees in knowledge-based organizations, increasing involvement of decisions identifies resistance early in the process when less time and resources have been invested. By actively involving employees in the transformation decisions, the employees will become owners of them, alluding to a sense of responsibility imposed by external means. On the other hand, an internal process entirely carried out by the management

group will demand time-consuming information and training of the affected parts, with the employees as passive recipients for the outcome of a process. At the same time, there are certain un-ideal consequences such as revisiting aspects of a process to discuss a case which has already been decided, there could also be a lack of effectiveness as a cost of involving too much (Amundsen & Kongsvik, 2016). This hints towards extension of processes which may take up resources in terms of time used. There is therefore a point to make in considering the consequences of too much employee participation. The discrepancy of benefits and drawbacks portrays the dissonance between researchers regarding the power of employee participation in processes. Several scholars point to studies showing employees choosing not to involve themselves, even when given the opportunity to (Neumann, 1989). There is therefore value in considering experienced facilitators or hindrances for participation of the individuals within the organization, originating from either the organization or the individual themselves. Involving employees in decision-making can help increase their motivation, but it may also be a challenge for others (Scott-Ladd & Marshall, 2004). On individual terms, Dachler and Wilpert (1978) point out one's individual ability allowing one to participate effectively. Similarly, Pasmore and Fagans (1992) point out that many employees may not feel prepared enough to participate in organization development activities due to lack of knowledge, experience, or training, alluding to a need for competence before choosing to participate. With focus on variables of personality affecting participation Vroom (1960) pointed out employees with a higher need for independence and lower need for authoritarianism had the greatest benefit from opportunities to participate.

Pasmore and Fagans (1992) create an overview of hindering aspects of participation on the organizations side to consider as structural, relational, or social. Here it may be beneficial to revisit the idea of considering the degree of employee participation in the organization. Keeping

in mind the structure of the organization studied, it is insinuated employees experience a high formal degree of involvement and influence already. Furthermore, Pasmore and Fagans (1992) differentiate between five levels of participating in an organization: (1) passive participation ("conforming"), (2) participate in improvement of existing systems ("contributing"), (3) attempts to change something in an existing system ("challenging"), (4) seeking collaboration with others who wish to change a system ("collaborating"), and (5) creating a new system ("creating). The higher end of this scale requires more effort by the participators and more sharing of power. Furthermore, Pasmore & Fagans (1992) also emphasize the importance of having an organization context which allows for the ideal degree of support and endorsement for involvement. Therefore, literature which pertains to and reflects best the structure of the organization studied, will be explored in the following section. Special attention will be paid to how the structure facilitates for employee participation.

**Employee participation in a self-managed organization**

*Reducing hierarchy*

The organization studied works based on a unique interaction between cultural values, the salary- and ownership model. The first of which regards guidelines for the company culture as: "lift each other, be curious, take initiative, and create value". The second of which works by the establishment of a competitive base salary, which can be further stimulated by employees' adherence to the values. The ownership model works based on all employees owning an equal stake in the company, regardless of position and tenure. This also means they receive an equal amount of the proceeds and retain voting rights like all other employees. Due to the flat structure this ownership model alludes to, the flat structure inherent in post-bureaucratic organization (Lee & Edmondson, 2017) provides a relevant parallel. These types of organizations take different

forms of operating flexibly to accommodate change. For instance, by decentralizing, use of technology and its culture (Volberda, 1996). Though as a general overview, they are usually exemplified by a form of self-management that hands power of decisions on dynamic teams and roles rather than individuals (Bernstein et al., 2016). In practice, it rids itself of the managerial hierarchy. Part of the reason for getting rid of the managerial hierarchy lies in the incapability to meet rapid change. A managerial hierarchy tends to send directives from the top to the bottom of a rigid hierarchy, which takes time, proving it fits best for executing tasks without the need for rapid change (Hamel, 2007).

Martin et al. (2013) also references this frequent high pace of change, due to faster information flows and constant technological developments, as posing a threat to a rigid hierarchy. The organization studied was founded with tenets for adapting to rapid external change by positioning itself with a culture toward pursuing ways to improve and change the way employees work. The threatening trends for hierarchy like frequent change and growth in knowledge-based organizations work as motivators for organizing in a less-hierarchical way (Martin et al., 2013; Blacker et al., 1993). To drive these decentralized organizations among challenges imposed by frequent change, typical core values such as a committed workforce, learning potential, risk taking and superior service are integrated (Kumar & Mukherjee, 2018). *Self-managed teams* are used to apply these core values into practice, outsourcing managerial authority to the individuals in the team who are the experts in work done for customers (Barker, 1993; Hackman, 1986). In these organizations, knowledge creation and learning are at the forefront, much attributed to fostering autonomy for front line workers (Adler, 1993; Nonaka, 1991). Managers still exist among these teams and approaches they may take on to represent less-hierarchical organizing are *participatory management* and *employee empowerment* (Lee &

Edmondson, 2017). Participatory management is exemplified by the implementation of structures which increase employee opportunity to participate, by creating committees where they influence aspects of their work such as how they want to work to what strategic direction the company should take (Collins, 1995; Cotton et al., 1988). *Employee empowerment* on the other hand involves managers utilizing empowerment for their employees to make decisions and take advantage of the skills they possess, seeking to reduce the experience of hierarchy by applying novel cultural and relational norms (Conger & Kanungo, 1988). The last identifying feature of self-managing organizations is by principles of *Organizational democracy.* This feature seeks to reduce the existence of a formal hierarchy by instilling principles of political democracy into an organization. The benefits of which to create a committed workforce taking responsibility for their own performance and the success of the organization (Kerr, 2004). The approaches of organizational democracy, participatory management, employee empowerment and self-managed teams, make up methods in which to reduce centralized hierarchical organizing. The following sections will explore the framework of these approaches and how they affect employees to establish an understanding which may aid in answering the research question. These sections are organized into what macro-to-micro level of the framework they outsource managerial decision authority. First, organizational democracy representing the organization structure. Thereafter the sections on framework will move from holacracy as organization design, to humanistic management principles such as participatory management and empowerment.

### *Organizational democracy*

At a macro level of reducing hierarchy, organizational democracy seeks to bring principles of political democracy into the sphere of business organizations. The essence of

political democracy seeks to collect its authority from the people within society. Effectively, for the ideal of democracy to be realized in the workplace, certain measures are usually in place. For instance, organizational democracy alludes to that people within the organization participate in processes (Levin et al., 2014). This happens through principles of organizational democracy, accompanied by increasing employee representation in different management committees and the board of directors, to increase the decision authority for employees. A true system allowing for participation as such is argued to entail two central aspects, growing "organically" from its constituents needs, beliefs and actions, as well as free flowing exchange of information across all aspects of the organization (Kerr, 2004; Manville & Ober, 2003). Much like these principles of organizational democracy, the organization studied employs employee representatives at several levels of the organization, from the board to management groups, and internal change processes. Similarly, the organization also aims to conduct yearly general assemblies and monthly all-meetings where employees are informed about various decisions and processes within the company. Bass and Shackleton (1979) state that these principles give employees a chance in influencing decisions from worker welfare to business direction and strategy. Furthermore, Manville and Ober (2003) suggest that a true democratic system of management will be aligned with the employee's need for self-determination, in realizing aspects of their intrinsic motivation. Empirical findings also support that democratic participation under an organizational democracy affects employees' motivation at work (Mellizo et al., 2017; Strauss, 1982). It is thereby of interest to understand what individual mechanisms may underlie this impact on motivation.

Methods of organizing democratically seek to increase employees' sense of autonomy and empowerment, as well as giving them a voice in how the organization functions (Forcadell, 2005). It is stated of importance that these systems are not carried out by mere chance or on the

whim of management, but rather "secured and guaranteed to employees in the form of a right to participation" (Brenkert, 1992). For an organization to identify as democratic, it is therefore important the systems are formalized. The right to participate, at least by principle of being considered a company shareholder, is formalized in the present organization by ownership rights to all employees. According to Athar (2020), utilizing employee stock option plans is a way to propagate psychological ownership, and aims to align employees' interests with the organizations (McHugh et al., 2005). This sense of ownership may be actualized by employees identifying with the organization and vice versa. Beneficial outcomes of utilizing an employee stock option lies in a potential to motivate employees, and particularly for harder work (Torp, 2011; Blasi et al., 2008). It is not clarified whether partial ownership of an organization may facilitate employee motivation to participate in decision-making, but for companies in India giving stock to employees, it catalyzed employee participation in organization management (Kochan et al., 2005). However, there has been research also showing that not all employees are interested in stock options, for instance in South Korea showing employees with stock options taking little part in decision making (Cin & Smith, 2002), though a low percentage of ownership in their respective company could affect participation. A lower ownership percentage could in this case represent lower decision authority due to dilution.

There is however disagreement between scholars as to how much decentralization of decision authority is necessary for the organization to qualify as democratic. Another essential feature of organizational democracy found from literature review is in the presence of a democratic culture, exemplified by an atmosphere of full and free communication with no consideration towards rank or power (Slater & Bennis, 1964). An organizational democracy can also include employee ownership of the organization, which is viewed to reinforce the allocation

of decision rights and democratic culture (Battilana et al., 2016; Sauser, 2009). The principles of democratic organizing are not without their drawbacks particularly in the case of the organization Mondragon, where Lee and Edmondson (2017) argue large scale process in gathering employee input to make company-wide decisions as hardly optimized for flexibility. In their closer analysis of democracy in the workplace, Kerr (2004) suggests there are limits to how much tenets of democracy are carried out in the workplace, suggesting democracy as an inherently messy and time-consuming decision-making process. Though basing an entire organization around tenets of democracy may be unrealistic, adopting certain characteristics may be worthwhile, depending on the characteristics of its workplace and resistance from further up the hierarchy to re-allocate decision power (Kerr, 2004). In another study, if taking part in decision making leads to more task ambiguity and responsibility for the outcome employees don't show eagerness to do so (Randolph & Sashkin, 2002). Overall, adopting democratic principles may result in a multitude and variety of opportunities to participate, albeit with risks involved due to time consumption and resistance to re-allocating decision power within. The method of organizing "holacratically" seeks to reduction of hierarchy one step further, by allocating formalizing authority to roles rather than people.

*Holacracy and self-managed teams*

From real-world examples, other methods to reduce hierarchical organizing has taken its form in experiments like the holacracy model adopted by Zappos, integrating a set of principles that formally removed people managers and gave the employees a high degree of autonomy over how they carried out their responsibilities. These kinds of systems are characterized by minimum hierarchy, a strong degree of personal freedom and self-leading employees (Schell & Bischof, 2022). Rather than managers influencing how employees work, they are directed by decidedly

formal, but flexible role definitions, structured processes, and decision-making processes (Bernstein et al., 2016). The result of more concrete roles did not lead to an increased workload but rather made it clearer and nuanced what each employee's role was. These roles are agreed upon in 'governance meetings', where anyone in the group provides input into how the group is organized by shifting responsibilities or proposing other ways to work. All input is thereafter discussed and consented to by the group, and it is assumed each employee has the know-how to absorb and process information in carrying out their own role (Schell & Bischof, 2022). The organization studied within this paper utilizes similar ways of organizing as the example of Zappos above, and another in the form of Valve (a company producing computer games). The latter example has gathered attention by using an organizational design which gives employees full independence and autonomy in choosing the projects (games) on which they want to work (Lee & Edmondson, 2017). Given the difference in how these two examples operate, it could be presumed differences exist in how a holacratic structure is manifested. There is a point in acknowledging the overall similarity between the two, which essentially entails eliminating the hierarchical reporting relationship between manager and employee. This alludes to the existence of a flat structure and a highly team-based work. In these cases, community as an organizing principle, could become important to these characteristics. A team will need coordination if it is to produce anything of value. Community includes mechanisms like trust and strong social bonds which lead to effective coordination (Adler, 2001). However, holacratic organizations are not without their challenges, and considering the restrictions imposed to work from home by the recent Covid-19 pandemic, with a lack of social connections it may negatively impact workers affiliative behaviors (Kniffin et al., 2021). Furhermore, Schell & Bischof (2022) maintain that holacratic organizational designs imply that employees assume a lot more responsibility, taking

into consideration the self-management principle and the degree of freedom behind these teams

it can be presumed employees choose the work that suits them best. Furthermore, with reward

systems built on top of the roles they choose, they can customize their idealized work situation

(Kumar & Mukherjee, 2018) and could be prone to over-exertion. Also, seeing as these types of

organizations are quite radical and imply higher responsibility compared to traditional

hierarchical organizations, there are calls for additional needs to support its members.

Particularly in terms of a need for human resource departments and coaches to support its

employees in learning how to use this system and adapt to it (Heyden et al., 2017; Kammerlander

et al., 2018). Another challenge is the relative lack of knowledge surrounding empirics of these

kinds of organizations, as it was only invented in 2007 and been promoted since 2015 (Bernstein

et al., 2016; Ravarini & Martinez, 2019; Robertson, 2015). Further, Robertson (2015) suggests

this framework demands traditional management to adapt leadership styles, which begs the

question of what management style exists in a reduced hierarchy.

### *Humanistic management*

The overarching theme of this category posits that traditional hierarchical management is

rooted in assumptions about human nature being inherently lazy, requiring others to oversee

people. New assumptions for reductions of hierarchy are proposed in which humans are

intrinsically motivated, requiring managers to empower employees so that they may manage

themselves (McGregor, 2006). Constructs such as participatory management, empowerment and

self-managed teams have emerged as descriptions of leadership in these reduced hierarchical

arrangements (Lee & Edmondson, 2017). The former of which advocates for increasing the

degree of employee participation in a range of types and levels of decision making, as a

relational construct. Empowerment distinguishes itself from participatory management as a

psychological construct. It is measured by an individual's subjective sense of self-efficacy, self-determination, and autonomy (Conger & Kanungo, 1988; Thomas & Velthouse, 1990). Lee & Edmondson (2017) concludes that allowing employees to participate does not constitute a necessary or adequate condition for an employee's experience of empowerment. Yet it is still a part of forming the climate for empowerment, in other words the structure, policies and practices supporting empowerment: autonomy through boundaries, with other practices like information sharing and team accountability (Seibert, Silver & Randolph, 2004). The first of which entails practices setting a clear vision and clarity regarding goals, which encourage for autonomous action. Secondly, information sharing is reached through providing information, which may be sensitive, on different administrative details about the organization. Thirdly, team accountability is enforced through giving teams the perception they are the locus of decision-making authority in organizations (Seibert, Silver & Randolph, 2004).

It is possible a climate for empowerment is a factor in self-managing teams because these teams build upon the two previous constructs of empowerment and participatory management as a popular approach to both empowering and increasing employee participation. Furthermore, leadership in these situations may be contextual because roles indicate authority while individuals do not.

The overall similarity between participatory management, empowerment and self-managed teams perceived by employees entails emphasizing the leader-subordinate relationship as satisfying, motivating, and productive. The benefits that come with increasing empowerment and facilitating participation for employees is said to improve their individual experience at work. For instance, employees are more engaged and empowered in self-managing teams compared to when operating in a traditional management structure (Ackermann, Schell & Kopp,

2021). Specifically, through increasing their sense of control, motivation, and organizational commitment (Lee & Edmondson, 2017). It is also suggested that managers showing confidence in employees' opinions could interact positively with intrinsic motivation, as it allows them more autonomy (Falk & Kosfeld, 2006; Charness et al., 2012). As such, this individual may experience being more involvement and able to influence processes in the organization (Engelstad et al., 2003; Leiulfsrud & Dahl, 2005). However, several studies have also shown that the efficacy of empowerment and facilitating participation generally depends on several other factors, such as the organizational climate, resources, and other factors (Cotton et al., 1988; Hackman, 1986). Even though empowerment, participatory management and self-management remain different from each other in minute ways, all three are part of laying a framework for the individual to act with greater autonomy in the workplace.

Participatory management is different from the other constructs by a leadership focus on increasing employees' chance to influence decisions (Bernardes et al., 2014). Lee & Edmondson (2017) distinguish between different methods to facilitate for participation either through a rule system or consensual agreement, whether it is direct or indirect (through either voting vs. employee representatives), and the types of decisions that allow employee influence. On the other hand, empowerment is affected by more than just having the means to participate in decisions. Some relevant factors for empowerment are supervisorial style, the nature of reward systems (for example: stock-based incentives), job design (in terms of role clarity, variety of tasks, etc.) and organizational factors such as transparency and culture (Conger & Kanungo, 1988; Hackman & Oldham, 1980; Spreitzer, 1996). While self-managed teams move the focus slightly higher than the individual, decentralizing decision authority to teams instead. The group decides how to carry out work – rather than an individual or manager – through mutual consent.

Interestingly, even though self-managed teams do not imply a hierarchical level, there is research showing the development of an informal hierarchy, usually based on experience and competence (Ackermann, Schell & Kopp, 2021).

Even though these constructs have different ways of working, they all seek to reduce managerial hierarchy through increasing employee influence and autonomy. Yet it is prudent to consider how these constructs may operate in practice, as it is shown managers may be reluctant to let go of decision authority, even if the outcome of giving employees more decision authority has the possibility to be beneficial for the firm (Fehr et al., 2013; Bartling et al., 2014). The CEO of Zappos alludes to the potential outcome for creating value in knowledge-based work in an organization implementing elements of self-management: "I'm personally excited about the potential creativity and energy of our employees, just waiting for the right environment and structure to be realized" (Greenfield, 2016). It is in the "right" environment and structure there may be insights to how to bring out the best in employees, and to understand how this framework may interact with individuals, it is prudent to consider mechanisms of stimulating intrinsic motivation.

**Employee motivation**

Argyris (1957) suggests most traditional organizations have been managed in a way which present complications for participation. In practice this entails people turning down opportunities to participate or a general lack of participative opportunities. Argyris (1964) noted the way traditional organizations were arranged was in strong opposition to the needs of adult human beings, which presented huge costs to motivation. Argyris (1957) therefore places great importance on bridging the gap between individual needs and organizational experiences, to bring out intrinsic motivation. Organizational experiences as contexts which satisfy basic needs

may stimulate intrinsically motivated behavior (Deci & Ryan, 2000). Therefore, self-determination theory (Deci & Ryan, 2000) will be used as a framework for understanding how social-contextual factors may stimulate individual needs.

### *Self-determination theory*

With their definition of three needs at a psychological level, Deci and Ryan (2000) identified them as needs for competence, relatedness, and autonomy. With several years dedicated to collecting evidence about self-determined behavior, it is shown high levels of fulfilled needs may lead to a range of outcomes such as well-being and performance by engaging in work activities willingly (Ryan & Deci, 2017; Deci & Ryan, 2014). There is no specific evidence higher levels of performance may be actualized in employees choosing to participate, but through the view of Argyris (1957), participation is the outcome of helping individuals become more proactive, independent, and equal. The individual needs posited by self-determination theory to a certain degree mirror Argyris (1957) view of participation by similarity between autonomy and independence, and relatedness with equality. Furthermore, Pasmore and Fagans (1992) reflect about the necessity for knowledge and competence on an individual level to facilitate employee participation. With these similarities in mind, it is assumed participation could be an outcome of fulfilled individual needs for self-determined behavior. When the needs for autonomy, relatedness and competence are fulfilled - creating autonomously motivated workers - it is assumed they will be more inclined to participate. In relation to the proposed research question this leaves room to speculate about how self-determined behavior may be a product of self-managing organizations. Overall, there are a multitude of factors related to the satisfaction of the three needs (Parfyonova et al., 2019) and research shows only a small number of studies exploring practical strategies or managerial behaviors to satisfy these needs in

organizations (Baard & Baard, 2009; Stone et al., 2009). Understanding of what the three needs entail and how to fulfill them will bring some perspective to how the framework of an organization may realize this.

Firstly, competence entails employees need to feel effective, successful, and good at carrying out their job (Van den Broeck et al., 2010). Individuals need for competence is fulfilled when they get opportunities to apply their skill set and training in task mastery (Forner, Jones, Berry & Eidenfalk, 2020). Secondly, autonomy represents an employee's need to experience the freedom to make choices and decisions in their role. Furthermore, autonomy is also associated with the opportunity for expression of ideas and input in decision-making for how their tasks are carried out (Forner et al., 2020). Deci and Ryan (1987) support this by their notion of autonomy as a person's need to be self-willed and initiate their own actions, as opposed to being managed by others. Thirdly, relatedness refers to a social dimension in which people have the need to experience belonging, feeling accepted by and cared for by their surroundings (Ryan & Deci, 2017). This need is considered satisfied in a case when employees have supportive relationships and friends at work, as well as a feeling of being part of the group (Forner et al., 2020).

Overall, findings within self-determination theory research shows the satisfaction of these needs may be associated with an assortment of positive worker outcomes, beyond being intrinsically motivated (Gillet et al., 2012; Vansteenkiste et al., 2007). Van den Broeck et al. (2016) supports this, in addition showing each of the three needs associated with engagement and affective commitment. If the work context can facilitate the fulfillment of these three needs, the result of which will be a high quality of motivation leading to a situation where employees personally support and participate in activities at work (Deci & Ryan, 2014; Van den Broeck et al., 2016).

Having explored different theory regarding employee participation, different levels of framework in a self-managing organization and a construct of intrinsic motivation as self-determination theory, this develops the theoretical framework. This framework will be used to understand the essence of empirical findings presented further on. Firstly, a brief description of the method used to collect these findings will be provided below.

## Method

This following section will describe the selected method and research design used to discern how different aspects to the framework of the organization affecting employees' motivation to participate. First, an explanation of the background for the specific choice of theme, research question and epistemological position will be provided. Thereafter, an explanation about choice of method, details about the study and the process around data collection. The last part of this section will describe the method of analysis used: Thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2022), and the work carried out in each of its six phases.

### Background for theme and research question

A year before informants were recruited, the department of psychology at NTNU (Norwegian University of Science and Technology) was approached by an IT-organization searching for master students who wished to explore how their ownership model influences change processes in the organization, and how to ensure employees engagement in said process. The request presented by the organization was taken on with great interest and the initial research question proposed was to explore the ways in which an organization can ensure employee participation in a change process, marked by using digital solutions.

In initial stages of the study, workshops for a participatory process within the organization were observed to gain insight into how the organization worked. However, it quickly became apparent that employees and interviewed informants spoke often about the organization structure and how it affected them. Over time therefore, the research question was focused and specified, through reviewing data collected and relevant theory. This assessment represents findings that are relevant for organizations striving to encourage employee participation, also providing experiential insight on theory described earlier about how a democratic ownership structure, empowering leaders, and autonomous work, can influence employees' motivation to participate. Furthermore, this assessment also fills a gap where there is little research on how the framework of a self-managing organization could influence its employees.

**Case description**

*Description of the organization*

A brief overview of the organization renders it as an IT consultancy founded in the early 2000s. It is located solely in Norway, with offices in the three biggest cities, lending its services to the rest of Scandinavia. The organization is medium sized, with just over 170 employees employed, where most of these are IT developers, technicians, and programmers. The structure of the organization studied is especially unique in the sense of being particularly flat, even for Scandinavian standards. Wherein the Scandinavian model, organizations maintain this flat structure through empowerment, autonomy, and professional development of the employees. Moreover, the present company has implemented an equal ownership model, allocating an equal share of ownership to each employee in the company, thus perhaps contributing to employees' expectations of how much is expected of them and how important they are to the company.

Another innovation regarding its structure, is the compensation model, where employees are paid

not based on provision but retain a base salary which may be higher based on other engagements

employees take on. These engagements are in large part judged based on their adherence to the

cultural norms or so-called "life rules" of the organization. More on these values will be explored

later, but the main point is their attempt to integrate even tighter the virtues of the Scandinavian

model into the workplace culture of the present organization.

**Method of study**

The present assignment uses a qualitative design, and exploratory approach, where data

was collected from 9 informants, all working at the medium-large sized IT organization

mentioned above. Due to a relative lack of research existing about self-managing organizations,

a qualitative research design was chosen. This design is particularly fitting in instances where

existing theory does not accurately describe phenomena studied (Larkin, 2015). Therefore, the

study was also initially conducted with an exploratory and unstructured approach. The

employees of this organization were all interviewed with a specific interest in their views and

experience on areas such as organizational structure, participation, organizational change, the use

of digital tools and autonomy. To collect this data, a semi-structured interview format was used,

which allows probing of interesting and important areas arising during the interview process

itself (Smith & Osborn, 2015). This in turn allows as much insight as possible into the

psychological and social world of the interviewee, which was fitting to the exploratory and

experiential approach taken in this study.

The method of qualitative design used was reflexive thematic analysis, to retrieve a

varied set of themes from the data. Reflexive thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2022), bases

itself on the accessible and robust approach for developing, analyzing, and interpreting patterns

within a qualitative dataset. Part of the framework for these patterns is the systematic process of coding data to develop themes – the analytic aim of the method. Essentially, thematic analysis is a method for analyzing data rather than a methodology. The study focuses on informants' lived experiences of the structure in the organization, which is in line with the fit of experiential research questions for thematic analysis (Clarke, Braun & Hayfield, 2015). The epistemological position of this study is thus grounded in a contextualized approach, assuming participants' language communicates their experiences and perspectives about operating within a self-managing organization. Because existing theory is lacking in how an organization structure like this influence employees, analysis was grounded in the data as much as possible, forming an inductive approach (Clarke et al., 2015). This was also important to attain insights into how the organization structure influences phenomena like motivation, to answer the proposed research question.

The reflexivity assumed in reflexive thematic analysis involves an active role of the researcher, reflecting critically over their own role and the research practice and process. Braun & Clarke (2022) simplifies reflexivity further as being the methodical process of critically interrogating what, how and why it is done, and how this could impact and influence the research. Effectively being aware of what the researcher's presence means for the analytical process.

**Background for data collection**

Within this section the process in which the data was collected is described, including information about the sample selected. As one of two students that showed interest in the request, the other being Ingrid Simonette Moen of the same master's degree; ongoing dialogue was set up with key people in the organization. During the initial stages of collecting data,

collaboration was carried out with this co-student, while leaving the completion of the master

assignment for itself. During the months before the summer of 2021, several meetings were

carried out with key people in the organization. These meetings consisted of presenting thoughts

about the potential phenomena to explore during the data collection process, ranging from: work

engagement, employee influence, leader role and organizational change with democratic

organizations as the contextual background. Following presentations for the key people of the

organization, an agreement was reached on what topics were interesting to explore and the

method of which to do so. The benefit of maintaining a working relationship with the key person

was in the sense of constructive cooperation with a representative of the organization to support

in sending out relevant information about the study and igniting interest for the employees to

enlist as informants for the ensuing data collection process.

**Data collection**

The details of this process encompass everything from the creation of the interview guide

used, to the actual process of carrying out the interview. The data collection process, as

mentioned earlier, was done in cooperation with a fellow student. The processes that were

cooperated on included forming the interview guide and interviewing informants. It was also

agreed to split the transcribing between the two of us, with each transcribing 4,5 interviews. The

process of analyzing data was thereafter done individually.

*Interview guide*

The interview guides were created during the fall of 2021 with the assistance of two

supervisors. As our informants were categorized into 3 different job positions (employees,

leaders, and employee representatives/safety representatives), it was decided to collect the most

relevant answers from each category, 3 different interview guides be created. There was also an extra slightly different guide being modified to suit the line of questioning for the key informant regarding a participatory process and information gathered from previous interviews. The goal of these guides was that each would have some basis in the relevant employee's experience at work. Additionally, due to different research focus between the two students, some additional questions related to alternative themes were added. The interview guide was split into two parts, with the first broadly covering areas such as work experience (tasks and work environment), organization structure, change processes, employee engagement and influence/participation. The second part went more in detail on a pertinent change process (sustainability change) the organization conducted during our investigation, again formulating the questions around the themes of digital tools, employee engagement and influence/participation.

The interviews were semi-structured, allowing both digressions and asking follow-up questions not already included in the interview guide. Essentially the interview guide functioned as a guideline allowing for the collection of informants thoughts and experiences pertaining to our themes, as well as allowing them to communicate what was important for themselves.

**Testing and reevaluation.** In the process of creating the interview guides, over multiple occasions underwent testing and were edited for ensuring relevance and flow in the line of questioning. The testing was done through practicing the interview with my fellow student, to ascertain if the questions were in a purposeful order, open and clear enough to be interpreted after an individual's own experiences. Conclusively, the guide was then sent to our supervisors for a review and confirmation before starting the interviews.

*Conducting interviews*

Overall, 9 interviews were done, with a length that varied from approx. 45-75 minutes. This excerpt describes the entire interview process.

Interviews were set up in a certain way to protect each informant's wish for privacy and confidentiality. This was secured and validated by forming an application with specific parameters for the Norwegian Centre for research data (NSD), where the confirmation of this application is included in the Appendix (1). The parameters used in recruiting informants went as follows.

The CEO of the IT organization studied sent out a mass email to all employees with the company, including an external link which led the recipient of the email to an anonymous questionnaire. The CEO had no insight into who pressed this link, protecting the integrity of informants.

The questionnaire gathered data solely for the researchers' eyes about whether the informant was a leader, regular employee, employee representative, or key informant (contacted directly) as well as their email: for organizing an interview and sending the information form (see appendix 2) relevant to this project.

It was desired to recruit a sample with a varied spread of age, sex, geographic location, and job position. This to ensure capturing as varied perspectives as possible.

The total number of informants recruited for this study was 9. They were in the age range of 20-50+ years old, almost 50/50 gender split (five males and 4 females) and divided between all three geographic locations the organization is located. Three of these informants were regular

employees, three leaders, two safety representatives, one employee representative and one key informant (senior management).

Thereafter, the informants were contacted for several reasons, given the choice to participate in the interview either in person or over software that allowed for video communication. As well as being sent an information and consent form, that required the informant to read through the purpose of the study and be reminded of their rights. The consent form was also required to be signed before the interview itself was carried out.

The interviews were conducted throughout the fall of 2021 (October – December), the last interview with the key informant. Seven of the interviews were completed digitally, while the other two were done in person. The interview guides used can be found attached (Appendix 3, 4, 5, 6).

Reasons for why many of the interviews were conducted using a digital solution such as Microsoft Teams was mainly restricted by the existence of the ongoing pandemic, including that several informants were in different cities throughout Norway.

Because of this, the environment the informants were in was out of the researchers' control. However, the informants were given the choice of what was most suitable. Most of the informants were either sat in company offices or from their homes. In this case informants were able to be interviewed in a place they were most comfortable in.

For the two physical interviews, one was held in an isolated meeting room at an NTNU campus site, while the other was held in the organizations own facilities. Both sites were chosen by the informants themselves.

The researchers attended all interviews together and took turns for the responsibility of conducting them (50/50 responsibility). The responsibility was mainly with regards to asking most of the questions as listed in the interview guide. While the person assisting would provide some extra input and ask follow-up questions to the informants, when deemed suitable.

After conducting each of the interviews, the researchers took the time to explore first impressions from the first batch of informants, while also discussing what went well and what didn't go as well in the interview process. These thoughts and other first impressions for the interview were noted to establish a familiarity with the material.

In the initial stage of the interview, it was confirmed with the informant that recording video via Microsoft Teams, and sound via smartphone was appropriate. This was also clarified with the Department of Psychology at NTNU.

**Data analysis**

During this section, the method used for analysis of the data collected will be explained. As stated previously, Reflexive Thematic Analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2022) was used, while adhering to the phases described by this method.

*Phase 1: Familiarizing yourself with the dataset*

This phase consists of three practices, firstly, as Braun & Clarke (2022) exemplify, it is about developing a deep and intimate knowledge of the dataset, otherwise known as *immersion*. The purpose behind immersing oneself with the data is identifying the diversity of meaning and *possible* patterns across the data set. The second practice requires the researcher to *critically engage* with the information as data, by being active as a reader or listener. As the researcher, you want to be actively making sense, contesting, and challenging, critiquing and imaging how

things could be different (Green & Guinery, 2004), with the data collected. This practice is particularly important in Reflexive Thematic Analysis when the researcher asks critical questions of their own role. In turn, this reflexivity decreases the chance of poor-quality analysis from fitting data into pre-existing ideas and forces the researcher to interrogate how they are making sense of the data.

Side by side, the first two practices seem contradictory, but it requires the researcher to find a way to read the data by combining closeness (*immersion*) and distance (*critical engagement*). The third practice entails *taking note of thoughts* related to the dataset, which is done throughout and is focused on more heavily towards the end of this phase (Braun & Clarke, 2022).

Already before the interview process started, a decision-making process conducted in the organization was observed. Later, the interview and transcription process itself contributed to further familiarity with and immersion into the data set. After every interview was completed, thoughts arose related to different topics the informants explored, which were noted and documented. This is in line with the third practice laid forth by Braun & Clarke (2022). Additionally, while not conducting interviews, time was spent listening to the audio recordings of the previous interviews, getting an even broader idea of what each data item was about, making notes of this and contrasting it with the research question, adhering in part to all three practices. Having engaged with the data set with these steps, the next phase entails coding.

### *Phase 2: Doing coding*

As the phase name states, this process is all about systematically working through each interview and the entire dataset (Braun & Clarke, 2022). Essentially, one data item is read at the

time, and while reading, when spotting something that is relevant to addressing the research question, it is tagged with a code label. Coding is approached as a 'consciously curious' researcher, open to absorbing and reporting different experiences that are separate to the researchers (Trainor & Bundon, 2020). To code the experiences important to each of the researchers' assignments this stage was approached with the plan to work individually, due to different research question focus. As such the process begun, by engaging with the data, to make analytic sense of the research question. Braun & Clarke (2022) stress the importance of a systematic coding process, due to *insight* and *rigor*. Insight refers to avoid jumping into the development of themes, and thereby risking foreclosing analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2021). While rigor is secured through codes engaging systematically with meaning and patterns encompassing the entire data set to produce a strong and detailed analytic interrogation.

Braun & Clarke (2022) also stress transparency in the researcher's orientation to data while coding. This dimension is important to coding and theme development because it answers the question of where and how meaning in each data item is captured, is it inductive (data-driven) or deductive (researcher/theory driven). The first mentioned approaches the data set as the producer of meaning, 'giving voice' to the participants and telling their stories word-for-word. However, Braun & Clarke (2022) stress that as researchers, we bring our own varied perspectives and experiences to the table, so engaging with data 'inductively', will never purely be inductive. This is where reflexivity comes in, considering how the researcher and their background thus far affects the data. The deductive orientation will see the dataset as the foundation for coding and theme development, but the research question guiding the development of codes will reflect theoretical or conceptual ideas the researcher attempts to understand, using the data set. In this project, the coding process initially started as leaning

towards inductive, reflecting underlying the nuance and meaning in the informants' statements. However, the study analysis has elements of both orientations, to tie informants' experiences and relevant theory together, as qualitative analysis gets its foundation and analytic power from theory (Braun & Clarke, 2022).

Semantic vs. latent coding runs almost slightly parallel to data vs. theory driven coding. Theoretical codes will usually be more latent while inductive codes tend to be semantic.

This coding process was entirely digital, engaging with the data set using the Qualitative Data Analysis program Nvivo. Creating the codes themselves is in many ways like using a physical approach, with an awareness of the research question, interesting passages in each data item was tagged with a code label. This process was essentially repeated over the span of the entire data set.

### *Phase 3: Generating initial themes*

Braun & Clarke (2022) describe this phase with an exploratory standpoint and evoke this phase with messiness and uncertainty yet calling attention to the freedom and creativity of analysis. 'Generating' initial themes is named as such to emphasize the generative and early stage of the theme development process. The overall practice behind this stage is in shifting focus from the codes as smaller meaning units to themes as larger meaning patterns.

On a more detailed level the practice entails engaging with the codes created to find areas where there is some similarity of meaning. When finding some of this similarity, the (potentially connected) codes are categorized into potential themes. The process considers each categorization on its own terms, towards the research question and the wider part of the analysis. Braun & Clarke (2022) stress this phase as "trying things out", in ascertaining how they feel in

conjunction with the research question. The essence of this phase is in awareness that there is a vast array of possibilities in which to sort themes. As such, during this phase many of the themes generated were primarily inductive and explorative, originating from the data itself. Due to a vast number of codes existing from initial coding phases, time was first spent merging similar codes together in Nvivo. To facilitate this process, codes were organized into positive and negative experienced aspects, as formulated by informants. It is through this process that I started to make sense out of the data and the narrative became clear, much in line with how Braun & Clarke (2022) describe this process to be as telling a story about the dataset to address the research question. Furthermore, due to the research question highlighting how the framework of the organization is experienced by the individual, this way of categorizing data initially provided some insight into overarching experiences of the employees. However, organizing in this way does not consider codes as distinctively nuanced yet the process itself provided further insight into patterns in data and codes reflecting similar meaning patterns were thereafter categorized together into themes.

Codes categorized together into themes were sorted underneath an overarching category named to reflect the codes contained within. For codes that deviated in terms of meaning, sub-themes were created to distinguish these nuances within themes. Towards the latter stages of this phase, a visual thematic map was drawn out based on recommendations by Braun & Clarke (2022) for three specific reasons: (1) starting to think about the temporary themes in their own right, (2) exploring how these temporary themes may relate to eachother, and (3) starting to get an impression for the overall story of this data analysis. Due to the visual perspective this mapping process granted, I was able to see relation in meaning between the different themes, and

so categorized certain themes as subthemes. A table from this mapping process showing the initial 6 main themes, is attached the appendix (7).

*Phase 4: Developing and reviewing themes*

This phase functions as an extension and offers a review of initial theme development from phase 3 through re-engaging with all coded extracts and the entire data set (Braun & Clarke, 2022). Clarke et al. (2015) suggest looking at the initial themes to see if they work in relation to the coded data. The thematic map carried out at the end of last phase provided an overview of the data set going into this phase. Initially, this diagram was messy, though through viewing data in a different lens, new ways were found to cluster meaning together and removed themes which did not aid in assessing the research question. During this phase I also moved back and forth from data set several times to assess that the "story" told, was of the data and not my coded material, which takes the 'reflexive' account of thematic analysis into consideration. Due to a lack of data on the use of digital solutions in the context of a change process and irrelevance of which in answering the research question, the theme "Technology essential but flawed" was removed. The research question was also altered to suit the data obtained to: *How can organizations ensure employee involvement and influence in a change process*?

The purpose behind this phase entails reviewing how viable the initial clustering is and exploring whether there is room for better pattern development (Braun & Clarke, 2022), where the thematic map was used as an aid. Throughout this phase I have therefore attempted to ensure themes are built around a central idea with rich and diverse incidences and refrained from themes becoming topic summaries. This is to make sure that the data's content is properly reflected and can answer the research question (Clarke et al., 2015). In the text, I have described informants' experiences as "one", "some" or "most", where the point is not to quantify the data but instead

show underlying patterns and meaning. Furthermore, I have attempted to ensure that themes remain inherently distinct from one another. As a result of working through this phase, I reduced the number of main themes to 5 which is shown in the table attached (Appendix 8).

### *Phase 5: Refining, defining, and naming themes*

This step entails the development and enrichment of the *analytic narrative*, as my interpretative commentary of the data set (Clarke et al., 2015). It involves writing definitions for each theme, is like writing abstract for the themes, which will clarify and illustrate what each theme is about, as such the central organizing concept or key-takeaway for each theme (Braun & Clarke, 2022). I have therefore taken care to follow Braun & Clarke's (2022) recommendations for writing definitions for each theme, by clearly formulating *what the theme is about*, *the boundary of the theme*, *what makes the theme specific and unique* and *what the theme contributes to the overall analysis*. In developing the themes initially, I based myself on an inductive method focusing on what the data set communicated. It is worth mentioning that the themes are not all quantitatively based, where some were developed based on repeated utterances from informants while others were unique and specific to a few informants. The relevance of themes was assessed in due regard to how they could explain the framework of the organization influencing employees' motivation to participate in decision-making. Throughout the successive steps of the process, I cross-referenced the themes with what theory stated about the different phenomena I was unveiling in my analysis. Considering the relative novelty about how this organization is structured, I figured an abductive approach (Tjora, 2017) was reasonable to ascertain how the observations made can be viewed through a theoretical lens. Following a repeated comparison between theoretical framework and deductively analyzing the data set, I gained further insight about what my findings were communicating. The result of which was that

I discovered the proper terminology behind involvement and influence as: employee participation. Furthermore, I also gained further inductive insight into how widespread employee participation is in the structure of the organization, and the wealth of data obtained about informants communicating their experience of this structure. Therefore, the research question was both altered to support the inductive and deductive insights obtained in this phase. Following this step, I further specified the research question and landed on 4 main themes which had around 3-4 subthemes each (Appendix 9).

### *Phase 6: Writing matters for analysis*

In this final phase of doing reflexive thematic analysis, it is about bringing the whole analytic story together, to shape the detail and flow of the analysis done (Braun & Clarke, 2022). Initially, I carried out this study with an exploratory mindset and ended up with a vast, broad description of themes. However, throughout the analysis phase of the study I ended up specifying and delimiting my research question, with a basis in exploring themes more in depth rather than reflecting the breadth of the entire data set. Due to this I took interest in exploring in depth how different aspects of the framework in a self-managing organization influences employee motivation to participate in decision-making. Clarke et al. (2015) recommend in the write up process themes that contextualize the following themes should be written up first. In my analysis, it was clear that each theme exists at a different level of the organization framework. Themes representing macro-levels of the framework as the organizational structure were therefore presented initially. Themes which represented lower levels of this framework and work within the context of macro-levels of the framework therefore followed respectively.

Taking these methodical considerations into account formed the write up process for this study. In the following section, the findings collected and coded from interviews are presented.

**Findings**

During this part of the study, findings collected will be presented. These will be in accordance with the research question stated: *How does the framework of a self-managing organization influence employee motivation to participate in decision making?*

**Background**

During the initial phases of analysis, employees and leaders repeatedly described the organizational structure as flat, with an almost non-existent divide between leaders and employees. One leader said as much "in (the organization) it isn't us or them, it is only us." Considering the ownership model already at place in the organization, it is possible the equality implied by this model seeps into the organizational culture and the way in which employees at the organization speak about themselves. Moving a step down the connotative hierarchy, employees communicate that they are very comfortable speaking and giving feedback to their leaders, bringing up suggestions for different ways to do things in the organization and communicating freely their challenges to the leaders. Additionally, employees are given autonomy to decide within a set framework and their assigned team, how they want to work. Employees describe a planning process in their teams as "the team leader lists the tasks that need to be done, and I am encouraged to suggest other tasks that I mean needs to be done". However, due to the nature of this organization being based on renting out the employees to other varied types of organization, the level of autonomy experienced from year to year may vary. This is something their main employer cannot control and must adhere to. As one employee stated,

"The biggest changes as far as my day-to-day work and work methods go, is in moving from one project to another…, in banks there are a lot of processes to follow and rules to

adhere to, in startups however things go very quickly, and I can just spit out some code as fast as possible".

This suggests a fluidity in employee's roles, through a different set of workflows based on different responsibilities and authority. Keeping in mind the fluid roles and how employees' work situation may be different within the same organization, special attention is paid to experience of the structure of the organization in question.

**Main themes**

| Theme | Subtheme |
|---|---|
| Owners of a flat structure | Ownership and autonomy |
| | Democratic processes |
| | It isn't us and them, its us |
| Role of the leader | Decision making |
| | Empower the people |
| | Letting it happen bottom-up |
| Experiences in decision-making | Structure and Framework |
| | Open participation |
| | Things take time |
| | Communicating information |
| Intrinsic factors | People are different |
| | Win-win helping others |
| | Engagement |

In the following passage, main themes along with their respective subthemes will be explored. The table visualized above presents an overview of the themes gathered from the dataset. Each of these findings will be explained, at the same time while supporting them with selected quotes from the dataset.

*Owners of a flat structure*

This theme explores in depth the higher-level framework that exists in the organization, which informants could experience as facilitators for employee participation.

Overall, the employees experience the work environment at the organization as a very good one. Most, if not all the informants stated their satisfaction in several aspects of the psychosocial work environment, with some also referencing awards the organization has won for this. A recently hired informant gave a broad description of the workplace.

> "You are encouraged to, challenged and, without it negatively affecting the nice culture, right? … There is a very healthy social environment at work, with a common lunch and no visible hierarchy in the organization so in a way everybody knows everybody, and everybody sits down and eats with everyone else…"

The positive comments about informants' experience of the workplace set the stage for what is overall a relatively different organization structure, in one way due to employees' experience of **ownership and autonomy** within their workplace. There are no others who own the organization, other than the employees that work there. Informants formulate this as meaning that the whole organization benefits from each other's effort, rather than a stakeholder at the top. In practice this entails every time an employee is hired, the rest of the employees give away a portion of their stake to the new employee to maintain equal ownership. Owning a part of the organization gives the employees a unique perspective, with freedom, influence over their situation at work and space to take initiative. "Yeah, I would say that the consultants or, the employees have a lot of influence. It is kind of like when everybody is wearing the 'ownership-hat' we are all the same." Common ownership over the organization has several consequences

for the organization such as employees deciding majority of which people sit in its board and influencing bigger strategical decisions at the general assembly. Although not everyone agrees it leads to enough involvement. One leader informant voiced a desire to improve and put effort into researching a sociocracy model, emphasizing employee feedback even further. On a smaller scale of the organization, all informants agreed that the teams' employees work with are self-governed, handing independence to and encouraging employees to figure out how best they work together. "[Experiencing independence] Maybe first and foremost within the team, that a team should be autonomous, so I experience or think that you feel some influence and can control the team a little bit yourself." In their teams, they decide individually and/or collectively how to organize themselves and how they work on a project, where many informants described teams being encouraged to do so.

> "Because then it reflects, that teams want to work in different ways, the freedom we have
>
> in the organization. Both when they are working in projects and, we want every team to
>
> be autonomous, and filling in their way to fulfill the project best."

Most informants' impression of how the organization is run hints toward the inclusion of employees in decisions that affect them directly. The employees are not consulted every time a decision needs to be made, but for larger and strategical decisions of the organizations the employees can vote. Additionally, a newly hired employee described how there exists fewer processes and bureaucracy to influence one's workplace in this organization compared to their previous employer. **Democratic processes** created larger room for the employees to participate in the following ways. Internal processes are often assigned a task force consisting of a voluntary selection of employees and leaders from the organization. Also, employees have the chance to influence larger issues in the organization albeit with some limitations.

"So, the organization is also structured in the way where everyone has their own right to vote on company size, choices, and changes, right? And there… I mean, it is kind of cool that I have as big a voice as everyone else in the company."

"I think the opportunity to get involved is relatively large, if people have a good idea or a strong opinion on one or another issue you can state it to the rest, and as long as it isn't too.. I mean of course, if you have a strong opinion that the minority believes it isn't a given that you win ground, because if we were to vote over it you'd probably lose."

As such, there are several prominent aspects of the organization's framework described by informants, that allow the employees to get involved and give them an equal voice, depending on how many people are affected. One is their right to vote (through the ownership model) on larger decisions that affect the entire company at the general assembly. Secondly, representatives of the board chosen by the employees of the organization make up most of the board members. Third, the 'campfire' forum allows employee representatives chosen by employees to bring up issues and suggestions to the leaders which may then be brought up at future general assemblies. One employee informant stated that this opens for employees to address other employees about their ideas and opinions, rather than consulting a leader directly. Employees are also given a voice as part of the process in selecting potential projects for the consultants to work for, the organization takes their employee's wishes and values into consideration.

"What I experience as the big difference between this organization which is a consultancy, and other consultancies that I've worked for: it is exactly that involvement and inclusion in that it isn't just any other 'project' but a project that you also should stand for!"

Perhaps because of previously mentioned democratic processes in mind, there were several informants who experienced the threshold to get your opinions and thoughts out to the rest of the organization as quite small. Furthermore, the people are also interested in each other. "I think people are pretty good at seeing each other, there is quite a flat structure."

Several informants described the organization as having a flat structure, with references to team spirit, unity and cooperation in the organization. **Its not us and them, its us** marks the unity of the organization. It even goes as far as some stating that the unity is what sets the organization apart from others, with descriptions of team spirit related to common ownership and an equal voice in the organization's bigger decisions.

> "There are a lot of people with strong emotions for the organization who are, who expect to be involved in important things, hehe. And I think that is, I mean you could say that yeah sometimes there can be a lot of discussions and a lot… I think that is a strength though. Rather that then people who don't care."

A leader informant added how the salary model linked up to the 'life rules' of the organization facilitate the sense of unity experienced in the organization.

> "I would like to state that the salary model is very linked up to the goals we have, and the life rules that we have stated we want to follow, which are: lift each other, be curious, take initiative and create value. And they have been decided so that everyone will help each other out, they are set in place so that we will become a better team."

The interaction between life rules and the salary model means that the employees are compensated further for what they do to ensure a great social aspect to the organization, to develop their own skills and increase cohesion in teams.

Granted with the nature of the organization as a consultancy, one informant stated that there since recently has been a lot more consultants working out of office for their customers. Though this is partially attributable to the recent Covid-19 pandemic. There are some who referenced losing a sense of the "family feeling" both due to being restricted to working from home and the strong growth of the organization. During interviews leader informants drew parallels between a growing organization and employees being less willing to get involved.

> "It's clear that, the bigger the organization gets, the more people will think that [why they should get involved] because they are a smaller part of it, and if yeah… Look at the election turnout in the EU parliament right?, it's getting further and further away, which leads to fewer and fewer caring. So that is a job the whole time, trying to keep that, trying to get people engaged you know."

According to many informants, this is something the organization is working on, trying to focus on cooperation and keeping employees affiliated with the company. With leader informants stating priorities like getting the employees to come into the office more often, encouraging participation in social initiatives and competence-development arrangements.

> "But it requires quite a few social activities to keep that, and competence-development, a lot of skill development activities to be able to keep that unity with us so that they don't suddenly go over to work for our customer."

In a further bid to buffer effects the pandemic had on the sense of team and community, a hybrid solution between working from home and the office was enacted. Leader informants stated as previously mentioned that they encouraged employees to return to the organization's offices at least once a month, especially given that consultants can end up working on a project

for a customer for up to several years. The digital tools used frequently by the organization aids by providing more possibilities for interaction when working remotely. Though with respect to the flat structure and outplacement of consultants, there is a unique context in which the leaders operate.

### *Role of the leader*

This theme was formed by how the leader works within the self-managed organization. Before diving into specifics, it is necessary to establish a broader view of how they themselves and the employees see their role. It is understood to be broad and undefined, where one informant will often take on tasks that are outside their designated responsibility. It can be so varied, that they constantly experience context change. As for how employees see their leaders, they find it easy to approach them, give feedback and perceive that the leaders work hard for a good work environment.

Being a leader for an organization where all employees are owners, it is not completely clear what their role is. Several informants were under the impression that the leaders retain a lot of mandate in **Decision making,** particularly decisions that include more than one employee and targets a larger portion of the organization. This is not necessarily a bad thing, as many informants state.

> "[Regarding middle-level decisions] Ehh, I experience that those kind of decisions should often be taken by someone who has a bit of responsibility to take them; but atleast having the option to discuss with them if I have some feedback on it."

"I am unsure [about taking bigger decisions], because, I don't think I am the right one to lead this organization, you know? So I don't need to be heard. I think it's nice if someone else can take decisions without me kind of having to take part in all decisions."

There is an exception during the general assembly, when the ownership model opens for everyone to bring forth issues or feedback. This also includes employees able to use their voting ability – albeit to a smaller degree due to a high number of employees – to influence decisions that affect the organization. While in most cases, several leaders and employees stated it difficult to open for everyone affecting decisions and get things done their own way. One leader points out how that may be unrealistic:

"You have an expectation [in this organization] to be heard. But then again that also includes respect. You are going to have to accept backing down sometimes, because it is what is best for the organization. But if it is good for the organization, it is also good for you."

In cases where leaders decide something opposed to what an employee wants, there is understanding and acceptance for it. Yet leaders and past task forces (for internal processes) have been adamant in communicating their decisions clearly and preventing friction between ingroups of the office. The sense is that leaders are good at safeguarding minorities in decisions like these. An employee informant noted that they are usually in agreement with what the leader decides in most cases anyway.

Even though leaders make the most decisions and employees experience that they tend to agree anyways, leaders carry out behaviors with the goal of **empowering the employees.** Referencing the previous point about safeguarding the minority in decision making, a leader and

key informant stated making sure employees feel heard is essential when explaining why a

decision was taken:

> "But as I said, when we are deciding something, then we have to clearly say why we are
>
> doing something else. Then they also feel heard. So the goal is that people feel heard. If
>
> they are to be given influence at all, we must show that we listen to them. Regardless of
>
> whether the decision turns out the way they want or not."

Usually, a leader will open for involvement by presenting employees with facts and

taking a step back to let employees discuss. An example in practice is the "campfire", often used

as a forum for discussion between leaders and representatives chosen by the employees. As part

of these forums, employees will consult the representatives with feedback they have, which is

then brought to the attention of the leader team. In conducting internal processes, a task force is

usually be put together, consisting of both leaders and employees without discriminating for how

long they've worked for the company. Because, according to the key informant and leader, if

employees are involved and heard, they will be inclined to participate. This also seems to be true

from an employee's point of view: "… I don't expect all my ideas to be carried out, but in the

case that I have any, they will at least be considered."

An employee informant added that the experience of participating is even stronger if they

are one of few that share the same feedback. Of course, this was only the case if feedback was

acknowledged and integrated into the process. In a case where leaders take full control of a

process, close for further involvement and only inform the employees, a leader informant

emphasized that chances of employee support for that idea are very slim. In this analysis it was

also prevalent that leaders strongly prioritize dialogue and communication with their employees.

One leader informant mentioned having a chat with the employees they are responsible for

around once per day. The goal with these chats is that the leader will know the employee a little bit better than others, follow up and check that they are doing fine. A leader informant presented one example as to how a dialogue like this looks:

"Us leaders are the ones who can see 'yeah now this person has been with that customer for this long', and with that one project. So, it could be smart to look for other opportunities... Then we ask the person if they agree with this, right? And then we work towards making that happen for example."

In essence, the leader attempts to include the employee in decisions that affect them, strengthening their mandate. But it is not only limited to decisions that affect them, where one leader reflects over taking a particular role to create awareness for the employees that it is possible to get engaged and influence things, they feel should be different. This entails in practice that there is a degree of openness and a desire for others to influence internal processes. Leaders function a lot like a coach for the employees, supporting them in what they want and encouraging employees to take initiative. "And yeah, the last thing I want to be is 'the boss', I would rather be a leader or a type of coach who doesn't bring a book full of answers, but just support people in what they want."

There is similarly a lot of acceptance if an employee has a lot to do on their free-time and little capacity to do more at work, or a person who is very engaged and wants to participate more than what is expected. For those that want to participate more, employees are encouraged to initiate different opportunities from arranging social events, participating in subject groups, and developing competence. One of the courses within competence development entails bringing in external course instructors, where the goal is to develop leadership qualities in consultants, to make it easier for them to take a leadership role in their teams. According to several leader

informants, the outcome will be employees to testing out new ways to work giving them the chance to affect the rest of the organization.

Letting employees try out new things may lead to some unique consequences, ever present by allowing processes in the organization to **happen bottom-up**. Using a past change process as an example, one informant described how a leader may facilitate bottom-up in several steps.

"So we have a department leader who kinda says, 'ok this is what we are going to talk about', and then we have several different methods to go through everybody's opinions and that. Write up post-it notes, discussing them and stuff. Voting, and other similar stuff. Then we collect insights the department leader received, to potentially start up change in the organization. Ehh, so it kind of goes from the bottom and upwards then. Ehh, considering the feedback and change suggestions we have."

Leaders in the organization seem to take this feedback seriously, the key informant and leader reflected over a general assembly several years ago, where employees voiced an issue with how the organization was run. A large discussion occurred at this general assembly, between employees advocating for both sides of an issue. Eventually the leader group decided to set up a task force with the sole objective of getting to the bottom of the issue. The task force presented their findings a year later, and the issue was rectified by a majority vote for a slight change in how the organization was run. Motivation for why processes are set into motion can vary where for a recent internal process the initial thought was: "I was curious about if we satisfy what we are supposed to of public requirements, and what do the employees want us to do forwards?"

On the surface, the previous statement denotes what can be understood as a combination of both a top-down and bottom-up process, in essence the leader initiates a process by presenting a list of issues for the employees to answer and employees provide their answers to form this process. According to the informant, it is important to collect feedback because decisions affecting the organization are better when feedback is collected. The reason for this, according to the informant, is to analyze a decision from several perspectives and take potential consequences of the choice into account. These perspectives will help leaders understand what may be important for the organization from the employees' point of view: "So employees in the organization have stated that we [as an organization] want to do something good for society with what we deliver. So that is something we as leaders must take seriously and make it happen."

Overall, leaders explain that there is an internal self-justice of what is the correct thing to do in the organization's context. The culture within the organization is described as essential for opening the floor to make space for opinions the employees may want to share. Furthermore, the way in which processes are planned and carried out can be an example of this and will also provide insight to how employees interact with an ongoing process.

### *Experiences in decision-making*

As part of the framework around the organization in question, decision-making processes involving most of the organization will occasionally be carried out with different themes based on internal or external pressure. These processes will be managed by a task force consisting of a voluntary group of employees and leaders. As a theme it portrays several aspects to the way these participatory processes are carried out in the organization with both leaders and employees having shared how they experience them. The subtheme **Framework and structure**

captured opinions over how an internal decision-making process was planned and organized. The consensus reflected by several informants was that processes like these require improvement.

"Yeah, I think that we aren't good enough to think clearly enough about processes. It's a little strange because a lot of us have been involved in training about just how to facilitate and plan processes. Such as finding out what we want to achieve, what kind of process to carry out and who to involve in the process to reach that 'goal'."

This about reaching a shared 'goal', is a view also shared by several other leader informants. The key informant added that for the process to have strength, you must at least work towards a common goal. This is where a potential issue arose, with a few leader informants finding the purpose around a process unclear. For one, there are so many processes run that they can often become unclear. Secondly and strongly emphasized, was the need for a specific goal, especially before choosing to involve people in the process. A specifically defined goal could provide a more structured process, when the alternative was a lack of guidelines for the workshop where employees could suggest whatever made sense to them. In an ongoing process the goal defined by the key informant was steeped in wanting to make a difference:

"We want to make a difference, we wish to make something that is good, not just for our customers but also the world. We don't want to make something that isn't sustainable, like something that will create a lot of difference or pollution."

Furthermore, multiple departments are usually set up to cooperate in internal processes, bringing a wealth of perspectives from employees with different backgrounds. As critique for the way an ongoing process carried out there was a call for a thoroughly thought-out structure by a leader. On the employee's side of the experience, one stated an collaborative process in

conjunction with a workshop tool and smaller digital meetings, as working very well. Employees met with each other in these digital meetings, participating by suggesting measures – based on own thoughts and opinions – for the process and discussing them together.

**Open participation** in processes is valued highly by the employees. In a previous process reflected by a safety-representative/leader informant, the employees were given freedom to run the process how they wished.

"We went far past the mandate, but it was, it turned out pretty good regardless. And being able to join in on these types of processes, where it circulates between different people, that's what I think is part of giving people the real feeling of being a part of and deciding what happens."

On the other hand, a leader speculated if the organization had set up a smaller and pre-defined group to lead an internal process, the solution might be good, but it would lack the anchoring allowed by involving the employees. While the organization does allow any employees to join the task force responsible for these processes, there is limited space. Additionally, getting involved in these processes do not encompass the project work expected by the organization's customer. For the employees who do take part, there are a few expectations to meet, if they are to engage themselves. For one, a leader informant stresses the importance of experiencing that a process has been carried out where the employees are heard and see that their concerns are being considered. "How much time should I devote to this, right? Does it have any effect? Or is it just others doing it for me..."

On the other hand, an employee shared their perspective on participation by feeling it easy to expect that leaders will tackle the decisions and carry out the process. Despite making

decisions on what the input was from the employees, there is still a different perspective in how the employees versus how the leaders view the topic of an internal process in the organization. This dissonance may present challenges if information and facts are not widely available.

**Communicating information** is described as an important part of processes. Due to unforeseen issues, the key informant was forced to let go of an ongoing process and in turn the process was halted. It was therefore not summarized to the employees as planned and the importance of communicating information related to processes, formed its own subtheme. As such, a lack of available information about an ongoing process was reflected by half of the informants. What follows is a quote from an employee and the leader/key informant. "Ehh, what, I have an idea about what we are doing but I kinda don't have… I'm not quite sure exactly what we decided and how it is.. What it means going forwards, right?" (Employee)

> "So, I think a lot of the people you spoke to said 'no I don't remember anything about that' or… Because some of them are quite far away to know that much about it. We haven't really informed enough in the round of department meetings afterwards." (Leader/key informant)

Despite a lot of effort put into communicating information frequently as a measure against the pandemic, and positive feedback from the employees, there was a strong requirement for information while people worked from home. With some employees feeling that they lacked knowledge about the topic for an internal process it led some to engage themselves less than desired. In the case a process is properly communicated to employees, there is a possibility this will lengthen the intended duration of processes.

There were indications from informants that the processes undertaken by the organization, can often end up **taking more time** than initially planned. Many of the leader informants repeated the same claim of things (processes) taking a lot of time in the organization. Despite a leader's awareness that moving in a quick linear manner from A to B in a process is unrealistic, part of the principle around involving others may have negative consequences.

> "Its clear that it can take a bit of time to gather in opinions and make sense out of something, that can take quite a bit of time. But it might just have to be a little bit like that when we have the organizational structure that we have and I don't necessarily think it is too much, it just has to be like that."

Although things in the organization may end up taking a lot of time, an informant mentioned a previous process set up to be short and concise. But due to unexpected engagement from the employees the process was expanded and extended, where everyone had a chance to partake. In one way, it took a lot of time and could have been a waste. But on the other hand, the informant said it created a fun idea for the employees to explore and helped to strengthen the culture of the organization. However, too much employee influence isn't necessarily always seen as a good thing, where leaders in the organization are aware of the need for a balance. "If there were to be a direct democracy on all decisions, I don't think anything would happen in the organization."

### *Intrinsic factors*

It is possible to assume the downside of direct democracy in all aspects being related to the number of different opinions and feedback everyone would have. Through analysis, there were also suggestions of differences between individuals influencing behaviors actualized at

work. This theme of intrinsic factors alludes to a varied set of innate factors affecting the degree

to which employees choose to participate. This also includes employees' considerations as to

what constitutes personal reasons for not participating. For the former, the subthemes of

**Engagement** and **Win-win helping others** are explored. Whereas the latter consider the

subtheme **People are different**.

The subtheme **People are different** attempts to capture how peoples' motivation,

interests and self-actualization can vary, because of individual differences between people. This

subtheme presents in what terms people may differ from each other and what the consequences

are. It was formulated by informants that people can differ based on how much they participate,

their sociability, their interest in internal processes and their levels of engagement. The latter

may vary based on which department in the organization they work in or strictly due to personal

differences. The consequences of people being different can manifest itself in a few different

ways, depending firstly how they differ. For instance, one informant spoke about how some

processes have been tricky to gain support and agreement for, due to employees having different

views about the organization. The same informant sums up this perspective concisely:

> "So there is a lot of difference between people [regarding involvement in processes], kind
> of also like the subject groups, getting contribution or getting people to take
> responsibility varies a lot upon ability and capacity to hold several balls in the air at one
> time, because a few of our employees are really good at diving into and only being
> engaged in their work. And they can be really engaged still, its not that, they are probably
> better at being engaged in that work project and in a way that customer [they are
> employed with]."

The next subtheme **Win-win helping others** came together due to a large pattern of common experiences around that helping others benefits both the recipient and sender. Although this is the central idea, it is more nuanced. One leader and an employee informant experienced helping their customers when knowing the work that one does is for a good purpose and that it contributes in a positive way. Another leader informant also stated that they believe most of the employees at the company feel that they are significant where they are placed. However, as part of the essence of this theme, contributing positively towards others provides something in return. A leader informant stated that when a customer praises the solution they received as very helpful in day-to-day work, it gives them an extra boost. Other employee informants also supported this, mentioning that if their solution makes the customers work easier, it contributes towards motivation. This is albeit not restricted to aiding customers in their work, and the same informant adds that contributing to that people thrive in the organization makes them glad. While a leader stated facilitating for effective work in their teams provide a sense of meaning. Overall, this subtheme presents that contributing to others in a positive manner, may return a sense of engagement, meaning, motivation or happiness to the contributor. Due to the multitude of informants' experience of engagement as a participatory drive, it formed its own subtheme.

**Engagement** is the strongest subtheme in terms of overall mentions. A lot of informants voiced their understandings about what this is about, ranging from doing the little extra in a work context, being self-driven and looking forwards to completing one's work, setting aside time and energy to try new things, and that you get involved and contribute extra. One employee formulated their understanding of engagement as "[Engagement] a wish and a will to kinda… Do the extra."

Informants not only defined their understanding of the term, but also stated things that affect their experience of being engaged. There seems to be a shared experience in that engagement is an internal experience affected by a multitude of external factors. Firstly, figuring out something was a prevalent topic. Several informants either stated that engagement can come from learning a system, getting good at, and improving it; or a curiosity in figuring out a problem with others. One informant summed up their impression of different precursors to engagement.

"I think people are very different there. Some are engaged by being able to focus really intently on something and getting especially good at a system. - So becoming an expert with a system… While others would prefer to just try new ideas and test them out. Some think it is really exciting to travel around and hold lectures, while others find it really interesting to reach out to the business side: the customer base. And yeah, people who like one thing can think that the other things are extremely boring, that it doesn't appeal to them or that its kind of scary. So it's very different what will engage one person or the other, that's my experience."

Thus far it seems that engagement may spring due to very different factors. And one informant adds that there may be a large dissonance between how engaged people are in general. In response to why so few people had answered a survey related to an internal process he said as much:

"There were some complaints over how few had answered [the survey]. Then I said that is quite a clear answer in and of itself… Remember to take that into account, because you might be really engaged and when you ask about something, only get this many answers, and the answers are from people who are also really engaged. While you forget the 70% of people who haven't answered."

From an employee's perspective as to why they did not involve themselves more initially, this is what they said:

> "Mmm, less than I would have wanted, I am quite interested in [the process]… And I know that the organization is very on top of that. But I, I don't feel like I've done enough to get updated about it."

Due to a lack of knowledge, the employee then decided not to get involved. This implies that though opportunities to get involved exists, it may not always guarantee participation as individual factors could present a hindrance. Considering the findings presented and theory visited earlier, the next section will combine the two to provide insights for answering the research question.

## Discussion

There are several aspects to consider, with respect to the framework of employee participation in decision making and the organizational structure presented thus far. The following discussion will attempt to structure and reflect over results collected in parallel with lessons learned from literature, with the research question: *How does the framework of a self-managing organization influence employee motivation to participate in decision making?* as a point of contention. The overall thread of this discussion is to explore how employees as equal owners, with participatory leaders and autonomous teams, can answer the research question. The discussion is structured such that aspects of the framework will be explored from a macro- to micro-level of the organization.

**Employees as equal owners**

*The ownership model*

In terms of the overall structure, the organization operates by a philosophy of equal ownership, which could create an equal baseline for everyone to operate. The philosophy of equal ownership is according to informants most obvious in yearly shareholder meetings with all employees having an equal right to vote, much like the principle of voting for aspects of government in political democracy. One employee stated: "everybody wears the 'ownership-hat', making everyone the same". In this sense, the employee alludes to a sense of equality. Because of employees being the sole shareholders, they garner from their own work within the organization, receiving a slice of the proceeds in the event the company has success and participating in shareholder decisions made on a company-wide basis may affect themselves directly. With these tenets of ownership, Athar (2020) suggests it a great way to foster psychological ownership, though with an implication that employees in the organization have a responsibility to take for their own success, and in extension the success of the organization. Research states employee stock option plans motivate for harder work (Torp, 2011; Blasi et al., 2008) and participation in organization management (Kochan, et al., 2005), though an employee from the organization studied doubted that owning stock contributes to further involvement. Their suggested solution of implementing a sociocratic model – which further emphasizes employee feedback – alludes to the ownership model not reducing hierarchy enough. Considering the strong emotions and expectations to be involved, there is a strong affiliation to the organization, and research shows company stock ownership aids in employees' identification with the organization (McHugh et al., 2005). Employees wanting to take this responsibility for

the success of the organization is also in line with Kerr's (2004) view, as outcomes of organizing in a way resembling political democracy.

### *Participation under an organizational democracy*

With the principles described above, it is hinted towards the organization's attempts to carry out an ideal of democracy in the workplace. The systems implemented in the present organization reflect principles of organizational democracy by increased representation of employees in the board of directors and the opportunity to vote on bigger aspects such as company size, choices, and changes. They have a voice as to who sits on the board and a moderate degree of influence over bigger strategical decisions in the general assembly. By collecting authority from the people within the organization, employees are given a higher degree of responsibility, placing expectations on them, and in essence shrouding the presence of a centralized hierarchical system. Therefore, through the ownership model in the organization it may contribute to a democratic culture and reinforces allocation of decision rights to all employees (Battilana et al., 2016; Sauser, 2009). The framework still presents limitations, as independence and autonomy are mostly experienced within the teams, where leaders encourage employees to take control of their work situation. This gives them opportunity to influence and control their teams themselves. However, taking into consideration a leader wishes to diffuse decision authority even more it is suspected there still exists a hierarchy of power, at least regarding higher levels of management. Kerr (2004) suggests that organizing democratically may only be carried out successfully if there is less resistance to re-allocate decision power further up in the hierarchy. But is there a benefit to increasing employee decision authority and democratic organization further? This kind of expectation for taking decisions on a higher level may manifest itself as external pressure, representing motivation imposed by extrinsic means. It could

therefore be assumed employees would experience a sense of duty to contribute to their workplace.

There are no indications that this external pressure would be very impactful, at least not in a negative sense as employees appreciate having as big a voice as everyone else in the organization, at least in terms of using their right to vote for higher level decisions. Furthermore, the democratic systems already in place involve employees by allowing them to influence decisions (Bass & Shackleton, 1979), rather than forcefully placing expectations on them. The structure is also formalized through general assemblies allowing employees to vote on higher-level company aspects such as size, choices, and changes. Through formalizing these opportunities to participate, it contributes to stronger actualization of a democratic system (Brenkert, 1992). Within the organization employees interviewed have conflicting perspectives on how much participation the ownership model allows for. Particularly leaders believed that this does not grant employees enough involvement in bigger decisions. Because though employees in the organization have the chance of their voices being heard, it'll really depend on whether they agree with the majority or not. As one leader said: "if you have a strong opinion that the minority believes it isn't a given you win ground, because if we were to vote over it, you'd probably lose". So, it is possible for employees to have their voices heard on a larger scale, albeit with a lower richness of input. With respect to Pasmore and Fagans (1992) degrees of involvement, only lower ends of the participation scale resonate with a right to vote, specifically as either contributing to or challenging existing systems. In terms of voting, it is assumed being part of the majority vote pertains to contributing, while being a part of the minority entails challenging. Then the participation experienced from being part of the minority vote is higher, where an employee also alluded to a greater sense of decision authority when a minority vote goes

through. Gathering input on such a large scale may not always be beneficial to the minority, but it is in giving employees a choice that may facilitate their self-determination. With a guarantee for participation and a democratic system aligned with giving employees a sense of control over their lives, it may realize their intrinsic motivation (Manville & Ober, 2003).

Furthermore, there is the additional aspect of a 'campfire' forum in the organization which may allow for a higher degree of involvement, as pertaining to Pasmore & Fagan's (1992) scale. For instance, it gives employees the opportunity to bring thoughts and concerns to employee representatives chosen by the employees themselves. Compared to previous systems such as the voting system, this forum allows employees to make rich input to an employee representative (possibly chosen by them) and affect decisions at a higher level. It is not clear how much this motivates for further participation. It is however prudent to question whether the democratic systems already in place facilitate open communication. Because opportunities to participate may exist, but if employees do not feel comfortable sharing their personal views those opportunities could prove obsolete. Research points out an essential feature of organizational democracy to ensure an atmosphere of full and free communication with no regard for rank or power (Slate & Bennis, 1964). Considering employees describing the workplace as very healthy socially, there are grounds to assume the flow of information in the organization is not initially hindered by strict hierarchy. Furthermore, in terms of the scale mentioned earlier it could be argued this forum allows for employees who desire higher levels of participation to challenge existing systems or seek collaboration with others who wish to change a system. Furthermore, the sharing of power inherent in a forum like this gives employees the chance to direct the organization in line with their own needs, beliefs, and actions, in efforts to actualize a true participatory system (Kerr, 2004). In this sense, it is assumed employees' sense of autonomy

could be stimulated by the opportunity to express ideas and input in higher level decision making (Forner et al., 2020). In accordance with employees' experience of participation: autonomy, influence and authority are central (Svalund et al., 2020), and as one of the three needs expressed by Deci and Ryan's (2000) theory for self-determination, there is a potential for the democratic systems implemented in the organization to grant employees decision authority, perhaps motivating employees to participate through higher levels of autonomy.

Though in the case the organization opens for even more democratic decision-making processes, is it inherently a positive thing to include employees beyond the levels of inclusion and decision authority which already exist? There were strong indications through analysis, that processes which open for a vast amount of input take a lot more time, which is much in line with established limits to organizational democracy (Kerr, 2004). Furthermore, Lee and Edmondson (2017) also referenced a downside towards increasing participation through large democratic processes as posing challenges for flexibility. On the other hand, a longer duration than expected for decision-making processes was speculated to be beneficial to the organization culture. A leader described a large expectation in the culture to be involved in processes, which does lead to discussions taking up a lot of time although this strong expectation could be interpreted as a representation of affiliation and commitment to the organization. Considering affiliation as denoting attachment to a group or the organization in this context, it is possible the need for relatedness as the social dimension for self-determination theory is satisfied, facilitating intrinsic motivation to participate (Forner et al., 2020; Ryan & Deci, 2017). There may even be grounds to assume the presence of relatedness among employees is the case in the organization due to the flat structure experienced, particularly due to several informants experiencing acknowledgement and validation from others, as well as a low threshold to share their opinions.

*A flat structure and autonomous workforce*

According to a leader in the organization, the experience of ownership gives employees a unique perspective as freedom and influence over their work, as well as an impression of equality. Employees describe the organization as a team, with focus on cooperation and mentioning the lack of an obvious hierarchy. The experience of it as "its not us and them, its us", may allude to a strong bond and equal footing between its members. According to Lee and Edmondson (2017) the mechanisms of trust and strong social bonds creates the sense of community. These mechanisms may aid buffering any social or relational hindrances for participating and strengthen the individual experience of relatedness. But how is this sense of community actualized? According to informants, the equal ownership and interaction between the salary model and life rules facilitate the sense of unity experienced.

The salary model and its interaction with the life rules dictate what is expected by employees, due to employees being compensated for the behavior rather than managers directing or influencing how they work. The values driving employees' behavior are "lift each other", "be curious", "take initiative" and "create value". The first of which denotes a commitment to each other and by extension the organization, which may also facilitate strong social bonds between employees. The second value alludes to encouraging employees to learn. The third reflects setting things in motion. While lastly, "create value" points towards delivering quality work. These resemble core values driving decentralization such as committed employees, learning potential, risk taking and employees delivering superior service, respectively (Kumar & Mukherjee, 2018). The salary model and life rules in the organization works to formalize these roles. By formalizing employees' roles and removing the need for a hierarchical manager, this creates autonomous workers (Bernstein et al., 2016) and in essence flattens the structure.

Therefore, the experience of "its not us and them, but us" is not just limited to the sense of unity, but also the reduced hierarchy. Through the experience of team unity and the reduced hierarchy imposed upon employees through the life rules, it is assumed this will affect employees experience of relatedness and autonomy. In a similar organization where employees were rewarded based on the roles they chose to take on, they customized their ideal work situation based on their choices (Kumar & Mukherjee, 2018). Taking this point into consideration, the freedom implied by the life rules and salary model cannot guarantee employees will participate specifically in decision making. Despite this, there is still argument to posit in which the salary model and life rules stimulate employees' intrinsic motivation through satisfying needs of autonomy and relatedness (Deci & Ryan, 2000), leading to self-actualized behavior.

### *Too far from home?*

There are however also a few other contextual details which may moderate the experience of the unity and team spirit to keep in mind. Firstly, this organization works based on renting out specialists to customers, as consultants. This entails that several if not most of the employees work in a context outside of the organization for a certain amount of time. Furthermore, working for another temporary employer brings a whole different set of expectations of how employees should work. One employee noted how different their customers organizations are structured and how this affects their work methods. It is possible this may complicate affiliation to the organization they are originally employed at. Considering one of the elements of self-determination theory as relatedness (Deci & Ryan, 2000), it is difficult to imagine an employee having stayed at a different organization, with other colleagues, tasks and activities participating in decision making with their 'home' organization. Particularly in decision making outside one's own area of responsibility, especially when the process takes

place in a context the employee is not situated at the given moment. Furthermore, if employees sense they take part in decisions which lead to a higher degree of task ambiguity and responsibility for the outcome, they will lose interest (Randolph & Sashkin, 2002). Regarding task ambiguity, employees will receive and possibly relate more to the flow of information in the organization they are temporarily situated with. It is therefore possible they may experience task ambiguity with decision making processes they become involved in with their 'home' organization and lose interest to participate. Though their customer may place expectations on them, they are still compensated through the salary model referenced before. And considering salary being influenced by their commitment and initiative it is assumed there is a sort of counterbalance to prevent employees losing too much of their affiliation and commitment to the 'home' organization. Regardless, it will be prudent to consider how far-reaching the salary model and life rules are in this case, particularly also considering the recent Covid-19 pandemic presenting a few complications related to the potential of losing cohesion to the organization. It is assumed the lack of "family feeling" reported by leaders in the organization is due to this absence from the office. The lack of social connections imposed by pandemic related interventions to work from home, is said to negatively impact workers particularly in terms of affiliative behaviors (Kniffin et al., 2021). These complications presented a challenge in keeping employees affiliated with the company and therefore may have negative consequences for actualizing intrinsic motivation through satisfying relatedness, due to everyone being restricted working from home. However, coupled with employees experiencing strong emotions to the organization, it may be reasonable to presume that the lack of presence inhouse is not too detrimental to organizational commitment. Furthermore, the strong recent growth of the organization has caused a few leaders to speculate that employees will be less willing to get

involved. And with strong growth implying many new faces, departments and change, there is reason to believe this may also influence the 'family feeling' of the organization. Ryan and Deci (2017) suggest maintaining high levels of fulfilled needs for stimulating outcomes like engaging willingly in work activities. It may therefore be prudent to contemplate the consequences of organizational growth and outplacement, considering the implementation of further social initiatives in keeping the need for relatedness at a high enough level.

**A coach-oriented leader**

*Empowerment through dialogue and communication*

Though the leader may not be directly involved in furthering social initiatives, they are understood to be very open towards their employees, prioritizing feedback, dialogue, and their wellbeing. It could even be implied that leaders' goal in keeping an open dialogue with employees is considered important because leaders want to keep their focus on the individual and ensure they are intrinsically motivated (McGregor, 2006). Considering the organization is understood to operate by means of a flat structure, it is fair to assume leaders don't oversee employees in ways of a traditional managerial hierarchy. Regardless, they also take steps to ensure decisions which directly influence employees are taken together with the leader and the individual in question. Furthermore, in addition to ensuring employees have a say in decisions affecting them, one leader also mentioned their efforts to increase awareness for employees of their potential to participate and influence decisions. In that case making sure the right framework for decision making exists to allow for participation (NOU, 2021). In doing this, they remind employees of the power they have in the company and put the individual at the forefront. They state not being the ones with answers and take a step back after laying forth facts about the organization to let employees discuss, and therefore, share important information and prevent

laying accountability on themselves but rather with the employees. Seibert et al. (2004) state

sharing information in this way and shifting the locus of decision-making authority to teams, will

provide a fitting climate for employees to feel empowered. They are essentially allocated control

and agency, which is also understood to empower employees (Lee & Edmondson, 2017).

Through this supervisorial style, it is possible these contextual factors work together to

strengthen employee autonomy, and competence, as aspects of intrinsic motivation. In this

regard, leaders may be attempting to motivate employees to manage themselves. It could

therefore be assumed empowerment fostered in employees through a leaders' actions work

towards influencing intrinsic motivation.

With employees as self-managers and leaders wishing to facilitate for participation in

decision-making, there is a complication in terms of what leaders' desire employees to do and

how employees want to manage themselves. Because employees state that they aren't necessarily

interested in taking responsibility for decision-making or the right person to make them. There

are a few reasons to speculate why this may be, of which may be a lack of competence,

individual differences in interest or role responsibility.

Firstly, in regard to competence levels, it is possible employees do not perceive

themselves as the right person to make middle-level decisions due to a lack of knowledge about

managing aspects of the organization outside of their own responsibilities. Coupled with

Pasmore and Fagan's (1992) view on the necessity of knowledge and competence on an

individual level to facilitate employee participation, it is possible employees need a wider skill

set and ability to incorporate taking decisions on a higher level in addition to being expected to

carry out their own responsibilities. As such the need for competence in predicting intrinsic

motivation is shown to be fulfilled when individuals can apply their skill set and training (Forner

et al., 2020). The organization does employ competence development programs to further develop employees' ability to self-manage, but it is not certain how much competence these courses lend to making informed middle-level decisions.

Secondly, and related to previous points about individual differences, as employees are encouraged to manage themselves, it is possible to assume they will choose to engage themselves in a different context that bring about their intrinsic motivation. It is clear after all that they are inherently different people and have their own way in which to bring forth their self-actualization. Research also shows a multitude of factors related to satisfying the three needs for self-actualized behavior (Parfyonova et al., 2019). By this participating in decision making is not necessarily of interest to all employees. It is therefore possible that the framework of the organization and the tenets in which its leaders promote self-managing, also work against leaders' efforts to encourage them to participate in decision-making. However, findings of this study indicate employees feeling motivated because of positive contributions towards others. In addition, Lee and Edmondson (2017) open up for different types of decisions which could facilitate for employee participation. With these aspects in mind, it is worth considering framing decisions in such a way to denote how it will affect others in the organization. For example, through leaders establishing a vision around how a particular decision they have involved employees in may affect others positively. After all, the organizations culture does allude to a strong community existing already. Leaders may be able to formulate decisions in a certain way to stimulate for more participation, but more research is required to uncover whether the way decisions are presented can influence employees' motivation to participate.

*Decision making*

The reality around leaders' role in decision-making is that when the decisions affect a larger part of the organization – understood as middle-level decisions – they have the mandate. Taking into consideration how the democratic processes, ownership model and flat structure facilitate participation, there seems to be a contradiction juxtaposed to the decision authority leaders in this organization retain. In essence, the framework existing at the organization studied allows employees to get involved in voting on decisions which affect the organization, and strong mandate in decisions concerning themselves, but not too much in middle-level decisions. This may allude to the existence of a hierarchical decision authority after all. However, the leader welcomes feedback and employees experience being able to voice their thoughts about these types of decisions. This is in line with leaders practicing participatory management, which as a relational construct seeks to involve employees in a larger range of decisions (Lee & Edmondson, 2017). But again, considering employees are specialists for the work tasks they are expected to carry out, it can be presumed they may either not be competent enough to take them or not interested in taking on other responsibilities. As a CEO of another self-managing company states, the creativity and energy of the employees as dependent on the *right* environment and structure to be realized (Greenfield, 2016). By this, the right environment and structure is perhaps a situation where employees are relieved of the responsibility to take on weighted middle-level decision-making. And again, it is worth considering whether placing the expectation on employees to take decisions may reduce autonomy and authority over their own work situation. Autonomy is a need experienced by a freedom to make choices and decisions in one's own role (Forner et al., 2020), and involving employees in decisions outside this role alludes to a contradiction in fulfilling this need.

***Let them choose***

Even though it may not be necessary for involving employees in every decision, some informants still felt it important to affect decisions taken by leaders in the sense that they wished to be heard if they have feedback to give. Being heard in this case alludes to their feedback being taken seriously and validation of their position as owners of the organization. On the other hand, leaders have an understanding for that the employees expect to be heard, but state that it includes respect. Considering the size of the company and the other hundred plus owners that also want to be heard, in this sense leaders take decisions with the company's best interests at heart, which in turn will garner the owners of the organization: the employees. However, it should be noted that other findings have shown managers being reluctant to give up making decisions even with the possibility that it is beneficial in allowing employees to decide (Fehr et al., 2013; Bartling et al., 2014). Though beside this, leaders are still understood to empower employees to make things happen in the organization, in processes where they open for involvement they bring a topic to the table in meetings with employees, allowing them to collaborate in deciding strategical direction for the organization. This represents an influential process occurring from the bottom-up, whereby leaders implement the structure needed for employees to influence the direction the company should take (Collins, 1995; Cottono et al., 1988). A leader in the organization did however problematize the participatory processes in the sense that employees who choose to take part and steer the decision-making process tend to be particularly engaged and will not necessarily represent views in much of the organization. Thus, the higher levels of autonomy encouraged through opening for participation may pronounce the individual differences in engagement determining motivation to participate.

*Multiple and unclear roles*

In an organization where all employees are owners, on the surface it is not too clear what leaders' roles are, as they are not expected to influence how the employees' work due to the formalization of roles already established. People inside the organization convey that the leader role is broad and undefined. In a holacratic organization, leaders work contextually, and their roles may shift quickly (Ackermann et al., 2021). For leaders with little experience in a system like this, it implies that there is time needed to adapt.

Taking into consideration also that leaders are expected to both empower employees to participate in decision-making and take decisions themselves, there is a contrast between the two. It has been established that leaders take decisions affecting a bigger part of the organization, but then there are also decisions on an organization-wide level where everyone participates by voting. Further, decisions on whether to involve employees, are usually taken amongst the leaders which may reduce transparency of information. Amundsen and Kongsvik (2016) reflect on the consequences of involving employees too little and too much, and findings of this study show little participation due to a lack of information. With these points in mind, there might be value in ensuring that employees are made aware of processes but not necessarily directly involved in.

**Autonomous teams**

It has been established through the flat structure discussed above, autonomy and influence over one's own work situation, represented in self-managed teams. Employees feel first and foremost a biggest impact on their independence through the work they carry out within the teams. This challenges previous assumptions of a very thorough reduction of hierarchy in the

organization, at least outside of the teams they work within. In these teams, employees are given the authority to decide how best to carry out the work they need to complete for their customers, usually through a framework which clarifies each employee's roles, allowing for a greater degree of flexibility, influenced by members within the team. The principles behind how teams in the organization operate seem to reflect real world examples like the holacracy model, whereby they also are characterized by a lack of hierarchy, large degree of personal freedom and self-leading employees (Schell & Bischof, 2022). It is plausible to imply autonomy is well-established within these teams and fulfilling one of the three needs for intrinsic motivation in regard to self-determination theory (Deci & Ryan, 2000). Considering how the teams make decisions on the tasks that need to be done, where employees describe the process as being able to influence and control what the team should do, there is a degree of employee participation implied. Integrating the scale Pasmore & Fagans (1992) developed, it is assumed that collaboration is sought with others in the team to change the in which they work, alluding to a lot of shared power yet also requiring more effort from the employees.

It is usually in conjunction with the team employees carry out the work they are expected to do for the organization's customers. And although employees are given opportunities to participate in other levels of decision-making in the organization, there may yet be an argument in the autonomy nurtured by team processes diverting attention away from participating in other decision-making processes. Schell and Bischof's (2022) study on several holacratic organizations lead to an implication that employees will assume a lot more responsibility over their roles in these systems. However, considering leaders describing a variety of different ways employees describe feeling engagement at work it is possible to contend that the degree of responsibility taken by employees to fully concentrate on their work might depend on the

individual. For instance, in an example of a highly independent organization, Valve has taken

steps in allowing employees to choose exactly which projects they wish to work on (Lee &

Edmondson, 2017). Given the expectations placed on the work by customers it is difficult to

assume employees have full authority to decide what they wish to produce. The difference

between Valve and the pertinent organization in this case is in what they are expected to

produce. Being a consultant organization by trade, it is difficult to assume they are given

freedom to decide in some processes related to the way their customers do things. Furthermore,

with employees being outplaced for longer periods of time, there is a chance they may get

integrated into and accustomed to the structure of their customers. Considering the relative

novelty of self-managing teams as pertaining to holacracy (Bernstein et al., 2016, Ravarini &

Martinez, 2019; Robertson, 2015), it could be assumed employees working for the organization

don't have a complete understanding of how the system works and by extension the degree of

participation it allows. For instance, findings indicate that the most change experienced in day-

to-day work and work methods is in moving from one project to another. If on top of that they

are expected to be outplaced in an organization with reduced decision authority, there could be

some dissonance in the behavior employees are expected to actualize. The need for competence

as relayed by self-determination theory (Deci & Ryan, 2000) may provide understanding to –

given the portrayed context – why employees then do not participate even when the structure

allows for a high level of autonomy. Relatedness is not mentioned as outplacement in another

organization with other colleagues may have some consequence for the fulfillment of this need

as well. Regardless, in terms of raising competence about the system, research suggests

addressing the lack of knowledge surrounding holacratic systems in a need for a human resource

department and coaches to support the learning and adaptation process for these systems (Heyden et al., 2017; Kammerlander et al., 2018).

**Strengths and limitations**

This study was carried out in a limited geographical region within a singular sector and particular organization type, an IT consultancy in Norway. It is therefore suspected that the findings may not be applicable to all regions, sectors, and organization types. With a larger sample, collected from a range of the parameters suggested, it will be more reasonable to generalize. According to Tjora (2017), it will be possible to support generalization by active use of empirical and theoretical findings in the literature field. This recommendation is followed and implemented in the discussion above, though it is sensible to point out the relative lack of empirics existing in the field of study. However, with several of the main themes and subthemes found relatable to research, there are indications this can be generalized to self-managing organizations.

There are also certain aspects to consider for this study's methodology. Firstly, a wide array of job roles/responsibilities between the informants recruited was thought to establish a broad understanding of the phenomena this study explores, as well as bringing to light variations in experiential perspectives. Secondly, the interview process brought its strengths and weaknesses. Firstly, it is assumed that with two researchers conducting the interview process, it provided the opportunity to pick up on or open new lines of questioning which may have had relevance for this study. The participants partaking in this process were also allowed to choose their preferred interview location, because of flexibility granted by the video communication solutions at the researchers' disposal. However, with the use of video communications it is

important to note the possibility that informants could be distracted in their setting by sources outside the researchers' control.

**Implications and further research**

Overall, the important implications to be derived from this study is to aid understanding in how different levels of the structure within a self-managing organization may stimulate intrinsic levels of motivation to participate in decision-making. In fact, Lee & Edmondson (2017) through their literature review on self-managing organizations state the relative lack of empirical findings in this field. This study provides experiential insight on employees and leaders in a self-managing organization. Furthermore, it contributes with understanding to how organizing democratically, fostering participatory management and empowering employees to manage themselves may stimulate different needs predicting self-determined motivation (Ryan & Deci, 2000).

The findings can also unveil important implications for what the consequences of high levels of autonomy mean for facilitating participation, because the basis in having autonomous employees entails that these employees will manage themselves. Though research shows autonomy as a central aspect to participation (Engelstad et al., 2003; Leiulfsrud & Dahl, 2005), this study's findings hint that people engage themselves in different ways. For instance, the present study showed employees value having a say in decisions at a higher level of the organization, though don't need a say in every decision. However, the opportunity to provide feedback to leaders taking these decisions was communicated as important. The implication of having employees participate in decisions taken by leaders will require information to be shared with and available to the rest of the organization. Even though employees may garner from being involved in decisions at a higher level, considering them as experts in their field of work and not

at managing organizations, it will be prudent to seek empirical insights into whether involving employees in decisions above micro-level will benefit the organization.

Even if employees are involved, employees may still not participate (Neumann, 1989). Findings from this study indicated that individual differences, lack of competence in the context of decisions, and loss of affiliation to the organization may hinder motivation to participate. In this case, research is required to ascertain with greater clarity what prevents employees from wanting to participate in decision making. And further, which type of organizational decisions employees will take greater interest to being involved in.

Though this study reveals that several aspects of the framework in a self-managing organization can influence needs for intrinsic motivation posited by Ryan & Deci (2017), there was no clear indication this could be causally linked to participation in decision-making. Some research suggests autonomous motivation leads to employees engaging in work activities willingly (Deci & Ryan, 2014; Van den Broeck et al., 2016), yet it is insinuated this applied to work tasks rather than decision-making opportunities. It is therefore suggested that future research undertake efforts to ascertain by what factors self-determined employees will actively engage in participate in decision-making. With this, there is a possibility other factors may lead to employees participating in decision-making. Findings within this study indicated that in the case certain tasks provide help to others it may positively influence the decision to carry out said task. This suggests perceived prosocial behavior could have an implication for theoretical considerations as a potential factor for intrinsic motivation.

**Conclusion**

In a time when knowledge is key and material goods is secondary, people are established as the primary producers of value. This brings an implication that focus should be on making sure these people are best able to realize their intrinsic potential to set their organization on the right course towards producing value. The means of setting the organization on the right course alludes to a directive action required, whereby employees are required to participate and contribute for decisions to be actualized. An organization may set the context, by relaxing hierarchy, in which employees allegedly are given all opportunity to involve themselves and by extension, participate. The purpose of this assignment was in exploring how the framework in an organization where hierarchy is relaxed, ownership divided, and employees are independent would influence employees' intrinsic motivation to participate in decision-making. Firstly, to ensure participation is actualized by employees it was assumed the needs proposed by self-determination theory (Ryan & Deci, 2000) will have to be fulfilled.

The research question was then answered through interviews with informants at an organization with a framework like the one described above, in conjunction with an overview of the literature existing in the relevant field already. Several levels of the framework were explored, where at a macro-level democratic principles like common ownership and equal voting rights are implemented. These aspects work to level the playing field, creating a flat structure which support a sense of belonging and therefore may affect relatedness as one of the needs for self-actualized behavior. Though democratic organizing also presents many opportunities to participate by allocating decision authority to employees, these processes were also known to take time. It was also found that a self-managing organization still retains and requires a leader, which may support employees' sense of autonomy, by enabling employees to customize their

ideal work situation and supporting bottom-up decisions taken on employees' initiative. Lastly, the way in which work is structured in this organization in the form of self-managing teams, supports autonomy and puts decision-making about how to work in the hands of the employees. However, with the autonomy and freedom of choice implied by self-managing teams and an empowering leader, there was no clear implications for whether employees would choose to participate in decision making.

There were also other limitations to consider and in the context of the organization studied potential mediating factors were also unveiled, where aspects like organization growth and outplacement may weaken the sense of unity experienced, causing less interest for participating. The lack of competence about or lack of interest in a decision-making process may also influence whether an employee participates.

Overall, this study provides valuable insight into a research field in its infancy about self-managing organizations, with considerations as to how different elements of a self-managing organization influence employees. It was assumed autonomy and relatedness were adequately fulfilled, but a lack of competence in decision-making were assumed to have influence on employees' choice to participate further in decision-making. It is therefore suggested that future research assess whether adequate levels of all three needs posited by self-determination theory leads to increased participation in decision-making.

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# Appendices

## Appendix 1: Confirmation by Norwegian center for Research Data

Meldeskjema / Masteroppgaven: "Hvordan få folk med på endring?" / Vurdering

# Vurdering

**Referansenummer**
453302

**Prosjekttittel**
Masteroppgaven: "Hvordan få folk med på endring?"

**Behandlingsansvarlig institusjon**
Norges teknisk-naturvitenskapelige universitet / Fakultet for samfunns- og utdanningsvitenskap (SU) / Institutt for psykologi

**Prosjektperiode**
01.08.2021 - 01.06.2022

Meldeskjema 🗗

| **Dato** | **Type** |
|---|---|
| 10.09.2021 | Standard |

**Kommentar**
Det er vår vurdering at behandlingen av personopplysninger i prosjektet vil være i samsvar med personvernlovgivningen så fremt den gjennomføres i tråd med det som er dokumentert i meldeskjemaet med vedlegg 10.09.2021. Behandlingen kan starte.

MELD VESENTLIGE ENDRINGER
Dersom det skjer vesentlige endringer i behandlingen av personopplysninger, kan det være nødvendig å melde dette til NSD ved å oppdatere meldeskjemaet. Før du melder inn en endring, oppfordrer vi deg til å lese om hvilke type endringer det er nødvendig å melde:

https://nsd.no/personvernombud/meld_prosjekt/meld_endringer.html

Du må vente på svar fra NSD før endringen gjennomføres.

TYPE OPPLYSNINGER OG VARIGHET
Prosjektet vil behandle alminnelige kategorier av personopplysninger frem til 01.06.2022.

LOVLIG GRUNNLAG
Prosjektet vil innhente samtykke fra de registrerte til behandlingen av personopplysninger. Vår vurdering er at prosjektet legger opp til et samtykke i samsvar med kravene i art. 4 og 7, ved at det er en frivillig, spesifikk, informert og utvetydig bekreftelse som kan dokumenteres, og som den registrerte kan trekke tilbake. Lovlig grunnlag for behandlingen vil dermed være den registrertes samtykke, jf. personvernforordningen art. 6 nr. 1 bokstav a.

PERSONVERNPRINSIPPER
NSD vurderer at den planlagte behandlingen av personopplysninger vil følge prinsippene i personvernforordningen om:

- lovlighet, rettferdighet og åpenhet (art. 5.1 a), ved at de registrerte får tilfredsstillende informasjon om og samtykker til behandlingen
- formålsbegrensning (art. 5.1 b), ved at personopplysninger samles inn for spesifikke, uttrykkelig angitte og berettigede formål, og ikke behandles til nye, uforenlige formål
- dataminimering (art. 5.1 c), ved at det kun behandles opplysninger som er adekvate, relevante og nødvendige for formålet med prosjektet
- lagringsbegrensning (art. 5.1 e), ved at personopplysningene ikke lagres lengre enn nødvendig for å oppfylle formålet

DE REGISTRERTES RETTIGHETER
Så lenge de registrerte kan identifiseres i datamaterialet vil de ha følgende rettigheter: åpenhet (art. 12), informasjon (art. 13), innsyn (art. 15), retting (art. 16), sletting (art. 17), begrensning (art. 18), underretning (art. 19), dataportabilitet (art. 20).
NSD vurderer at informasjonen om behandlingen som de registrerte vil motta oppfyller lovens krav til form og innhold, jf. art. 12.1 og art. 13.
Vi minner om at hvis en registrert tar kontakt om sine rettigheter, har behandlingsansvarlig institusjon plikt til å svare innen en måned.

FØLG DIN INSTITUSJONS RETNINGSLINJER
NSD legger til grunn at behandlingen oppfyller kravene i personvernforordningen om riktighet (art. 5.1 d), integritet og konfidensialitet (art. 5.1. f) og sikkerhet (art. 32).
Dersom du benytter en databehandler i prosjektet må behandlingen oppfylle kravene til bruk av databehandler jf art 28 og 29

Dersom du benytter en databehandler i prosjektet må behandlingen oppfylle kravene til bruk av databehandler, jf. art 28 og 29.

For å forsikre dere om at kravene oppfylles, må dere følge interne retningslinjer og/eller rådføre dere med behandlingsansvarlig institusjon.

OPPFØLGING AV PROSJEKTET
NSD vil følge opp ved planlagt avslutning for å avklare om behandlingen av personopplysningene er avsluttet.

Lykke til med prosjektet!
Tlf. Personverntjenester: 55 58 21 17 (tast 1)

**Appendix 2: Information letter for interview participants**

<div align="center">

# Vil du delta i forskningsprosjektet
## *"Hvordan få folk med på endring"*?

</div>

Dette forskningsprosjekt har som formål å kartlegge medvirkning, opplevelse av digitalisering og engasjement i endringsprosesser i bedriften. I dette skrivet gir vi deg informasjon om målene for prosjektet og hva deltakelse vil innebære for deg.

**Formål**
Formålet med dette prosjektet er å se hvordan medvirkning og engasjement påvirker endringsprosesser. I tillegg ønsker vi å undersøke opplevelsen rundt bruken av digitale verktøy i disse prosessene. Prosjektet tar i hovedsak for seg prosessen rundt bærekraftsprosjektet i bedriften, med formål om å ta inn FNs bærekraftsmål i bedriftens praksis.

Forskningen vil resultere i to masteroppgaver skrevet av studenter på master i arbeids- og organisasjonspsykologi ved NTNU.
Problemstillinger som skal undersøkes er "Hva fører til medvirkning og jobbengasjement i endringsprosesser? -Med fokus på bærekraft." og "Hvordan påvirkes medvirkning i endringsprosesser med bruken av digitale verktøy?"

**Hvem er ansvarlig for forskningsprosjektet?**
Førsteamanuensene Marit Christensen og Anne Iversen ved Institutt for Psykologi, NTNU, er ansvarlig for prosjektet.

Studentene Joakim Helle Olsen og Ingrid Simonette Moen, er medansvarlig for prosjektet.

**Hvorfor får du spørsmål om å delta?**
I dette prosjektet ønsker vi å intervjue medarbeidere, ledere og mellomledere i Kantega, som har vært involvert i bærekraftsprosjektet. Vi søker å intervjue mellom 10 og 15 personer totalt. Alle som er ansatt i Kantega vil få denne forespørselen om å delta av administrativ leder for bedriften.

**Hva innebærer det for deg å delta?**
- Hvis du velger å delta i prosjektet, innebærer det at du deltar i et 45-60 minutter langt intervju ledet av en av masterstudentene. Intervjuet spør om faktorer som medvirkning, engasjement, bruk av digitale verktøy og tar for seg prosessen rundt bærekraftprosjektet.
- Intervjusspørsmålene er tilpasset din arbeidstittel: medarbeider, leder eller tillitsvalgt/HR-ansvarlig.
- Under intervjuet vil det bli tatt lydopptak og notater.

**Det er frivillig å delta**
Det er frivillig å delta i prosjektet. Hvis du velger å delta, kan du når som helst trekke samtykket tilbake uten å oppgi noen grunn. Alle dine personopplysninger vil da bli slettet. Det vil ikke ha noen negative konsekvenser for deg hvis du ikke vil delta eller senere velger å trekke deg. Deltakelse i dette prosjektet vil ikke påvirke ditt forhold til arbeidsgiveren din.

**Ditt personvern – hvordan vi oppbevarer og bruker dine opplysninger**
Vi vil bare bruke opplysningene om deg til formålene vi har fortalt om i dette skrivet. Vi behandler opplysningene konfidensielt og i samsvar med personvernregelverket.
- Det er kun studentene og veiledere som vil ha tilgang til dine opplysninger.

- Navnet ditt og kontaktopplysningene dine vil bli erstattet med en kode som lagres på en egen navneliste adskilt fra øvrige data.
- Datamaterialet vil lagres på krypterte servere og bearbeides kun på datamaskiner som er tilknyttet NTNU.
- Deltakere vil ikke kunne gjenkjennes i publikasjonen. Personopplysninger som ansettelseskategoriene leder, tillitsvalgt/HR eller medarbeider, samt kjønn og alder, vil kunne benyttes i publikasjonen. Det vil ikke gis noen opplysninger om arbeidssted.

**Hva skjer med opplysningene dine når vi avslutter forskningsprosjektet?**
Opplysningene anonymiseres når oppgaven er godkjent, noe som etter planen er i juni 2022. Personopplysninger og lydopptak vil da bli slettet.

Dersom det blir aktuelt å benytte opplysningene i etterkant av mai 2022, for eksempel i forbindelse med oppfølgingsstudier, vil du som informant bli kontaktet i god tid for innhenting av nytt samtykke.

**Dine rettigheter**
Så lenge du kan identifiseres i datamaterialet, har du rett til:
- innsyn i hvilke personopplysninger som er registrert om deg, og å få utlevert en kopi av opplysningene,
- å få rettet personopplysninger om deg,
- å få slettet personopplysninger om deg, og
- å sende klage til Datatilsynet om behandlingen av dine personopplysninger.

**Hva gir oss rett til å behandle personopplysninger om deg?**
Vi behandler opplysninger om deg basert på ditt samtykke.

På oppdrag fra Institutt for Psykologi ved NTNU har NSD – Norsk senter for forskningsdata AS vurdert at behandlingen av personopplysninger i dette prosjektet er i samsvar med personvernregelverket.

**Hvor kan jeg finne ut mer?**
Hvis du har spørsmål til studien, eller ønsker å benytte deg av dine rettigheter, ta kontakt med:
- Institutt for Psykologi - NTNU ved [Marit Christensen, marit.christensen@ntnu.no], eller masterstudentene: Joakim Helle Olsen, joakiols@stud.ntnu.no eller Ingrid Simonette Moen, ingrid.moen@ntnu.no.
- Vårt personvernombud ved NTNU: Thomas Helgesen, thomas.helgesen@ntnu.no

Hvis du har spørsmål knyttet til NSD sin vurdering av prosjektet, kan du ta kontakt med:
- NSD – Norsk senter for forskningsdata AS på e-post (personverntjenester@nsd.no) eller på telefon: 55 58 21 17.

Med vennlig hilsen

| Marit Christensen | Joakim Helle Olsen | Ingrid Simonette Moen |
| Veileder | Student | Student |

-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------

# Samtykkeerklæring

Jeg har mottatt og forstått informasjon om prosjektet "Hvordan få folk med på endring?", og har fått anledning til å stille spørsmål. Jeg samtykker til:

☐ å delta i intervju

Jeg samtykker til at mine opplysninger behandles frem til prosjektet er avsluttet

----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------
(Signert av prosjektdeltaker, dato)

**Appendix 3: Interview guide – Key informant and leader**

# Intervjuguide nøkkelperson

Innledende spørsmål om personen:

1. Kan du fortelle litt kort om deg selv?

## Del 1 :

Om organisasjonen

- Hvordan vil du beskrive din arbeidsplass?
- Hva innebærer jobben din?
    - Hvordan har pandemien påvirket rollen din ?
- Hvordan vil du beskrive arbeidsmiljøet i bedriften?
    - Hvordan oppfatter du det at ansatte er konsulenter (ute hos eksterne) opp mot arb.miljø?
    - Silo vs åpenhet

Medvirkning

- Hvordan jobber dere med medvirkning?
    - Hvordan spiller eiermodellen deres inn her?
    - Organisasjonsstrukturen, demokratiet i bedriften generelt
- Hvordan jobber dere vanligvis med endringsprosesser?
    - Hvordan blir formålet ved endringer presentert?
    - Hvordan er kommunikasjonsflyten/informasjonsflyten i endringsprosessene?
    - Hvordan reagerer de ansatte?
- Hvordan fungerer lønnsmodellen?
- Hvordan blir medarbeideres meninger tatt med videre? (prosessen)
- Synes du at graden av medvirkning til dags i bedriften er tilstrekkelig?
    - Hvorfor/hvorfor ikke

Del 2:

Bærekraftprosjektet

- Hva er din rolle inn i prosjektet?
- Hva legger du/dere som initiativtakere i "bærekraft", hva er det for dere?
- Hvorfor er det viktig for bedriften å satse på?
- Hva er visjonen/intensjonen med endringsprosessen?
- Hvordan ble visjonen operasjonalisert? Hvordan gikk dere fram?
    - Hvordan ble det "solgt inn" til de ansatte?
    - Hvilken rolle har eksterne konsulenter hatt inn i dette prosjektet?
- Hvor sentralt var "bærekraft" i bedriften før prosjektet?
    - Følte du det var behov for at bedriften burde være mer bærekraftig?

- - Hvorfor det?
- Ifølge deg, hva er viktig for at ansatte skal føle at de har innflytelse i prosjektet?
    - Hvordan har dette fungert i praksis?

Digitale verktøy

- Hvordan har det digitale aspektet påvirket gjennomføringen av prosjektet?
    - Har det vært lettere eller vanskeligere, og hvorfor?
    - Ansattes engasjement?
    - De fleste mener det er lettere å holde fokus på agenda i digitale møter, mens fysiske møter er bedre for samhandling, hva tenker du?
- Workshop program (Figjam)
    - Hvordan oppfatter du at det fungerte?
    - Det kom også frem fra intervjuer at de ansatte opplever at informasjonen er lettere tilgjengelig når workshopen utføres online, men mer oversiktlig med fysisk workshop, hva tenker du om det?

Videre tanker

- På hvilken måte har prosjektet påvirket bedriften så langt?
    - Hva har vært bra, hva har vært dårlig?
    - Referanse til hva som har kommet frem fra intervjuer foreløpig
        - Til tross for høyt oppfattet engasjement i jobben, har det ikke fremstått noe endring i engasjement opp mot bærekraft etter prosjektet, refleksjoner?
        - Det er også tydelig at ulike roller ønsker å jobbe med bærekraft på forskjellige måter i organisasjonen, hva tenker du om det?
- Tror du det i større grad vil jobbes med bærekraft framover?
- Hva hadde du gjort dersom prosjektet skulle utføres på nytt?

Avslutning

- Er det noe mer du ønsker å tilføye på noen av temaene vi har snakket om?
- Er det noe jeg ikke har spurt om som du syns er relevant å nevne i denne sammenhengen?

**Appendix 4: Interview guide – Leaders**

# Intervjuguide ledere

Innledende spørsmål om personen:

1. Kan du fortelle litt kort om deg selv?
    a. Alder
    b. Kjønn
    c. Fartstid/erfaring i bedriften og ledererfaring?


Del 1:

Arbeidsoppgaver, arbeidshverdag

- Hvordan vil du beskrive din typiske arbeidshverdag?
    - Hva innebærer jobben din som leder?
        - Sammenlignet med andre lederjobber?
        - Hvordan har pandemien påvirket rollen din som leder?
    - Hvor mye bruker du digitale verktøy som en del av jobben?
        - Hva er det du bruker da? Programmer, utstyr, etc.
        - Hva med kommunikasjonsverktøy, og hva er dine tanker angående bruken av disse?
            - Hvordan påvirker digitale verktøy arbeidet ditt generelt?
- Hvordan vil du beskrive arbeidsmiljøet i bedriften?
    - Hvilket inntrykk får du av de ansatte?
    - Silo vs åpenhet


Engasjement

- Hva betyr jobbengasjement for deg?
- Hva engasjerer deg på jobb?
- Hva gir deg mening i arbeidet ditt?
    - Hva er grunnlaget for at du jobber med det du gjør?
- Utfordringer, krav?
- På hvilken måte engasjerer du deg i saker utenfor dine egne arbeidsoppgaver?
    - på eget initiativ?
- Hvordan oppfatter du engasjementet blant de ansatte?


Endringsprosesser

- Hvilken plass har endring i din arbeidshverdag?
    - Til hvilken grad er endring nødvendig?
    - Hvordan blir formålet ved endringer presentert?
        - Hvordan er kommunikasjonsflyten/informasjonsflyten i endringsprosessene?

- Hvordan reagerer de ansatte?

## Medvirkning

- Hva legger du i begrepet medvirkning/ altså "å medvirke"?
    - Vil du si at de ansatte opplever dette?
    - Hvordan påvirkes det av at alle er medeier?
    - Hvordan jobber dere med medvirkning?
- Hvor viktig er den gjennomsnittlige medarbeiders mening i beslutninger og prosesser i bedriften?
- Hvordan opplever du skillet mellom leder og ansatte i bedriften, generelt?
- Hvordan blir medarbeideres meninger tatt med videre? (prosessen)
- Synes du at graden av medvirkning til dags i bedriften er tilstrekkelig?
    - Hvorfor/hvorfor ikke

Del 2:

## Bærekraftprosjektet

- Hva legger du i bærekraft, hva er det for deg?
- Hvorfor er det viktig for bedriften å satse på?
- Hvor sentralt var "bærekraft" i bedriften før prosjektet?
    - Følte du det var behov for at bedriften burde være mer bærekraftig?
        - Hvorfor det?
- På hvilken måte har prosjektet påvirket bedriften så langt?
    - Hva har vært bra, hva har vært dårlig?
- Hvor stort utbytte tror du dette prosjektet vil gi?

## Medvirkning

- Hvordan har bærekraftprosjektet påvirket ansattes innflytelse/medvirkning i prosesser for bedriften?
    - På godt og vondt
- Hvilken rolle har eksterne aktører i dette prosjektet?
    - Hva skjer hvis/når de trekker seg ut?
- Ifølge deg, hva er viktig for at ansatte skal føle at de har innflytelse i prosjektet?
    - Hvor mye innflytelse har de fått?

## Engasjement

- Har du merket en endring i engasjementet rundt dette temaet etter oppstarten av prosjektet?
    - Ditt?
    - Ansattes?
- Dersom noen viste mindre engasjement, hvordan ble det ytret og tolket (av deg)?
- Har bevissthet rundt temaet økt etter prosjektstart?
    - På hvilken måte?
- Tror du det i større grad vil jobbes med bærekraft framover?
    - I så fall hvordan?

- På hvilken måte har et slikt prosjekt påvirket engasjementet generelt i bedriften?

Digitale verktøy

- Hva tenker du om bruken av teams for å gjennomføre møter?
    - Hvordan har det digitale aspektet påvirket gjennomføringen av prosjektet?
        - Har det vært lettere eller vanskeligere, og hvorfor?
        - Ansattes engasjement?
        - Sammenliknet med fysiske møter
- Workshop program (Figjam)
    - Hvorfor brukte dere denne løsningen?
    - Hvordan fungerte det?
    - Hva mener du er fordeler og ulemper i å bruke en slik digital workshop?


Avslutning

- Er det noe mer du ønsker å tilføye på noen av temaene vi har snakket om?
- Er det noe jeg ikke har spurt om som du syns er relevant å nevne i denne sammenhengen?

**Appendix 5: Interview guide – Safety-/Employee-represenatives**

# Intervjuguide Ansattrepresentant/verneombud

Innledende spørsmål om personen:

1. Kan du fortelle litt kort om deg selv?
   a. Alder
   b. Kjønn
   c. Fartstid/erfaring i bedriften?

Del 1:

Arbeidsoppgaver, arbeidshverdag

- Hvordan vil du beskrive bedriften som arbeidsplass?
  - Arbeidsmiljø?
  - Trivsel?
  - Silo vs åpenhet
- Hvordan vil du beskrive en typisk arbeidsdag?
  - Hvordan opplever du grad av selvstendighet/autonomi og samarbeid blant de ansatte?
    - Før/under pandemien
- Hvor mye benyttes digitale verktøy som en del av jobben?
  - Programmer, utstyr, etc.
  - Hva med som kommunikasjonsverktøy, og hva er dine tanker angående dette?
  - Hvordan påvirker digitale verktøy arbeidet i bedriften generelt?
    - Hva tenker du om bruken av teams/zoom for å gjennomføre møter?

Engasjement

- Hva betyr jobbengasjement for deg?
- Hvordan opplever du engasjementet blant dine medarbeidere?
  - Hvilke utfordringer ser du?

Endringsprosesser

- Hvilken plass har endring i arbeidshverdagen?
  - Hvordan er kommunikasjonsflyten/informasjonsflyten i disse prosessene?
    - Får ansatte den informasjonen de trenger?
    - Er formålet klart?
  - Hvordan går disse prosessene parallelt med opprinnelige arbeidsoppgaver?

Medvirkning

- Hva legger du i begrepet medvirkning/ altså "å medvirke"?
  - Hvordan jobber du med medvirkning i bedriften?

- Hvordan relaterer dette til hverdagen i bedriften?
- Hvordan tenker du at dette påvirkes av eiermodellen?
- Hva er din opplevelse av medvirkning mtp. beslutninger og prosesser i bedriften?
- I hvilke kontekster får man medvirket i bedriften?
- Hvordan opplever du skillet mellom ledelsen og ansatte i bedriften, generelt?
  - Hvor ofte føler du ledelsen ønsker innflytelse fra de ansatte i bedriften?
- Hva mener du er viktig for at ansatte skal oppleve innflytelse på jobb?
  - Hva kan ledelsen gjøre?
  - Hva kan HR/verneombud gjøre/hva gjør de nå?

Del 2:

Bærekraftprosjektet

- Hva legger du i bærekraft, hva er det for deg?
- Hva vet du om bærekraftprosjektet til bedriften, er dette noe du mener er viktig for bedriften å satse på?
- Hva har din rolle vært inn i prosjektet?
- Hvor sentralt var "bærekraft" i bedriften før prosjektets oppstart?
- Opplever du at prosjektet har påvirket de ansattes arbeidshverdag?
- Hvor stort utbytte tror du dette prosjektet vil gi?
  - Hva ser du for deg langtidseffekten vil være for bedriften/de ansatte?

Medvirkning

- Har bærekraftprosjektet endret graden av innflytelse/medvirkning i bedriften?
  - På godt og vondt
  - Oppfatter du at prosjektet kommer innenfra?
  - Hvordan er kommunikasjonsflyten/informasjonsflyten i prosjektet?
  - Er formålet med prosessen klart?
  - Hva kunne blitt gjort annerledes for at ansatte skal oppleve mer medvirkning i bærekraftprosjektet?

Engasjement

- Har du merket en endring i engasjementet blant de ansatte rundt bærekraft etter oppstarten av prosjektet?
  - Har bevisstheten rundt temaet økt etter prosjektstart?
  - På hvilken måte
- Tror du det i større grad vil jobbes med bærekraft framover?
  - I så fall hvordan?
- På hvilken måte prosjektet påvirket engasjementet generelt i bedriften?

Digitale verktøy

- Hvordan har det digitale aspektet påvirket deltakelsen i bærekraftprosjektet?
  - Har det vært lettere eller vanskeligere, og hvorfor?

- Engasjementet?
- Hva mener du burde gjøres for å møte utfordringene digitale verktøy bringer for de ansatte?

Avslutning

- Er det noe mer du ønsker å tilføye på noen av temaene vi har snakket om?
- Er det noe jeg ikke har spurt om som du syns er relevant å nevne i denne sammenhengen?

**Appendix 6: Interview guide – Employees**

# Intervjuguide medarbeidere

Innledende spørsmål om personen:

1. Kan du fortelle litt kort om deg selv?
   a. Alder
   b. Kjønn
   c. Fartstid/erfaring i bedriften?

Del 1:

Arbeidsoppgaver, arbeidshverdag

- Hvordan vil du beskrive en typisk arbeidsdag?
    - Grad av selvstendighet/autonomi og samarbeid med kolleger
        - Hvor mye jobber du selvstendig og styrer hverdagen selv?
        - Før/under pandemien
    - Hvor mye bruker du digitale verktøy som en del av jobben din?
        - Hva er det du bruker da? Programmer, utstyr, etc.
        - Hva med som kommunikasjonsverktøy, og hva er dine tanker angående dette?
        - Hvordan påvirker bruken av disse kommunikasjonsverktøy jobben din i bedriften, generelt?
- Hvordan vil du beskrive arbeidsplassen din?
    - Arbeidsmiljø?
    - Trivsel?
    - Silo vs åpenhet

Engasjement

- Hva betyr engasjement for deg?
- Hva engasjerer deg på jobb?
- Hva gir deg mening i arbeidet ditt?
    - Hva er grunnlaget for at du jobber med det du gjør?
- Utfordringer, krav?
- På hvilken måte engasjerer du deg i saker utenfor dine egne arbeidsoppgaver?
    - på eget initiativ?

Endringsprosesser

- Hvilken plass har endring i din arbeidshverdag?
    - Jobber du for det meste med de samme oppgavene/har det vært lite eller mye endring på disse?
    - Hvordan er kommunikasjonsflyten/informasjonsflyten i disse prosessene? Får du informasjonen du trenger?
    - Er formålet med endringen klart?
    - Hvordan går disse prosessene parallelt med dine opprinnelige arbeidsoppgaver?

- Hvordan mener du bedriften forholder seg til endringer?
    - Readiness for change

Medvirkning

- Hva legger du i begrepet medvirkning/ altså "å medvirke"?
    - Hvordan relaterer dette til din arbeidshverdag?
    - Hvordan påvirkes dette av at du er medeier?
- I hvilke kontekster får du medvirket?
- Opplevelse av medvirkning ift. beslutninger og prosesser i bedriften?
    - Til hvilken grad føler du at du har en viktig rolle i beslutninger som påvirker bedriften?
- Hvordan opplever du skillet mellom ledelsen og ansatte i bedriften, generelt?
    - Hvor ofte føler du ledelsen ønsker din innflytelse?
- Hva mener du er viktig for at du skal oppleve innflytelse på jobb?
    - Hva kan ledelsen gjøre isåfall?
    - Hvordan opplever du at de løsningene du foreslår ikke blir den endelige løsningen?

Del 2:

Bærekraftprosjektet

- Hva legger du i bærekraft, hva er det for deg?
- Hva vet du om bærekraftprosjektet, er dette noe du mener er viktig for bedriften å satse på?
- Hvor sentralt var "bærekraft" i din arbeidshverdag før prosjektet?
    - Mener du dette var tilstrekkelig?
- På hvilken måte har prosjektet påvirket din arbeidshverdag?
- Hvor stort utbytte tror du dette prosjektet vil gi?
    - Hva ser du for deg langtidseffekten vil være for bedriften, for deg?

Medvirkning

- Hvordan har bærekraftprosjektet påvirket din opplevelse av innflytelse/medvirkning i prosesser for bedriften?
    - På godt og vondt
    - Oppfatter du at prosjektet kommer innenfra?
    - Hvordan er kommunikasjonsflyten/informasjonsflyten i prosjektet?
        - Får du informasjonen du trenger?
        - Er formålet med prosessen klart?
    - Hva kunne blitt gjort annerledes for at dere får mer innflytelse i bærekraftprosjektet?
        - Fra lederens side
        - Eksterne aktører
        - Digitalt vs. fysisk?

Engasjement

- Har du merket en endring i engasjementet ditt rundt dette temaet etter oppstarten av prosjektet?
    - Har din bevissthet rundt temaet økt etter prosjektstart?
    - På hvilken måte
- Tror du du i større grad vil jobbe med bærekraft framover?

- I så fall hvordan?
- På hvilken måte har et slikt prosjekt påvirket ditt engasjement generelt på jobb?

Digitale verktøy

- Hvordan påvirker bruken av digitale verktøy deltakelsen i prosjektet?
    - Hva tenker du om bruken av teams for å gjennomføre møter?
    - Digital workshop (figjam tavlen)?
        - Har det vært lettere eller vanskeligere, og hvorfor?
        - Føler du at du har mer innflytelse i digitale eller fysiske møter?
        - Engasjementet ditt?

Avslutning

- Er det noe mer du ønsker å tilføye på noen av temaene vi har snakket om?
- Er det noe jeg ikke har spurt om som du syns er relevant å nevne i denne sammenhengen?

**Appendix 7: Stage 1 of generating initial themes**

Research question: How can organizations ensure involvement and influence in a change process, marked by using digital solutions?

| Main themes | Subthemes |
|---|---|
| Technology essential but flawed | Information exchange |
| | Interpersonal aspects |
| | Practicality |
| | Mental considerations |
| Personal agency | People are different |
| | Win-win helping others |
| | Engagement |
| Attitude to change | Change is the reality |
| | Internal change |
| | Sustainability already well-anchored |
| | Change efficacy |
| Structure facilitates | Ownership model |
| | Democratic processes |
| | Team spirit |
| Role of the leader | Decision making |
| | Coach for the employee |
| | Letting it happen bottom-up |
| Process planning on internal measures | Different ways to work with sustainability |
| | Things take time |
| | Lack of access to information |

**Appendix 8: Stage 2, of reviewing and developing themes**

Research question: How can organizations ensure involvement and influence in a change process?

| Main themes | Subthemes |
|---|---|
| Structure facilitates | Ownership and autonomy |
| | Democratic processes |
| | It isnt us and them, its us |
| Personal agency | People are different |
| | Win-win helping others |
| | Engagement |
| Attitude to change | Change happening inside and out |
| | Change efficacy |
| Role of the leader | Decision making |
| | Empower the people |
| | Letting it happen bottom-up |
| Process planning on internal measures | Structure and framework |
| | Participation |
| | Things take time |
| | Communicating information |

**Appendix 9: Stage 3, of refining, defining and naming themes**

Research question: How does the framework of a self-managing organization influence employee motivation to participate in decision-making?

| Main themes | Subthemes |
|---|---|
| Owners of a flat structure | Ownership and autonomy |
| | Democratic processes |
| | It isn't us and them, it's us |
| Role of the leader | Decision making |
| | Empower the people |
| | Letting it happen bottom-up |
| Internal participatory processes | Structure and framework |
| | Participation |
| | Things take time |
| | Communicating information |
| Personal agency | People are different |
| | Win-win helping others |
| | Engagement |

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