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Master Thesis

New ways of working in high-tech consulting start-ups - How investing in employees returns with yield

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Abstract

The consulting industry is gradually evolving, although it is still characterised by commission-based salaries, high levels of competition, and turnover. This paper documents an investigation into the three unconventional high-tech consulting start-ups Blank, Fink and Variant, and how they manage the work environment to foster work engagement and retain their employees in the digital era. Moreover, we strived to explore how these companies challenge conventional consulting business models. In order to investigate these aspect, the research was based on a comparative case study, allowing us to get an in-depth analysis of their internal human resource and organisational practices through the informants' opinions, perceptions, and behaviours. As a result, this research has discovered a number of beneficial outcomes related to the innovative mentality and incorporation of work practices revolved around the employees. Consequently, our research implies that investing in employees returns with yield.

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1.0 Introduction

Why study the organisational practices of high-tech consulting startups?

The technology industry is flourishing, and technology contributes to changing the way we work and communicate in a workplace (Flanding, Grabman & Cox, 2019). In December 2019, the list of the top 10 most valuable companies by market capitalisation in the world included seven tech-companies, such as Apple Inc., Microsoft, Facebook, and Google (Duffin, 2019). In contrast, the top 10 list consisted of companies from the car, oil and steel industry in 1955, and mainly car manufacturers in 1990 (Fortune, n.d.). Despite these numbers, according to a recent turnover report conducted by LinkedIn, the technology sector had the highest turnover rate out of all business sectors in 2017 (Booz, 2018). For the tech industry, low salaries, toxic work environments, and employee mistreatment are reported as the main drivers for turnover (Scott, Klein & Onovakpuri, 2017). In addition, issues with retaining tech talent are argued to be due to the high demand for tech competencies, a lack of qualified high-tech professionals, and an increase in high-paying job vacancies, leading top talent to pursue new opportunities elsewhere (Booz, 2018; Johnson, 2018). According to Thomson (n.d), top talents is also concerned with career advancement opportunities, leading them to apply for companies who offer such opportunities.

Furthermore, The Financial Times has reported that the consulting industry is also facing significant levels of turnover (Batchelor, 2011). This may be partially explained by the 'up or out' policy used, requiring employees to fight for promotion or leave the company, which is commonly regarded as the industry standard (Batchelor, 2011). In addition to the high levels of competition, employees may seek out other companies or self-employment opportunities as a result of factors such as the work style, lack of transparency, and commission-based pay (Booz, 2018; Grandre, 2019). The consultancy profession enables individuals to work with a wide range of projects and clients, however, every job is temporary and involves that they frequently change employer, and some may desire a more permanent contract (Newton, 2010). Moreover, the lack of transparency may be partially explained by the industry in itself, as firms in knowledge-intensive industries have traditionally enhanced their competitive advantage by deliberately protecting expert knowledge (Gattnar et al., 2014).

The reasons why high turnover rates are of concern, is because it brings about increased costs related to severance pay, recruitment processes, employee training, and a lack of continuity (Blacklock, 2015). As a result, consulting companies have become increasingly concerned with resolving the drivers of turnover, in addition to cultivating a work environment that leads to employee retention (Consultancy.uk, 2018; James & Mathew, 2012). Despite companies taking action by raising salaries and expanding opportunities for career development, research indicates that such initiatives are inadequate to deal with the retention rates alone (Top-Consultant.com, 2005). Several studies report that consultants themselves desire to be more involved with the engagements they are assigned, receive better work training, sufficient opportunities for career growth, and regular, informal communication and feedback from managers (Consultancy.uk, 2018).

Subsequently, employee retention moves beyond tangible assets, where the psychological climate and employee well-being are crucial constituents (Johnson, 2018; Brusseau, 2011; Johnson, 2005). As a result, numerous organisations have to re-evaluate and change their workplace facilities and practices, in order to meet the needs of a more demographically diverse and demanding workforce, and to retain their employees (Davis, Leach & Clegg, 2011; Laing, 2006).

1.1 Research question

Specifically, the industry in the intersection between high-tech and consulting is interesting to study as research in this field is scarce. This may be due to a number of factors, such as the industry being novel and the pace of technological development, swiftly leading the existing research to be out of date (Booz, 2018). Moreover, we were interested in finding out more about the underlying reasons for the high turnover rates and how one can manage for employee engagement and retention. We were also interested in investigating the combination of high-tech companies and the different workplace practices managers leverage to get employees to work in such dynamic ways. Consequently, we came across three Norwegian high-tech consulting start-ups that appeared to have a different approach to running their business in comparison to conventional consulting firms. In these companies, the employees seemed committed and social at work, and by investigating their web-pages we came across several practices that

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appeared unusual in business as a whole, thus we wanted to investigate this further.

Initially, we were unsure about how to best capture the factors that contributed to add value to the employees, but as soon as we started reading up on the companies, we realised that the work environment was at the centre. The reason why we wanted to investigate the work environment is due to its supposedly positive effects on work engagement (Gruman & Saks, 2011; Rich, LePine & Crawford, 2010; Schaufeli & Bakker, 2010). Furthermore, the reason why we wanted to investigate start-ups is not related to the term in itself, but that newly established companies tend to have an innovative mentality and are relatively small in size (Soni, 2019). We wanted to investigate the workplace practices that were implemented in the three companies to secure employee commitment and motivation. Subsequently, we aspired to gain insight on how one can utilise creativity and re-thinking to attract, motivate, and retain qualified personnel in a competitive industry. On the basis of these arguments, our research question is as follows:

> *"How do unconventional high-tech consulting start-ups manage the work environment to foster work engagement and retain employees?"*

Further, we have developed a sub-question on the basis of findings we believe will arise from this research:

> *"How do these high-tech consulting start-ups challenge conventional consulting business models?"*

Due to a fast-changing world of business, new ways of running consulting firms are becoming increasingly common (Buono et al., 2014). There is a blooming focus on collaborative processes, employee development opportunities, and building long-term relationships of trust between the client and the consultant (Buono et al., 2014). Further, high-tech companies have since its origin leveraged experimentations to unlock business opportunities, and worked in a dynamic manner to keep pace with the cutting edge technology and daily tasks they are faced with (Flanding et al., 2019). Hence, a lot of lessons can be subtracted from these companies, with employees being identified by a willingness to change and a mindset revolved around continually seeking ways to improve. Subsequently,

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we figure that these qualities are transferable to smarter ways of working and running business. Further, our research on such innovative firms might enable conventional firms to revise traditional structures and practices.

In order to investigate our research question, we have incorporated a theoretical framework related to the development of engagement and satisfaction at work, and the creation of a positive work environment. Consequently, our theories and research topics revolve around the most commonly reported drivers to work engagement and retention, namely motivation, growth opportunities, transparency, the psychological climate, and the physical work environment (Morgan, 2017; Ind, 2010; Schaufeli & Bakker, 2010; Rich et al., 2010; James & James, 1989). Furthermore, the above-mentioned alternatives were chosen because we wanted to limit the scope of relevant data to provide an in-depth study, and to appropriately address our research question, as there were limitations related to time and data collection opportunities.

1.2 Outline of the thesis

The purpose of this research was to contribute to this field with a qualitative investigation of how the work environment contributes to work engagement among employees, thus increasing the employee retention rate. Subsequently, we will start off with a theoretical review where we will present key theories from the field of investigation, separated into three subcategories related to the work environment, -engagement, and employee retention. This is followed by the methodology section, where we present the research strategy, framework, and methods used to gather and interpret data, in addition to ethical considerations and assessment of the quality of the study. Then we present our findings, which are separated into five subcategories, and discuss the results in light of the theoretical framework. Lastly, we elaborate on implications and opportunities for future research, and conclude our research.

2.0 Theoretical Framework

Key theories to unravel the causes of work engagement and retention

In the following chapter, we present and elaborate on an applicable and relevant theoretical framework revolved around the work environment, engagement, and employee retention. The first couple of sections are devoted to conceptualising work environment and work engagement, in addition to the practical implications of disengaged- and engaged employees in the setting of an organisation. The second part of this section, on the other hand, is concerned around key determinants of work engagement. Here, we included key points summing up the main content of each theory, denoted by 'K', in order to make it easier to compare the theoretical framework with our findings through the comparative case study approach in the discussion part of the thesis. Finally, an untangling of the concept known as company loyalty is presented.

2.1 The hallmarks of a positive work environment

According to Schaufeli and Bakker (2010), *psychological climate* is conceptualised as an employees perception of the work environment, and the *work environment* is referred to as the psychological factors, organisation of the work, and physical surroundings, in addition to how these factors affect the employees' loyalty towards the company (see Figure 1). It is a comprehensive concept that incorporates all of the surroundings an individual is faced with when working and affects how an employee feels about the work they do. The *psychological aspects* of the work environment include, for instance, co-worker relations, perceived safety, and workplace well-being (Halbesleben, 2010; McLoughlin & Miura, 2008; May, Gilson & Harter, 2004). *Work organisation*, on the other hand, refers to aspects such as task allocation and levels of autonomy (Halbesleben, 2010; Macey & Schneider, 2008). Furthermore, the *physical work environment* is conceptualised as the physical attributes of a workspace like decorations and office layout, in addition to factors such as noise levels and office lighting (Morgan, 2017; Higgins & McAllaster, 2004).

Figure 1. *The constituents of the work environment. Source: Schaufeli and Bakker (2010).*
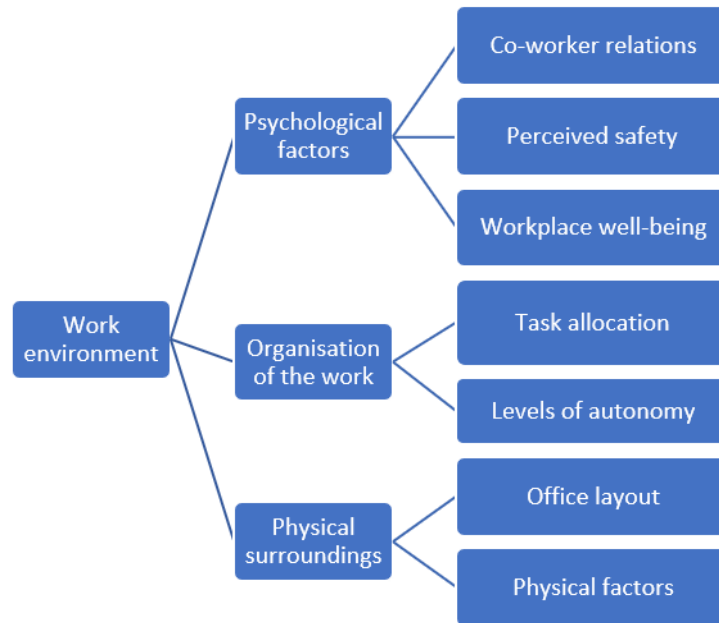
Since the beginning of the 21st century, there has been an increased number of studies and focus on empirical research related to the positive work environment (Schaufeli, 2007). This is due to the discovery that a cut-throat environment is harmful to productivity over time, and that positive factors contribute to increased business performance, and benefits both the employers and employees (Schaufeli, 2007). In essence, considerable research highlights that the development of a positive work environment is ideal with regards to cultivating satisfaction and employee engagement (Gruman & Saks, 2011; Halbesleben, 2010; Rich et al., 2010; Schaufeli & Bakker, 2010). A *positive work environment* includes characteristics such as support, feedback, open communication, and a strong team spirit. On the contrary, a *negative work environment* can lead to poor communication, lower morale and productivity.

Thus, it is evident that characteristics of the work environment can be a contributor to both positive and negative outcomes, and it is therefore reasonable to aspire towards developing and sustaining a positive work environment. Subsequently, it is essential that employers have a broad understanding of the different dimensions of the work environment, its impact on engagement, and the practical implications of employee engagement.

2.2 Feeling engaged at work

Work engagement as a term was first introduced in 1990 by William Kahn and is closely related to concepts such as commitment, enthusiasm, involvement, and focused effort (Schaufeli & Salanova, 2014; Kahn, 1990). Since then, it has been widely used in academic literature, however, it may be difficult to grasp as there are inconsistent descriptions and interpretations of the term among practitioners (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2010).

According to Kahn (1990), *work engagement* is conceptualised as an employees' willingness to wholly dedicate oneself emotionally, cognitively, and physically in the work they are conducting. Corporate Leadership Council (2004), on the other hand, describes engagement as the degree to which employees devote time and effort in the company to something or someone, and the time they remain in one place as a result of that commitment. In general, most practitioners and scholars acknowledge that it is the antipode of burnout, due to being characterised by commitment, enthusiasm, and captivation (Bakker & Leiter, 2010; Schaufeli & Bakker, 2010; Schaufeli & Salanova, 2007).

As mentioned above, there is ambiguity connected to the term due to various definitions and applications. Subsequently, this thesis defines that work engagement reflects a high degree of involvement in the work and implies that the employees focus their efforts (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2010). In addition, engaged employees experience a mental state of flow where they have a higher level of concentration and their sense of time is altered (Csikszentmihalyi, 2014). According to Schmettow and Drees (2014), work engagement is also related to achievement motivation in the technology sector, where a common personality trait of computer enthusiasts is the need for recognition of their expertise. Despite these outcomes, it does not necessarily imply that employees who exude high levels of engagement have an impulse to work an excessive amount of working hours (Sonnentag et al., 2008).

2.2.1 The practical implications of engagement

In general, an average person will spend a significant amount of time at work over a lifetime. Some employees experience feeling focused, engrossed, and enthusiastic about their work, whereas others may experience a level of

disengagement, lack enthusiasm, and absenteeism (Ind, 2010). According to Bakker et al. (2008), engaged employees emanate more energy, are passionate about their work, and experience that time passes quickly due to being completely immersed. Disengaged employees, on the other hand, are perceived to have lower productivity as a result of higher absenteeism, further leading to higher costs for the organisation (Ind, 2010). Thus, companies that on average have employees with higher levels of engagement are prone to experience higher levels of employee retention, productivity, and organisational performance (Ind, 2010; Bakker & Leiter, 2010; Wagner & Harter, 2006). Subsequently, work engagement has gained considerable attention due to the beneficial outcomes and organisations are increasingly demanding employees to engage through being proactive and committing to high performance levels (Bakker & Leiter, 2010; Salanova, Agut & Peiró, 2005).

2.2.2 The determinants of work engagement

According to Robertson-Smith (2007), a one-size-fits-all approach to work engagement is improbable to be effective. Subsequently, there is not an explicit all-purpose list with the determinants of work engagement as the factors are interrelated and vary depending on the organisation, the employees, and the work itself. As a result, we will further demonstrate eight determinants, who are perceived to be the most prominent and commonly reported drivers to work engagement, which have been summed up into key points.

Work motivation

Starting off, employees who experience a high degree of motivation at work are according to research more likely to be committed, engaged, enthusiastic, and make a greater contribution (Rich et al., 2010; Parker et al., 2003; Baltes, 2001). Furthermore, individual differences, such as knowledge, interests, and previous experiences, have an influence on an employee's ability to engage in their work (Kular et al., 2008; Humphrey, Nahrgang & Morgeson, 2007). Subsequently, an employee's engagement levels may vary due to the dissimilar traits of extrinsic- and intrinsic motivation (Rich et al., 2010; Ryan & Deci, 2000). Particular features of the work, such as salary growth, are motivating on an *extrinsic* level, as it contributes to the achievement of work goals (Bakker & Leiter, 2010; Ryan & Deci, 2000). In contrast, *intrinsic motivation* emerges from internal factors such as

perceived learning opportunities and mastery, which in turn may influence engagement and the degree to which an employee is willing to utilise their energy in a task (Christian, Garza & Slaughter, 2011; Macey & Schneider, 2008). For instance, a study of R&D employees within three high-tech companies revealed that employees with higher levels of congruence between themselves and the organisation, beyond external rewards, experience higher levels of self-driven work motivation (Saether, 2019).

K1: *Work motivation is positively related to engagement levels.*

Opportunities for growth

An employees impression of professional growth opportunities within the firm is another key predictor to individual work engagement levels and the intent to stay (Gruman & Saks, 2011; Schaufeli & Salanova, 2007; Saks, 2006). This implies that firms who have highly engaged employees are most likely investing company resources on employee growth opportunities. For instance, this can be achieved by enabling employees development and capacity building (Anitha, 2014). Furthermore, Gruman and Saks (2011) emphasise two psychologically beneficial outcomes of enabling employees to further educate themselves. Namely, a sense of accessibility to completely engage in their job and an increased feeling of confidence in abilities needed in their position, which might in succession lead to lower anxiety levels (Gruman & Saks, 2011).

K2: *Growth opportunities have a positive impact on individual work engagement levels.*

Transparency

A company culture characterised by transparency may contribute to foster higher levels of trust, satisfaction, engagement, and performance (Schnackenberg & Tomlinson, 2014; Ind, 2010; Vogelgesang & Lester, 2009). Despite this, transparency is difficult to conceptualise as it faces imprecise and various interpretations among scholars and practitioners (Parris et al., 2016; Schnackenberg & Tomlinson, 2014). Parris et al. (2016) suggests that transparency is defined as the corporate stakeholders' perception of how forthright, truthful, and open the company is about its information, decision-

making process, and various operations. Moreover, internally transparent organisations display openness through sharing information within and across divisions and teams (Vogelgesang & Lester, 2009). Subsequently, research suggests that transparency is necessary in order to foster trustworthiness, credibility, and accountability, in addition to reducing employee dissatisfaction (Parris et al., 2016; Schnackenberg & Tomlinson, 2014).

K3: *Corporate transparency has a notable positive effect on employee engagement.*

Psychological climate

The psychological climate has a significant effect on individual performance, work attitudes, satisfaction, and motivation (Parker et al., 2003; Baltes, 2001). Moreover, a display of factors such as cooperation, openness, inclusiveness, and support from peers in the workplace fosters a sense of belongingness, fulfilment, and safety, including the physical aspect security, which are positively related to work engagement (Bakker & Leiter, 2010; Halbesleben, 2010; Saks, 2006; Parker et al., 2003; Albrechtsen, 2003). In work environments characterised by supportiveness, employees feel less reluctant to experiment, change practices, and contribute (Anitha, 2014; Kahn, 1990). This is due to the fact that it contributes to foster a feeling of safety, where the employees feel there are opportunities for them to voice their concerns and dare to try out new things.

Several frameworks have outlined the dimensions of the psychological climate, and one of the most prominent and widely recognised is the one suggested by James and James (1989). In this framework, the psychological climate is measured on four dimensions: leader support and facilitation, role stress and lack of harmony, job challenge and autonomy, and workgroup cooperation, warmth, and friendliness, which are displayed in Figure 2. As illustrated below, the key dimensions are depicted in dark blue, whereas the light blue boxes are the inherent sub factors that contribute to an individual's perception of the work environment. Subsequently, through understanding these, one can gain insight into how one can contribute to foster a positive psychological climate (Cotterill, 2012; James & James, 1989).

Figure 2. *A hierarchical model of meaning. Source: James and James, 1989.*
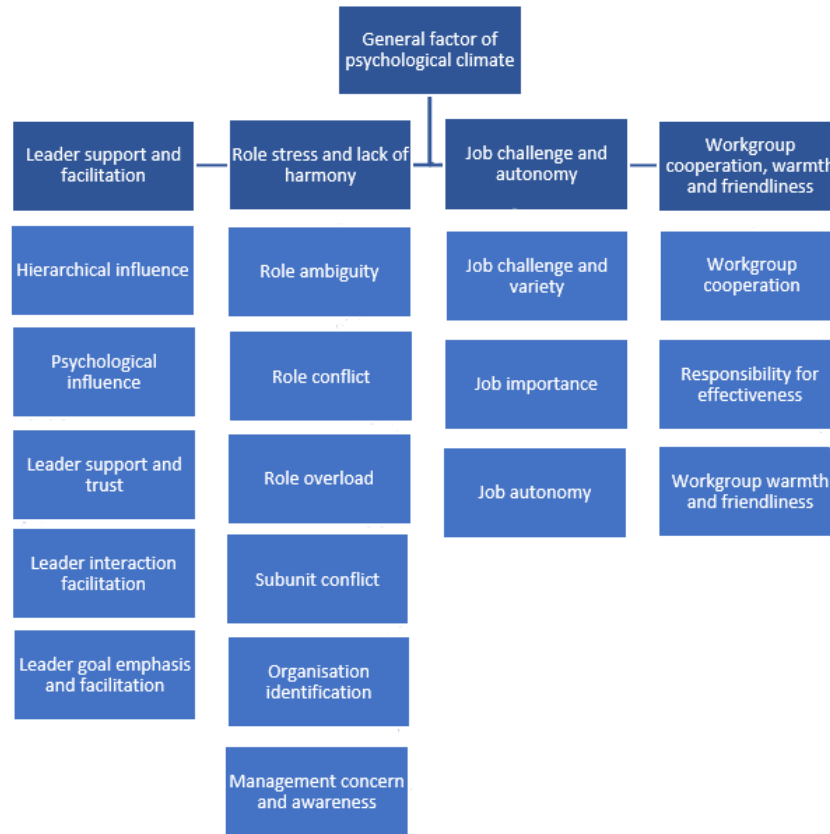
Leader support and facilitation. Several researchers suggest the characteristics of the leader as another key determinant to work engagement (McLoughlin & Miura, 2008; Halbesleben, 2010; James & James, 1989). Concerning the attributes of the leader, research suggests that inspiring-, authentic-, and supportive leadership affects work engagement levels through increasing contentment, involvement, and enthusiasm for work (Christian et al., 2011; Schneider et al., 2009). In addition, Macey and Schneider (2008) argue that leaders can positively influence work engagement levels by setting clear expectations, recognising achievements, providing feedback, and through being fair-minded, as it brings about a sense of bond to the work. Furthermore, James and James (1989) argue that aspects such as hierarchical influence, psychological influence, and leader goal emphasis and facilitation may affect the psychological climate, thus work engagement levels. To illustrate, Kautz and Bjerknes (2015) investigated why four dedicated IT-consultants decided to terminate their labour agreement. Findings indicated that it was caused by emotional aspects such as perceived job insecurity, low trust towards management practices, and not feeling

appreciated for their human qualities, but rather recognised for their ability to bill clients (Kautz & Bjerknes, 2015).

K4: *Leadership support and facilitation positively affects work engagement levels.*

Role stress and lack of harmony. According to research, aspects such as perceived stress, harmony, and clarity are also predictors to individual work engagement and intent to stay (Crawford et al., 2014; Christian et al., 2011; James & James, 1989). In order to reduce stress and enhance the sense of harmony, the manager needs to increase role clarity, secure feedback from team members regarding management processes, identification with the organisation, and manage subunit conflicts within the team effectively (Moen et al., 2016; Cotterill, 2012; James & James, 1989). Another aspect of the job characteristics that influence perceived levels of stress is workload, which may be explained as the amount of work an employee is expected to perform within a given timespan (Crawford et al., 2014). Specifically, an employee may experience a state of flow when there is an alignment between their capacity, skills, and the challenge at hand (Csikszentmihalyi, 2014; Nakamura & Csikszentmihalyi, 2002). However, if the size of a challenge is too great and the employee does not possess the necessary skills to do the work, it may result in distress, lack of control, and a decline in task performance (Csikszentmihalyi, 2014; Christian et al., 2011). On the contrary, an employee may experience boredom and disengagement if they are overqualified for a job (Csikszentmihalyi, 2014).

K5: *Perceived alignment between skills and work has a positive impact on work engagement levels.*

Job challenge and autonomy. According to research, job characteristics, such as autonomy and task variety, -complexity and -workload, are theoretically grounded to be contributors to motivation and work engagement (Macey & Schneider, 2008; Saks, 2006; James & James, 1989). With regards to *autonomy*, employees who face high degrees of freedom and flexibility in their work report higher levels of productivity, a greater sense of accountability and well-being, and they feel valued at work (Johnson, 2005; Halbesleben, 2010; Wheatley, 2017). Another characteristic is *task variety*, also known as the degree to which an

employee is required to possess a different set of abilities and skills in order to perform the duties of their position (Christian et al., 2011; Macey & Schneider, 2008). Salanova and Schaufeli (2008) argue that when employees experience a feeling of being stuck in a pattern where they are performing a repetitive set of monotonous tasks, and feel the need to make a change, they tend to become disengaged. Subsequently, by providing employees with enough task variety, and allowing employees to utilise different skills, one can enhance the degree to which an employee is engaged.

K6: *Autonomy and task variety lead to strengthened work engagement levels.*

Workgroup cooperation, warmth, and friendliness. Another aspect of the psychological climate that contributes to work engagement is the characteristics of the social environment and co-worker relations (McLoughlin & Miura, 2008; Halbesleben, 2010; James & James, 1989). More specific, Schulte, Ostroff and Kinicki (2006) suggest that communication and repeated social interactions are factors that positively affect individual engagement levels by influencing individual perceptions of the work environment. Subsequently, through fostering warmth and friendliness within the team, in addition to distributing workload among the employees for effectiveness and cooperation, it contributes to cultivate a positive workgroup environment (James & James, 1989). Furthermore, the organisation of the team in terms of size and structure, as well as policies, practices, and procedures used to establish a basis for common perceptions, contributes to the development of a positive psychological climate (Schulte et al., 2006).

K7: *The perceived social environment notably affects individual engagement levels.*

Physical work environment
The physical work environment is another key predictor to work engagement and satisfaction, and refers to the physical surroundings at work such as decorations, lighting, equipment, venue, and office spaces (Morgan, 2017; Davis et al., 2011; Lee & Brand, 2005). As a result, numerous organisations and high-tech companies, such as Amazon, Deloitte, and Microsoft, are investing millions of

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dollars to create a well-designed and fun workspace for the employees (Morgan, 2017). Consequently, the physical workplace is a cultural artefact that provides deeper insight into the company resources that can be utilised to cultivate commitment and engagement in the workplace (Higgins & McAllaster, 2004; Schein, 2010).

Furthermore, employees who work in well-designed physical environments often experience pride, satisfaction, and joy towards their office space (Morgan, 2017; Davis et al., 2011). In fact, Morgan (2017) suggests that the physical environment is a part of the key environments that contribute to the employee experience, as it accounts to 30 % of the experience. Further, he suggests that organisations need to focus on four major characteristics to create a great physical environment for employees, namely 'Choosing to bring in friends or visitors', 'Offers flexibility', 'Organisation's values are reflected', and 'Leverages multiple workspace options'. Through enabling the employees to bring friends or visitors to the workplace, it contributes to foster a greater sense of community, transparency, and openness. Research shows that these organisations tend to have more focus on overall well-being of the employees and that it contributes to drive innovation (Morgan, 2017). Further, through flexible workplace arrangements, such as a home office or co-working spaces, it improves high-tech employees' well-being and increase job satisfaction, in addition to lowering burnout rates (Morgan, 2017; Moen et al., 2016).

Moreover, the organisational values need to be incorporated and reflected in the physical environment in order to hold real value and support aspirations. Finally, a company should leverage multiple workspace options, such as a combination of break areas, conference rooms, and silent rooms, in order to increase performance and satisfaction. Organisations that commit to this framework understand how employees work, and design workspaces to reflect those ways, contributing to an overall positive employee experience. Subsequently, a well-designed workspace may contribute to the employees feeling more creative, engaged, and connected to their company (Morgan, 2017; Lee & Brand, 2005).

K8: *Attributes of the physical environment positively affects work engagement.*

As illustrated below in Figure 3, there are a significant number of factors that may contribute to affect individual engagement levels and satisfaction at work. Specifically, we delved into the individual differences in motivation, employees' perception of opportunities for development and growth, openness regarding company information, and support from management. Further, we covered aspects regarding an employees perceived alignment between capacities and work, opportunities to make their own decisions, and whether the tasks are sufficiently challenging and varied. Besides these factors, the perceived social environment and physical work environment will also have an influence on satisfaction and ability to engage at work, and capability to sustain a positive work environment and retain employees.

Figure 3. *Determinants of work engagement.*

2.3 Employee retention

In this section, we will delve into a concept that also play a significant role in employee retention rates, namely company loyalty. *Employee retention* is regarded as the efforts an organisation exert to generate an engaging environment for the employees and involves encouraging employees to remain in the organisation long-term (James & Mathew, 2012).

Company loyalty

According to Brusseau (2011), there are two types of company loyalty, namely narrow company loyalty and broad company loyalty. The *narrow company loyalty* is related to an employee's willingness to stay with a company instead of searching for a job elsewhere (Brusseau, 2011). Despite this, the traditional work contract of trading long-term job security with hard work and loyalty has decreased in magnitude (Robinson, 1996). The nature of the employer-employee relationship has undergone a fundamental shift, where employees no longer expect, nor desire, to work for the same company for decades (Johnson, 2005). Part of the rationale behind this shift is due to the fact that numerous employers dismiss employees if it is in the company's interest and today's workers desire to move on to a new job if it is better or enables them to take on new challenges (Brusseau, 2011). The *broad company loyalty*, on the other hand, concerns an employees' willingness to sacrifice personal benefits, such as income, leisure time, and personal relationships, confident that it serves a greater purpose in the organisation (Brusseau, 2011). In order to be willing to sacrifice, the employee must sense attachment to the organisation beyond concrete non-instrumental interests.

Furthermore, Brusseau (2011) argues that there are three levels of dedication related to company loyalty, namely obedience loyalty, balanced loyalty, and free agency. *Obedience loyalty* describes a situation where the employee has a high willingness to sacrifice and exists to serve the company's interests (Brusseau, 2011). On the contrary, *free agency* is characterised by an absence of loyalty, where employees' find value in the organisations only to serve their own interests (Brusseau, 2011). *Balanced loyalty*, on the other hand, is more frequently observed, where the employees and organisations share interests, and the employee is willing to make sacrifices for the organisation, but only to a certain extent to preserve the value of personal life and aspirations (Brusseau, 2011). According to Johnson (2005), this is the preferred type of loyalty, as both parties in the employer-employee relationship are benefiting.

Thus, in order to increase the probability of employees staying in the companies, one should ensure that they are engaged and satisfied. Further, it involves developing a sort of loyalty that is sustainable, where the employees have an

attachment to the companies beyond the instrumental variables. One can also see that there has been a shift in attitude, and that today's employees are more interested in achieving a work-life balance.

3.0 Research methodology

This chapter starts off by describing and justifying our choice of research strategy. Further, we will explain why we selected the comparative case study research design, and how we ended up with investigating the three companies; Blank, Fink and Variant. We then present the methods utilised in the collection and analysis of data to reach our findings. Lastly, we elaborate on the ethical considerations, and conduct an assessment of the quality of our business research.

3.1 Research strategy

The research strategy may be conceptualised as the overall orientation of the research (Bell, Bryman & Harley, 2019). Further, there are two main alternatives to theory development, namely the inductive- and deductive approach. According to Saunders, Lewis, and Thornhill (2015), the *inductive approach* is exploratory, rooted in theory-building, and associated with qualitative research, whereas the *deductive approach* is focused around theory-testing. For our study, we initially sought out to be explorative in our strategic approach, as we desired to unveil patterns and determinants that were not anticipated (Bell et al., 2019). However, we started out by conducting a thorough theoretical review on highly-relevant topics and discovered that existing literature has covered a lot about leadership and several key determinants to employee engagement. Furthermore, we have conducted five years of master studies at BI with several courses covering leadership and the meaning of engagement in organisations. As a result of these factors, it would be impossible for us to go further with our research without being coloured by existing research.

Therefore, we decided to incorporate a deductive approach by developing key points that summed up the main content of each theory, which functioned more as an extension of the research question. This was valuable for our study, as it enabled us to have a research focus with pre-specified constructs to shape the design of our research and to more easily compare theories with findings in a structured way (Eisenhardt, 1989). Subsequently, when we refer to findings in the

discussion section that indicates that theoretical aspects are supported, these are highlighted by '(see K1)'. However, the approach was not fully deductive, as we did not aspire to confirm or disconfirm a set of hypotheses with a stringent testing as in quantitative data collection with statistics and a large population (Bell et al., 2019). To summarize, we wanted to investigate if existing theory holds, but had a presumption that the companies included in our research also brought with them something new, which further might result in theory-building. Especially in order to investigate our sub-question, the explorative approach is more suited, as we strived to investigate what workplace practises that challenges conventional models. Thus, we ended up with a combination of a deductive and inductive approach.

3.2 Research design

According to Bell et al. (2019), a research design provides a guideline for the collection and analysis of data. Hence, selecting the appropriate design will relate to factors such as the objective of the research question, the connection between variables, and applicability to other contexts (Bell et al., 2019). In short, we desired to carry out an investigation of companies that were innovative and explorative in order to put the theory at a test, and to gain insight on the work practices they utilise.

Comparative case study

For our research, we framed the data through a comparative case study design in order to address the subject of investigation. A *single case study* is concerned with the complexity and uniqueness of a particular case, and focuses on understanding the dynamics of an isolated setting (Bell et al., 2019; Yin, 2018; Eisenhardt, 1989). Further, case studies may be extended *longitudinally*, which considers the development of a phenomenon over time, or through a *comparative design*, concerned with similarities and differences across cases (Bell et al., 2019). Thus, our choice of research design enabled us to gather detailed information on each of the companies and contribute to our understanding across the cases on the determinants to work engagement and company loyalty in an existing ecosystem (Eisenhardt, 1989; Yin, 2018).

Prior to the decision of conducting a case study, we came across the Norwegian high-tech consultancy start-up Blank AS, further referred to as Blank, which are known for their explorative practices and unconventional approach to the consultancy work (Blank AS, n.d.-a). After discovering the high degree of employee well-being within Blank, we were interested in conducting an in-depth study in order to figure out the resulting factors. We realised that this could best be done through a case study, as it enabled us to get well acquainted with the company through conversations, interviews, and observations of the workplace dynamics. Subsequently, our discovery of Blank became the foundation of the entire thesis. We further found it interesting to look into this knowledge-intensive industry as the power lies with the employees and companies are pressured to do things differently to attract and retain bright minds.

As a result, we wanted to extend the study to in a comparative manner, by finding similar Norwegian companies that follow the same business model to understand the core workplace practices across companies. Subsequently, we searched through an extensive number of start-up websites to find companies that fit with our criteria and topic of interest (StartupLab, 2020; Startup Norway, 2020; The Hub, 2020). It was challenging to find a searchable collective term and overview of the entire population that cross-checked each criteria. We did not desire to investigate conventional and large high-tech consulting companies, due to their characteristics of being competitive and provision-based. Moreover, we did not want to investigate purely high-tech start-ups, as they do not offer consulting services. Based on these criterias, the population seemed to be very small in Norway, maybe below ten in total. Subsequently, we managed to find two other suitable companies that fitted into our criterias, Fink AS and Variant AS, further referred to as Fink and Variant. We discovered them through investigating the unique aspects of Blank that was about challenging the existing business model in the industry (Fink AS, 2020a; Variant AS, 2020a).

Case studies are quite narrowly understood in the distinction between the positivistic approach (Yin, 1984; Eisenhardt, 1989) and the purely interpretative (Bell et al., 2019). Further, Eisenhardt (1989) criticise case methodology in the way the researchers pretend that they start from scratch when investigating a case, such as it being a purely grounded theory approach. This contributes to support

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our reasoning behind utilising the combination of an inductive and deductive approach. Moreover, the use of key points functioned well in this type of research design, as the aim of this research was to rather see whether the existing theories applied to companies considered to be non-representative for the industry, such as in the three cases in our study. Subsequently, taking advantage of the comparative case design enabled us to look at theory from a real life setting, to assess the uniqueness of each case, and discover common features that further enabled theoretical reflections (Yin, 2018; Eisenhardt, 1989).

3.3 Methods of data collection

In relation to the collection and interpretation of data, there are two main approaches, namely quantitative- and qualitative research (Bell et al., 2019). A *quantitative research* accentuates quantification, whereas a *qualitative research* accentuates words, is descriptive, and is utilised to generate an in-depth understanding of behaviours, opinions, and interpretations through the perspective of respondents (Bell et al., 2019). Regarding this research, we chose the qualitative approach, as we were more interested in the way in which individuals interpret their social world. According to Yin (2018), when conducting qualitative research, it is essential to utilise a set of methods that enables the collection of qualitative evidence in order to add richness to the data collected. Further, we utilised a *triangulation strategy*, which involves that more than one method was used in order to grasp the different aspects of a social phenomenon and to cross-check our findings (Bell et al., 2019). Subsequently, our primary data collection methods included semi-structured interviews and observations, which were substantiated with secondary data such as company websites and articles.

Semi-structured interviews

When utilising a qualitative case study, interviews are often considered the most crucial source of evidence (Yin, 2018). Thus, we gathered data through a set of in-depth semi-structured interviews characterised by a flexible interview process, where the interviewer follows an interview guide with a list of topics to be covered (Bell et al., 2019). Moreover, as semi-structured interviews are more open-ended than structured interviews, and grounded in individual reflections, it enabled us to follow-up on specific statements and to allow leeway in the response

to the questions (Bell et al., 2019). In total, we utilised one interview guide tailored for the employees and one for the managers.

In total, we conducted 14 different semi-structured interviews that allowed us to unveil key information in relation to our research question. The interviewees consisted of one or two people from the management in each company, in addition to three employees in each company (see Appendix B). The first interview was a pilot and lasted approximately one and a half hours. The purpose of this interview was to establish how the interview guide functioned in practice. The answers from the pilot were satisfactory, and hence included in the findings, but the interview took longer than anticipated. Subsequently, the interview guides were shortened by rephrasing and removing questions that did not capture any insights related to how the company was run or how the employees experienced the work environment. The rest of the interviews lasted somewhere between 20 to 60 minutes, depending on the interview guide used, and how talkative and descriptive the interviewee was.

We were interested in finding out more about the work practices and the employee's opinions and feelings towards their employers, and in order to research these aspects, we identified a list of variables to align with theory, which was then used to construct questions (Eisenhardt, 1989). For instance, in order to measure whether the employees experienced that there were sufficient opportunities for growth, we asked: "What opportunities do you have for capacity building?" (see Appendix A). The questions were additionally constructed in a way that were open towards finding determinants that were not captured in the theoretical framework. Subsequently, the questions asked were open-ended, short, and not double barrelled, in order to reduce the chance of yes/no answers and to ensure that the interviewee did not lose the underlying purpose of the questions or only responded to one part of the question (Bell et al., 2019).

Around two thirds of the interviews were conducted face-to-face at the company offices, however, as a result of the mobility restrictions imposed due to the coronavirus outbreak, the rest were conducted live via Skype. In all interviews, we used subtle gestures and positive body language to get the interviewees to open up and get comfortable (Bell et al., 2019). Moreover, in the online interviews, it was

especially important to display engagement and affirmation, as we were prevented from transferring our body language to a full extent and as it might be easier to hesitate and drop out of the exchange during an online interview (Bell et al., 2019; Saunders et al., 2015). Despite these considerations, we experienced in the online interviews that some of the interviewees answered in a shorter fashion, which may have been a result of the setting. Moreover, across all interviews, we audio recorded to enable active listening (Bell et al., 2019).

Sample

The sampling approach used in this study was *purposive*, which is a subjective sampling technique (Bell et al., 2019). We chose this approach, as we did not want to sample on a random basis, but in a strategic manner where we selected companies and interviewees on the basis of their relevance to contribute to our understanding of the subject (Bell et al., 2019). Further, we used the *critical case sampling*, as we deliberately selected the companies in anticipation that they would enable us to put the theory at a test (Bell et al., 2019). The interviewees were selected from different organisational units, positions, work history, age groups, and genders, in order to enable variance in attitude and opinions (Appendix B). Regardless of these varying characteristics, the answers we received across all interviewees were very similar, and we did not distinguish between these characteristics in the presentation of our findings. In appendix B, we have provided an overview of the sample and the interview in itself, where we have in a table described the different job levels, age groups, and the type and length of interview. In addition, we have included two separate graphs, where we provide information regarding share of each gender, and type of position. These have been detached from the table, in order to avoid identification of the respondents.

Participant observations

In addition to semi-structured interviews, the use of participant observations enabled us to collect supplementary data, to substantiate findings and to enable concepts to emerge out of data (Bell et al., 2019). According to Yin (2018), *participant observations* are conceptualised as a method where the researcher observes a group of people and engages in activities in the participants' environment for a specific period of time.

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Overall, we managed to conduct four visits to Fink, where the first visit was an informal meeting with the managers to gain insight about the company. The next two visits were related to interviews with the managers, and the last one to observe the in-house day and conduct employee interviews. Due to the mobility restrictions imposed, we only managed to visit Blank once to get know the company, but did not have the opportunity to do further observations. Moreover, we had to travel to Trondheim to collect data at Variant, where we conducted a full-day with observations and interviews. Concerning participant observations at Fink and Variant, we observed meetings, the working climate, workspaces, and activities, and actively participated in company lunches, which enabled us to get a better understanding of the company cultures and work environments (Bell et al., 2019). Besides observing the workplace dynamics, we conversed with the employees and management when natural, further enabling us to get familiar with the type of people who work there. We also took field notes during observations, in order to more accurately recall the occurring events in the aftermath (Eisenhardt, 1989).

Ruling out surveys

Besides the aforementioned methods, we took into consideration the use of surveys to collect data on these work environment phenomena. However, it would be challenging to capture these aspects in a survey and to collect enough data due to the difficulties related to finding similar companies, and the potentially uncertain degree of response. Moreover, we believed it would restrict our qualitative research, as it may lower the depth and variety in answers received, and because we would not be able to follow-up answers. We may additionally experience responders fatigue if the questionnaire is too long, contributing to lower the quality of the data. The respondents would also have the opportunity to read the entire questionnaire before responding, and might therefore reflect too much on finding suitable answers, instead of relying on initial thoughts (Bell et al., 2019; Yin, 2018). Therefore, we decided to rule out surveys in the collection of data.

Secondary data

To substantiate and confirm our primary data, we also took into consideration secondary sources of information, such as company webpages, -reports and -

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blogs, in addition to relevant articles, and newsletters. This enabled us to evaluate and incorporate relevant data without having to conduct time-consuming data collection of preexisting data (Bell et al., 2019).

3.4 Ethical considerations

Despite these precautions, ethical issues may arise when conducting research, subsequently, it is important to be aware of the principles involved and how to deal with them (Bell et al., 2019; Crow et al., 2006). One ethical principle we adhered to was the securing of *informed consent*, in which the respondents were fully informed about the aim of the research (Crow et al., 2006). Moreover, the consent form enabled the interviewees to access information about the project and ethical considerations before giving their consent. Furthermore, participants *volunteered to partake* in the study and were free to withdraw from the study without consequences. Prior to our study, we applied to the Norwegian Centre for Research Data (NSD) regarding a consent form of *confidentiality* and received approval for our aforementioned method of data collection. Another ethical principle to adhere to is to ensure that we *do no harm* (Bell et al., 2019). In order to ensure the *anonymity* of the interviewees, we used fictional names, independent of original gender and job title of the respondents, in order to avoid identification (Crow et al., 2006). The only recognisable characteristics from our data collection were the voices from the audio recording, however, the consent form ensured the participants that recordings would be deleted simultaneously with the master thesis delivery at the latest.

3.5 Assessment of qualitative research

In order to assess the quality of our business research, we have in the following section assimilated the external and internal reliability and validity of this study.

Reliability

In the sections above, our research methodology has been thoroughly described in order to enhance *external reliability* (Bell et al., 2019). Starting off, there were research restrictions related to sample size, coronavirus outbreak, and resources at disposal, which may have affected findings and the strength of our data collection methods. The first interviews, at Variant, were conducted prior to the coronavirus spread to Norway, and we consider those answers to be unaffected by the

situation. At Fink, the management was interviewed before the outbreak, however, the employees were interviewed one week prior to the imposed mobility restrictions. The employees talked about the virus at the Friday meetup when we visited for observations, and we therefore consider the interviews to be somewhat influenced by the situation. At Blank, the planned interviews were postponed to April and conducted online, and we did not have the opportunity to do observations, except from a company visit prior to the data collection, thus we consider the data collection to be significantly affected by the outbreak.

Furthermore, data was only gathered from three Norwegian high-tech consultancy start-ups, thus responses and questions were interpreted in the setting of these specific company sizes and respective niche industries. Hence, these factors contributes to lower the external reliability, one may not be capable of replicating the study at a later time (Bell et al., 2019). Furthermore, the format of the interviews allowed for follow-up questions, which made the answers and questions somewhat different. The interview guide has been included as an appendix, even so, all interviews were semi-structured. Hence, both the social setting and follow up questions would be difficult to replicate, which contributes to lower the reliability. However, through being transparent in our choice of research strategy, -design, -methods, it contributes to increase replicability of this research to some degree (Bell et al., 2019; Yin, 2018).

Furthermore, in order to enhance the *internal reliability* of this case study, all data was audio recorded and coded independently, allowing us to not lose or alter data, and to maintain the accuracy (Bell et al., 2019). The data from the three companies was then compared, contrasted, and discussed among us until an agreement on recurring patterns and themes was reached. In relation to practical considerations, Bell et al. (2019) argue that by audio recording an interview, it can make the interviewee self-aware and uncomfortable. Despite this, we argue that if we would have taken written notes instead, it would be more distracting for the interviewee, and the data would be affected by our ability to recall the conversation.

Validity

Concerning the *internal validity* of our research, also known as *credibility* in qualitative research, it relates to the degree to which our findings match reality and is often the most important measure of quality (Bell et al., 2019). We cannot eliminate the risk of alternative explanations, despite having controlled for numerous variables. For instance, our study did not distinguish between age, gender, and job title when interpreting findings which may have an impact on individual work engagement levels. However, to strengthen the credibility of our research, we thoroughly discussed findings, sought out patterns, and reached an agreement upon what to include and exclude from the study (Bell et al., 2019). During the interviews, we set-aside an appropriate amount of time in order to not rush the respondents, and make them comfortable enough to provide authentic answers. When presenting our findings in the thesis, we included complete quotes from the interviews, in order to not take the respondents answers out of context. However, through translating interviews conducted in Norwegian, one might lose some of the originality and meaning, as idiomatic Norwegian often can come across as idiotic English, and vice versa. In relation to *triangulation*, we strengthened the validity by relying on multiple sources of information to confirm and augment the primary data collection. Furthermore, through gathering and comparing data from three different companies in the comparative case study, it contributed to strengthen the quality of the study (Bell et al., 2019; Saunders et al., 2015).

With regards to *external validity*, the use of a comparative case study contributes to put the applicability to other contexts at risk (Bell et al., 2019; Yin, 2018). Bell et al. (2019) also argue that case studies and small sample sizes makes generalising qualitative research challenging, which is also true for this study, especially since the companies we investigated stand out in the industry. Despite this, the aim of this research was not necessarily to find results that could be generalised to all industries, but to let the uniqueness of the comparative case study for high-tech consultancy firms initiate theoretical groundwork for future research. Since we discovered a significant number of consistent findings across the cases, it enhanced our ability to lay a basis for future theoretical inferences. Moreover, the *ecological validity* is high due to the choice of research design, as

the study takes place in real life contexts, making the findings applicable to everyday life (Bell et al., 2019).

To sum up, the qualitative research strategy with an inductive and deductive approach enabled the comparative case study to draw lines between the companies to further uncover key drivers to engagement and retention. Further, triangulation of data through using semi-structured interviews, participant observations, and secondary data, enabled us to better grasp and assess the environment of the respondents, in addition to increasing the quality of our study.

4.0 Findings

In this section, we have separated our findings into four subcategories, namely work organisation, physical surroundings, psychological climate, and company loyalty. Throughout the text, we have compared and contrasted the three high-tech consulting start-ups Blank, Fink and Variant. Furthermore, we have incorporated quotes from the interviews throughout to illustrate their point of view, and briefly highlighted the key discoveries in Table 1, which can be found at the end of the findings section.

4.1 The organisation of the work

Within the section of work organisation, we sought out to present our discoveries concerning the attitudes that permeates these companies. Moreover, we display what kind of structures they have put in place, their use of employee benefits and compensations, in addition to the role of transparency and insight. Subsequently, we have structured the findings into the following sub-categories, namely the pioneering mindset, flat organisation, investments in the employees, and openness.

4.1.1 The pioneering mindset

Starting this journey, these three companies entered the consulting industry with a desire to prove that there are smarter and more sustainable ways of conducting business (Blank AS, n.d.-b; Fink AS, 2020b; Variant AS, 2020b). On the basis of the cross-checked data collection, it became apparent that these companies have incorporated a business model characterised by taking care of and prioritising their

employees. This was also emphasised by an interviewee from Fink, who conveyed that they had no doubt that in order to succeed in this industry, investing in their own employees is the best thing they can do (Grupe, n.d.).

Out of the three companies, Blank displayed a particular desire to be at the forefront of changing the consulting industry, whereas Fink wanted to be a contrast to what can sometimes be perceived as a cold consultancy world, by being inclusive and warm (Fink AS, 2020a; Johnsen, 2017). Variant expressed a desire to be a new variant of a consulting company, one that is exceptionally transparent both internally and externally (Variant AS, 2020a). Thus, all interviewees emphasised that the managers believe that the most important building block in their company is to hire talented employees who dare to think differently.

"The reason I joined this is because I very much agree with the way of trying to stir up the industry today. I truly believe that this is a great way to get good people who work well together and who desire a good place to work." - Silje, Blank

"We also think that the arrangement we have with the culture, values, bonuses, salaries, joint ownership and the social things, it's so good that it would be a shame to not share it with more people." - Stian, Fink

"Transparency and openness is important for us, that's our thing. We have learned from our own experiences, and been inspired by things around us. Then we have built on it further in our own way." - Tone, Variant

Concerning growth strategies, all three companies accentuated that they have had a gradual and slow growth. At Blank, it was emphasised that once they reach 60 employees, they will slow down the hiring process, as they do not desire to exceed 100 employees. At Fink and Variant, they have not reached an agreement on the forecasted company size, but have expressed a desire to not increase the size significantly. Moreover, at Fink, it was expressed during an interview that they have the capacity to hire consultants swiftly, however, they do not desire to throw consultants into client projects that they would not be satisfied with.

4.1.2 Flat organisational structure

In all three companies, the organisational structure is flat and the threshold for contacting the managers are low, where the employees emphasise during the interviews that the employee-manager relationship is good. Furthermore, all utilise a trust-based management system, where employees are responsible for their own capacity building, and are encouraged to self-direct, voice concerns, and come up with initiatives. Several interviewees explained that the management often makes the final decisions, but that employees are encouraged to take part in the suggestion process. From the interviews, most employees expressed their satisfaction with being able to self-direct and to involve as much as they would like, and they also conveyed that the level of autonomy contributed to increase their involvement and feeling of being valued.

"We have a high degree of freedom to do whatever we want. This also entails that you have to take responsibility for your own capacity building so that you don't end up hanging on Slack all day." - Linn, Blank

"You have a significant influence. I can just call the manager and tell him that I'm unhappy about my project and think that I have to get out. Then it will in most cases be fixed." - Pernille, Fink

"Some have to be decision-makers, but I absolutely feel like you have influence over your own direction. You have the opportunity to voice your opinions and you'll be taken seriously if you feel like things aren't working." - Fredrik, Variant

Concerning the management structure, at Blank, there is one leader at the top with a small administration, including a chief designer and chief programmer (Blank AS., n.d.-a). The rest of the employees are referred to as designers or programmers, with no labels indicating seniority.

"We didn't want to have seniority levels where one climbs the ladder, as we believe that it's an old-fashioned idea. Development is not about position or titles, but more about having a professional development where you can build an academic leadership position." - Henrik, Blank

At Fink, they have a general manager and a sales- and marketing manager, and the rest of the employees are referred to as designers or programmers, with no labels indicating seniority (Fink AS, n.d.). In addition, they have a board with members

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made up of their employees, where it was explained that all have the opportunity to apply for a position. During an interview, one employee also emphasised that he does not look at the manager as his boss, and can easily call to chat informally. Moreover, decisions are made with the employees, and the manager does not necessarily have to be present when decisions are made.

"The two extra weeks of holiday, for example, were an employee initiative that happened at the general assembly. We made a vote, and told the manager afterwards as he couldn't attend that exact meeting." - Stian, Fink

At Variant, besides designers or programmers, they have a small management team, and some of the positions are defined within seniority levels and responsibility areas, such as CDO, CTO and CCO (Variant AS, 2020a). In the interviews, it was emphasised that career development is about advancing work proficiency levels, and to gain more influential projects at a client.

"There's a significant focus on 'the joy of learning' here, and academically there are great opportunities to advance to higher positions like project manager and such." - Nina, Variant

Furthermore, formal structures, rules, and frameworks are implemented when the need arises, and the autonomy is also reflected in the social aspects of the companies. In the interviews, it was underlined that the employees are encouraged to come up with suggestions to social gatherings and to initiate interest groups, and if all employees are invited, expenses are covered by the companies.

"It's very easy to take initiative because you don't have to ask for permission. For example, I went out to buy a Switch for the office and asked afterwards if I could get a refund from Blank." - Linn, Blank

"We encourage all to let us know if they want to put something together, after all, it's our money. We spend a lot on social initiatives and capacity building, as nobody can come in and say 'why did you spend so much money on MAEMO at the summer party?' Well, we simply wanted to." - Stian, Fink

4.1.3 Investing in the employees

Another prominent similarity between these companies is that they all utilise the same form of compensation, namely a fixed salary based upon the upper quartile

of Tekna's salary statistics (Blank AS, n.d.-b; Fink AS, 2020b; Variant AS, 2020b). Subsequently, all employees know that the salary is above industry average, and that individual performance, gender, and age have no influence. Moreover, commission-based salaries have been purposefully avoided by these companies. One employee at Fink explained that they would have been able to earn more money short-term with commission-based salaries, but in the long-term they believe that it is not rewarding.

"We work for the clients and deliver great services, thus we earn money. I experience a deeper motivation when we work in this manner, instead of 'I have a billing rate just above 83 %, which means that I'll get 10.000 NOK more in bonus." - Silje, Blank

"We know people from other companies that don't attend social activities they want to join, because then they will only reach 90 % in billing rate. We don't see this as advantageous for the social environment or profitability, as satisfied employees perform better in so many ways." - Markus, Fink

Across all three companies, they also have a profit-sharing system, where around 30 % of the profits are set aside and distributed equally to employees, which is independent of individual performance and time spent in the company. Furthermore, all employees in all three companies are offered the opportunity to buy company shares, with a differing ownership structure between the companies (Blank AS, n.d.-b; Fink AS, 2020b; Variant AS, 2020b).

"A lot of people advised us to not offer joint ownership to all of our employees, but I believe that we've proved a long time ago that this isn't where the shoe pinches." - Stian, Fink

On the basis of interviews, observations, and information obtained from company handbooks, all three companies have strong employee benefit programs. Employees also receive a wide set of insurances, among this a comprehensive health insurance, and full accessibility to a medical application with video consultations. In addition, employees get all necessary work-related equipment, software, and academic books covered. Employees also receive five weeks of vacation in total and they all have favourable parental leave schemes.

At Blank, employees can participate in corporate sports, and receive up to 1.000 NOK for fitness gear, and a subscription with Oslo city bike. In addition, employees receive a certain gifts for each year they have spent working there. At Fink, all work-related public transportation is covered, and employees receive up to 500 NOK monthly for fitness-related costs, and 1.000 NOK to buy a bicycle helmet if needed. Further, each employee has one extra week of paid vacation, and a yearly competency building budget of 100.000 NOK. At Variant, employees receive up to 10.000 NOK yearly to spend on gadgets like software and cell-phones, and cover up to 500 NOK on fitness-related activities. According to most of the employees, they believe the competency building support is great, it is wonderful that they get paid to learn new things, and they express that these benefits contribute to increase their well-being and fondness towards the employers.

"What we see that has worked well and paid off are our company values and our focus on the employees. The money we invest in our employees is returned with yield." - Markus, Fink

4.1.4 Exceptional degree of openness

On the basis of the data collected, openness and transparency both internally and externally is ingrained in the business model of all three companies, where the aim is to be as transparent as possible. The publicly available company handbooks for all three companies substantiate this concept, and provides an extensive update on work-related topics, such as salaries, employee benefit programs, and guidelines (Blank AS, n.d.-b; Fink AS, 2020b; Variant AS, 2020b). The handbooks are easy to manoeuvre through with a similar content across the companies, which is continuously updated by the employees. A publicly accessible salary calculator can also be found on all three company websites, where anyone can easily check an employee's salary on the basis of work experience. Furthermore, all three companies utilise open-source codes at Github, with open statistics on a detailed level (GitHub, 2020). Throughout the interviews, employees from all three companies conveyed that the openness contributes to foster a sense of security, trust, and involvement, as they continually have an overview of the company status, board meeting reports, and the decision-making processes.

" It's more free and open than other places, and I believe that we're a bit rock-and-roll because we dare to be so. Because of this, we also attract those sort of people who have a different view on the consultant role." - Silje, Blank

At Blank, they have published a lot about their conditions and thoughts behind, for instance, competitive wages and ordinary goods on their website and blog to make it easier to navigate through (Blank AS, n.d.-b). Moreover, if an employee has questions that are not answered in the handbook, the following applies: ask for forgiveness rather than permission. This also applies to Variant, as no one has to receive permission to publish anything, but rather have to come up with very good arguments in order not to (Brevik, 2020). Additionally, they have their own blog that is continuously updated with company events, thoughts, news, and detailed monthly company results (Variant AS, n.d.). At Fink, they continuously use the handbook, and are at the forefront when it comes to updating it. One employee also mentioned that they were in the process of updating the handbook with headers more adjusted to Fink, such as interchanging headers about 'parental leave' with 'kids and holiday'.

"There was something different about Blank in comparison to other companies. There's a big focus on openness. It's open throughout, and you get to know everything you want." - Linn, Blank

"Openness? Oh, yes! We have an employee handbook that tells absolutely everything in the entire company. There is no doubt that the transparency of this company is as they say it is." - Pernille, Fink

"I believe insight is a significant contributor to why people choose to stay. I really noticed the openness as soon as I started in Variant. Everyone was very open and inviting. There are no surprises and secrets, and it creates safety" - Nina, Variant

4.2 The physical environment

In this section, we will cover the physical surroundings in the three companies in light of the employees perceptions and observations conducted. Moreover, we will elaborate on aspects such as the workplace design, layout, and choice and use of office venue.

In relations to the office venues, Blank has their own 583 sqm venue in a two-storey top floor apartment on Youngstorget in Oslo, whereas both Fink and Variant rent coworking spaces, respectively at Spaces in Oslo and Digs in Trondheim. Moreover, from our observations, the workplace design differed between all companies, where the coworking spaces was about decorating with ornaments and furniture due to limited opportunities.

At Blank, the venue is carefully thought out, with an office area at the lower floor, and an upper floor dedicated to social gatherings and academic sessions, also referred to as the 'loft'. In relations to physical surroundings, the loft includes a kitchen with beer tap, a sofa section, in addition to a stage and drum set for concerts and fun (see Picture 1). From our observations, the office area is spacious with rows of computer desks, wall-mounted couches, and a meeting room, with a green colour permeating the area.

Picture 1. *Lounge area and event at the 'loft'. Source: Blank Oslo (2019).*

According to one of the managers, it was important that the office felt like 'home', and that there was enough room for everyone. Currently, Blank is refurbishing their venue, where the employees have been encouraged to take part in the decision-making process by suggesting and ordering art.

"I feel pride when I enter the office and the venue that we have. Our venue is a very important part of our identity and I'm proud when I bring people there and show it." - Silje, Blank

"I think our office is a very important part of our culture. You can go there one Saturday night and bring two friends and grab some beer, then other employees from Blank appear who also has two friends with them. It is very homely, and they encourage you to use it outside of work as well." - Linn, Blank

The Fink office, on the other hand, is situated in a coworking space for an indefinite time, as they are pleased with the practicalities the venue provides. According to the interviews, as a result of the company growth, they desire to relocate to a larger venue capable of housing more people, where they can celebrate birthdays and have breakfast meetings, but are not actively searching for a location.

Picture 2*. Office area and main entrance to Spaces. Source: Spaces (2020).*

The office is centrally located in Oslo, and the rented rooms are situated on a floor that is shared with other companies. The office rooms are well-equipped, bright and functional, and they have the opportunity to rent additional rooms if needed. Further, they have a mini-fridge with refreshments, hand-picked furniture, and wall-pictures taken by an employee from one of their trips to New York (see Picture 2).

> *"We chose Spaces because it gives a good vibe when you come here. When mom comes to visit, she thinks it's nice and great, and it is."* - Martin, Fink

> *"We like to have the office centrally located because people live all over the city. And as we are small, it's nice to have the clever crew at the reception and the downstairs area to accommodate people and packages."* - Stian, Fink

At Variant, the coworking space is centrally located in Trondheim, and they have the opportunity to rent more rooms when needed. The coworker meeting rooms are well equipped, but with dark walls and narrow lightning (see Picture 3). Their designated office rooms, on the other hand, are bright and functional, where the design itself is simplistic, appealing, and not as personalised.

Picture 3. Meeting at Variant day and office entrance. Source: DIGS (n.d.).
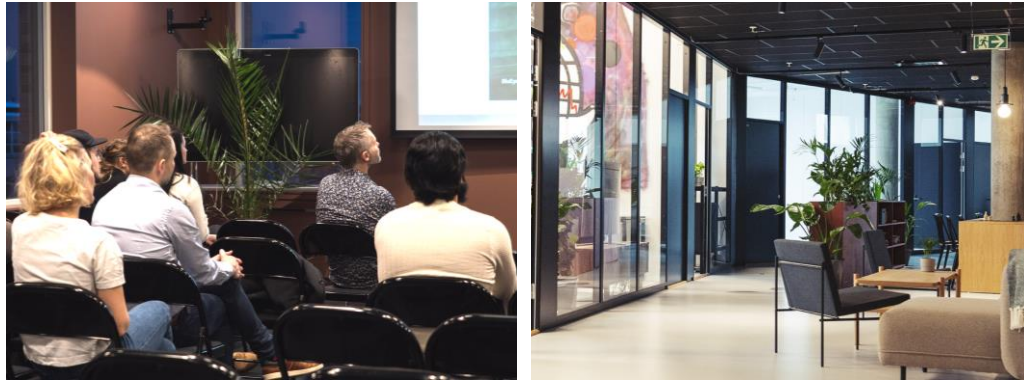
According to an interviewee, they chose to be at Digs because it was the right place to grow, as they depended on the energy of the coworking spaces when they started out. At present, Variant reached a company size where they desired a larger venue in order to accommodate all employees and Variant-activities (Sæther, 2020). Subsequently, they are moving to their own venue, but due to the coronavirus outbreak, the official move-in was postponed (Sveås, 2020). Criteria for the new venue included a central location, a customised space to work creatively with clients, a gathering place for social and academic events, and a design that foster inspiration, creativity, and functionality (Sæther, 2020).

"I'm really looking forward to the place we're moving to. We can be more together, and we don't have to book tables for social gatherings. Then I want to set aside several days to work there" - Øyvind, Variant

4.3 Psychological climate

Having looked into the role of the work organisation and the workplace design, we have in this section sought out to present significant discoveries related to the employees impressions of the work environment. Moreover, we will highlight key aspects such as employee fit, growth opportunities, perceived safety, social environment, feedback, and stretch zone.

4.3.1 Employee fit

Concerning the recruitment process, all of the companies use extensive amounts of resources to ensure that the people they bring in mesh well with the other employees and values, and who can contribute to challenge the company in order to decrease the chance of building an 'echo chamber'. The process begins with thorough screening, followed by a personal interview over a coffee, where the aim

is to figure out whether it is a candidate they sense that they can work well with. This is often the sole type of interview they use, as newly-hired are often recruited among people they know well, and through employee referrals, and their skills are therefore known.

"Our foundation must always be larger than the house, so that when new people come in, no one feels that they don't have enough foundation. We had to constantly make sure that we didn't grow too fast in the beginning, because you can't rebuild the culture." - Stian, Fink

"When finding the right candidates, we experience that there's a skewed distribution in traditional interview settings, and that it's almost rigged to not understand the strengths of the candidate." - Tone, Variant

Furthemore, the managers from all three companies argue that you can get away with a lot if you only have to talk about a specific technology, without having to prove your skills. Thus, the next step in the interview process is a technical test, in situations where the employer are unfamiliar with the candidates' skills. This is a collaborative test, where the aim is not to measure their maximum performance, but to see how the candidate solves the problems and test their soft skills.

"Beyond confirming that the candidate can do what they say, it's essential that it's a person we desire to work with. Every person brings with them something new and takes the company in a different direction. We don't wish to hire so that we narrow down the culture." - Stian, Fink

Furthermore, at both Blank and Variant, interviews unveiled that a significant number of fresh graduates are hired, and despite being the youngest company, around 40% of Variants consultants are fresh graduates. Fink, on the other hand, has up until recently highly relied on employee referrals and having to know the candidates well, as both Blank and Variant initially did, but has begun to take in graduates as well.

Across the interviews, it became apparent that the employees were satisfied with the interviewing process and the use of the 'coffee date' concept, as it enabled them to feel comfortable and open up. Moreover, at both Blank and Fink, newly signed employees were invited to the occurring social events and had the opportunity to get to know their colleagues prior to their first day at work, making

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them feel that they had been in the company much longer, and contributed to strengthen the social ties to co-workers and the overall connection to the workplace.

4.3.2 Opportunities for growth

Besides extensive investments in the recruitment processes, all of the companies spend a lot of time and money on capacity building (Blank AS, n.d.-b; Fink AS, 2020b; Variant AS, 2020a). Further, they dictate the terms in client contracts to ensure that their employees can attend the in-house academic days, and if that is not possible, they walk away. However, they are flexible regarding working extra hours for the client in hectic periods to ensure delivery. The data gathered during the interviews highlighted that all employees were encouraged to pursue growth opportunities of their own choosing. At both Variant and Blank, there was no budget set aside for capacity development, but employees were encouraged to learn new things, through buying essential books and participating in at least one relevant conference a year, covered by the company. At Blank, they follow a 'rule of thumb' on employee development spending, where the employees make an evaluation of whether enhancing or building a specific competency benefits Blank, and if the answer is yes, they are free to do so.

> *"The room of possibilities is significant. At Blank, we facilitate little as we say that everyone has the right to do whatever they want, but this could lead employees to become passive and to take too little active responsibility for their own capacity building."* - Silje, Blank

At Fink, on the other hand, the employees themselves were responsible for the allocation of the aforementioned annual capacity development budget (Fink AS, 2020b). Moreover, they were free to choose whether they wanted to, for instance, travel to New York to attend a sizeable conference and stay at a luxurious hotel or participate in several smaller events in the local area. During the interviews, it was emphasised that the managers believe that the company, clients, and employees benefit from everyone spending their budget to learn something new, and that the investment in itself is lower than the yield, as it leads to increased company performance. Moreover, they emphasise that when the employees return to work, they are always pumped, feel inspired, and have learned a lot.

"We see that the capacity building budget is used less than we thought. I believe this has to do with the fact that just being aware of that you have it contributes to a sense of peace." - Martin, Fink

In addition to this, both Blank and Variant set aside one day a month for in-house capacity building, where all employees participate, whereas Fink sets aside one day each quarter (Blank AS, n.d.-b; Fink AS, 2020b; Variant AS, 2020a). Furthermore, at Fink, they also arrange academic sessions for developers and designers once a month, and all of the designers work together at the office every Friday. At Variant, the capacity building day was referred to as 'Variantdagen', at Blank it was named 'Innedag', and at Fink it was called 'Fagdag'. The overall concept and objective of these days were similar, but there were differences in the outline.

At Variant, a clear outline of the day was published in advance on their blog, and employees had the opportunity to take initiative to prepare something. From our observation, the day started out with a meeting, and during the day there were project presentations and three different segments one could attend. At Fink, we participated in the weekly 'Fagdag' for designers, where there was no preliminary meeting, so the employees just started working with client projects or in groups, and the overall day seemed very casual. During the day, there was one client specific sketch-a-thon exercise the employees attended. At Blank, we did not get to attend the in-house day due to the corona outbreak, but according to the data gathered from the interviews, they either work on self-governed projects or participate in workshops and lectures.

"The in-house capacity building concept has been genius. We experience that it works well for some and others feel the opposite, but everyone has liked the friendliness of the concept. It's important socially, and for contributing to the sense of belongingness." - Gustav, Blank

4.3.3 Perceived safety

Concerning perceptions of safety at work, in all three companies, financial security was one of the initial thoughts that came to the employee's mind. In addition to this, during the corona outbreak where several plans and overall work got cancelled or rescheduled, employees expressed that they felt safe.

"I feel very safe in Blank. We're in an uncertain time now, but I feel that we're focusing on the right things." - Linn, Blank

"One of the employees was planning to go to China for a wedding, but he had to cancel due to corona, and Fink covered everything, both for him and his partner. I feel safe as an employee at Fink." - Mari, Fink

In all three companies, the "trial and error" mindset permeated the culture, and the employees conveyed that they are encouraged to experiment, learn from mistakes, and to come up with suggestions for how they can improve the workplace.

"Given that our employees know that we're in no way flawless, it's easy for us to try out new things. We don't all have to be perfect. That's the purpose with this project, the 'project Fink'." - Stian, Fink

"We try out things and are still pretty new in the game, so we are still trying to run a consultancy company. Nobody in the company has the answer to how it should look like in the end and that's very fun." - Silje, Blank

"During the interview, they told me that I could do as I wanted and that I would be supported. They also told me that they expected me to fail and that they wanted me to fail, which I really liked." - Martine, Blank

Throughout the interviews, employees from all three companies also expressed that they felt that their mental and emotional health came first, and none had anything negative to say about the perceived safety. Most of the interviewees also mentioned that the compensation and benefits contributed to boost their well-being, and that the employers are desirable if you become sick, pregnant, or dissatisfied. Further, an employee from Blank conveyed that he had never felt more at home or safe in any other company before.

"I experience that we have an excellent and safe social environment, where there's plenty of room to have opinions, lots of personalities, and a low degree of conflict. It's a company culture characterised by very competent and highly motivated people." - Henrik, Blank

"Fink puts the people 100% in focus, so there's no doubt that I feel safe. I don't even know what to feel unsafe about. There are many benefits put in place to

ensure my well-being, contributing to fondness and appreciation towards Fink." -
Pernille, Fink

*"I was a bit sceptical before I decided to join because it was such a small
company and newly established. But since I have such great insight into the
economy and all decisions made, it creates greater safety for me to know that this
isn't something that will go downhill right away."* - Nina, Variant

Moreover, most of the interviewees portrayed that the management conduct
frequent check-ups on their well-being. This was especially prominent at Fink,
where several employees expressed that the general manager attended most social
gatherings, and often calls to check up on how things were going with them.

*"I work well with the people here, who I have become great friends with and feel
that you can talk about not only job, but personal matters. I also get followed up
by my closest leader in Variant who asks how things are going and if I'm still
satisfied."* - Nina, Variant

4.3.4 Social environment
In all three companies, the social environment was characterised as "very good"
by the employees during the interviews, and the co-workers were looked upon as
friends or great co-workers. Moreover, all three companies frequently facilitate
social gatherings, summer- and Christmas parties, dinners at and outside work, in
addition to the aforementioned academic days.

At Blank, the 'Innedag' is considered very social, where they usually go out to
grab a beer at the end and many employees believe this is the highlight of the
workday. In addition to this, they celebrate Blank's birthday annually at the loft,
an event open to employees, friends, and former colleagues, and up to 200-300
people stop by during the evening. Moreover, on an annual basis, they usually
host pre-parties for the festivals by:Larm and Øyafestivalen, an open event where
employees can bring their friends and step by the office for drinks. Once a year,
Blank arrange 'Utedag', where the employees spend an entire weekend outside of
Oslo, for both capacity building and social events. They have also incorporated a
unique concept called "pizzabot", where a bot invites one random group of
employees every other week to join a pizza gathering, enabling the employees to
connect with different individuals.

"Blank pizza is a very important thing! It works 'coco' well and describes many sides of this business at the same time. It's innovative, and I haven't heard about anyone else doing it. I just can't give it enough credit." - Silje, Blank

Besides this, they frequently host a "Film club", where all watch a movie at the loft, and "Dinner club" on Thursdays, for those who are interested in trying out new dishes. Moreover, employees have established interest groups within, for instance, fitness and sports, and they rent venues for climbing and indoor football. In relations to social events, it is often the same group of people that attend, but all employees meet regularly due to the academic days, and employees spend a lot of time in the office beyond working hours. One employee mentioned that she often visits the loft on Saturdays to watch football matches, and that other employees have had weddings, birthdays, and baptismal dinners there.

"I haven't been a place anywhere near this. The people I work with are pretty similar to me and I really enjoy the things we do." - Silje, Blank

"I believe the social environment is really good. You don't know everyone equally, but no matter who you meet at the office, it's always nice. If I didn't like the people in Blank, I wouldn't have worked here." - Linn, Blank

At Fink, they arrange cabin trips once or twice a year, birthday parties, and Friday beers after receiving their monthly salary. In addition, on a monthly basis, they go out to eat dinner at a hotel restaurant in the city, and facilitate a Friday breakfast. Besides this, employees get together outside work, arrange dinners with people from the same academic field, and have formed interest groups, like for those who enjoy to work out in the mornings. Furthermore, they also arrange a sports pub championship and during the corona epidemic, they also arranged digital events such as "Paint'n Sip", and academic lunch.

"There's not a lot of girls, probably ten in total. There's one girl in tech, so we wanted to include her as well, and made a "Finkini"-group, where we arrange a girls night to do typical girl stuff." - Mari, Fink

According to several employees, they feel like they can share personal matters with each other. Another employee also pointed out a company description made by a summer student: "When the company meets, it's as if an old group of friends are meeting, who have not seen each other in a long time", which he sought

suitable. During the observations we made at the "Fagdag" for designers, the atmosphere was warm, including, and goofy, and there were no groupings. According to one of the employees, they are a well-conjoined group, and due to being exempt from client projects on Fridays, work has a tendency to ebb out, as they are allowed to be a tad unserious when they arrive at the office.

"The best thing about work is the people, no doubt. We joke around, we're serious, we have fun and we're talented. I develop a lot in dialogue with those I work with. Fink wouldn't have been the same if you replaced them and I might not have wanted to work there." - Pernille, Fink

At Variant, they facilitate breakfast meetings and an annual September trip where they travel to, for instance, London to build capacity and attend social events. In addition, around New Years they hosted a party with 170 attendants, where employees pitched into the planning and were allowed to invite whoever they wanted, including friends and people from the same industry. Besides this, employees have established interest groups related to, for instance, games, fitness, and music, and employees can participate in physical activities, such as hiking, corporate sports, and fishing. During the corona epidemic, they held the usual board game night online.

"I had two beers with a colleague yesterday, and I climb weekly with another, and tonight, I'm playing board games with someone else. There's social things, but not all the time and it's not necessarily organised by the company." - Fredrik, Variant

During our observation at 'Variantdagen', no one interrupted during talks or tried to overrun others, and during the breaks, the employees chatted a lot with each other and the environment seemed relaxed. There was less goofing around than at Fink, however, they made jokes on each other's behalfs, which seemed common and accepted by everyone. At the end of 'Variantdagen', they usually hit the town or get together at a co-workers house.

Besides these events, they also have a 'donut' concept, similar to 'Blank pizza', where a bot matches two random employees every other week to have a cup of coffee or eat lunch together. Building on this, an employee expressed that the bot gives them the opportunity to sit together with a person they might not have connected that much with before, that it enables them to discover new friendships

and grow together in an organic way. One of the employees expressed that they feel connected to their colleagues, but they are colleagues first and foremost, whereas several other employees look upon their colleagues as friends.

"We've experienced great growth, but not at the expense of the environment. The social environment is very good, that's what we're best at, other than being academically good and having cool clients and projects." - Fredrik, Variant

4.3.5 Feedback

Concerning feedback and recognition, in all three companies, scheduled annual achievement review meetings are conducted, but most feedback is given sporadically with little structure. Furthermore, most of the interviewees expressed that they often have to ask for feedback when they need it, but that the threshold for asking is low. According to several employees, this is a result of the fact that the quality of their work can mainly be assessed by the client as they spend most workdays there. Furthermore, if a problem arises in the companies, it was expressed in the interviews that the managers attempt to resolve it straight away.

"You have to ask for feedback yourself. It's not like you get a message once a week and there's not a lot of routine to it. We've tried different formal feedback schemes, but nothing has worked completely for us." - Linn, Blank

"We haven't set up a specific time to review what has happened the past week. I've done a lot of this in previous jobs, and for my part, this doesn't work so well. I need to have a relation to those I depend on, so they call me anytime." - Martin, Fink

"It's the client who sees us on a daily basis, and see the direct effect of the work we do. So, it's a bit difficult for the managers here to give direct feedback, and I'm very understanding of that." - Fredrik, Variant

At Blank and Variant, it was mentioned that Slack is used as a communication platform, where feedback is sporadically given. At Fink, on the other hand, it was expressed that they diligently use Slack to give feedback and have created a group called 'Finkekvitter' where employees and management can give and receive feedback and appraisal. According to the employees, the manager is good at recognising employees by sharing client feedback, is very open, and frequently praises employees in front of the rest.

Across the companies, the feedback and recognition is appreciated. However, the need for feedback differs among the employees, where the trend is that those who have the most experience feel that it is sufficient, whereas fresh graduates often feel the need for more. There again, it was expressed during the interviews that it is different from client to client the degree to which employees receive feedback. Moreover, an employee from Blank mentioned that IT consultants and the consultancy industry, in general, have a problem with obtaining feedback due to the client-based projects. An employee from Variant also pointed out that it is typical for the industry that you primarily receive feedback when something is off and that the road to appraisal is longer.

"I would prefer to receive more feedback from the client where I spend 9/10 days, but it's very rare that these things come without me actively asking for it." - Silje, Blank

"At the client you get direct feedback on your work. Then we've had some feedback processes in Blank and tried to get a system there because it has been a challenge. We have run a few laps with that which have worked well." - Martine, Blank

4.3.6 The stretch zone

According to most of the interviewees in all three companies, when working as a consultant, the tasks and challenges will vary from client to client, and there can be significant variety within a project. Furthermore, several interviewees emphasise that they experience task variety when they land new projects or clients, which depending on the timeframe of the contracts happens more frequently for some than others. According to the interviewees, developers are often hired to spend hours coding with a set of computing tools, and the workday can in that way be one-sided. Even if most work days are spent out with the client, the employees have the opportunity to obtain additional administrative tasks at their employers, and there are also days like the in-house days where employees work on entirely different things. Subsequently, the work year is quite varied.

"I could've been a consultant in any type of company and worked with 80-90% of the same things that I'm doing today, but to be able to contribute to develop a company is perfect. It's the everyday that gives me the most, and I believe that it's not possible to have it better in my industry." - Silje, Blank

All of the stories portrayed in the interviews convey that the companies are concerned with ensuring that the level of pressure, workload, and stress is not overwhelming. According to an employee from Blank, it is an old-fashioned idea that IT consultants work around the clock, and it is part of a world that one does not wish to be part of anymore. Further, their ambition is that one ought to work with a pace and pressure that one can sustain until retirement. At Fink, they have deliberately chosen not to go into start-ups and smaller companies, where there is a fast pace and sizable work pressure, because they believe it would wear them out. At Variant, their ambition is to have something more balanced, and to rather focus on being present when at work. Hence, there is only about an hour overtime per employee monthly on average.

Moreover, many employees expressed that they often experience a 'hypnotic state' where they lose their sense of time because they get into the flow and are completely absorbed by their work. According to the interviews, they feel an increased sense of happiness and satisfaction when they experience this.

"I get peak experiences everyday, so I never think about time when I'm at work. Sometimes when I'm supposed to do pickups at kindergarten, I have to keep track so that I don't forget the time. I have fun and enjoy going to work or else I would have changed my job." - Pernille, Fink

The stories provided also highlight that there are individual differences in stress tolerance. Some employees express that they prefer to be in their comfort zone, whilst others are comfortable with consistently challenging themselves. According to interviewees from all three organisations, they believe that most of their colleagues step out of their comfort zone every day, where one experiences that it is challenging, but achievable. Further, they portray that they can take on as much responsibility as they would like, and underline the importance of not getting too many tasks outside of the comfort zone, as it can lead one to feeling completely overwhelmed.

For instance, at Blank, an employee explained that they were concerned with being cautious and taking great care of a newly educated employee when she entered. In the aftermath, she told them that she would have rather been thrown out in a project to get hands-on experience. At Fink, according to the employees, few are thrown out on thin ice, but recently they had a junior where he had to

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learn a new computing language that few knew. The manager followed up on him throughout the entire project and he got a strong sense of mastery because he went from being junior to senior within this field of expertise. At Variant, an employee conveyed that most are thrown out of the comfort zone at an early stage, but that they get the support and follow-up they need, and that it is looked upon as a declaration of trust.

"Devotedly. I'm passionate about my work and feel that my work is passionate for me. I have it incredibly exciting, at the same time as I haven't been in the proximity of burnout." - Silje, Blank

"*It's best to be in the stretch zone where you're experiencing mastery, but feel that you have to do more than you have done before. This is where the capacity building happens, outside the comfort zone."* - Stian, Fink

"I'm the type of person that has a pinpoint-focus and if there are too many things happening at the same time, I become stressed. You have to know yourself and when to scale back on the workload." - Fredrik, Variant

4.4 Company loyalty

In the following section, we elaborate on the perceived improvement areas and company loyalty, in addition to the reported employee retention. Concerning improvement areas, all of the interviewees expressed that it was hard to pinpoint, and if they came up with any, they emphasised that it would not influence their well-being at work. Furthermore, the suggestions were either related to personal preferences, or to workplace practices that would have to be in place if they were to increase in size. For instance, one employee mentioned that they could have facilitated more fixed social gatherings, so that one could plan ahead, and another employee suggested that they could have put in place more guidelines, so that it is easier to get an overview as a fresh graduate.

In relations to referrals, all of the interviewees expressed that they were either very likely to promote this company or were already doing it. However, the majority emphasised that they had to consider what kind of person they would recommend working there, as they believe this way of working is not for everyone. Across all, they would not hesitate to recommend working there if they

sense the right profile and if it was a person they would have enjoyed working with.

"It depends on who it is, but if there's a great match, I absolutely believe that you won't find a better workplace in Trondheim. On the eNPS, it's definitely a ten." -
Fredrik, Variant

Concerning overall turnover, at Blank, 14 people have left the company during the timeframe of five years. Everyone who quit left because they were relocating, needed a change of occupation, or experienced other life-changing factors, except from one that left for another consulting company, but left there as well, shortly after starting the new position.

"It went almost two years without anyone quitting, then a small wave came. People change and time changes and you just have to accept that. You can't hold people in disarray and you can't get a model or company structure that fits everything always. It may not be us." - Gustav, Blank

At Variant, the retention rate has been 100 %, except for one person that signed a contract, but decided to leave for another company before the start date. At Fink, there has also been a 100 % retention rate, except for a founder that resigned in the beginning. Furthermore, the employees conveyed that they are focusing efforts on retaining employees instead of recruiting new ones. One employee believed the high retention rate is because the employees enjoy spending time together, in addition to being well-compensated.

4.5 Overview of findings
To summarize, it is evident that these companies are very similar on a broad level, as the differences lie in the details, which can be seen below in Table 1. The most prominent *difference* is related to the physical environment, as there were different degrees of personalisation and use of the office spaces outside of work hours, which is explained by the choice of venue. Moreover, there are small differences in the allocation of the competence budget, and slight differences in what they wanted to change in the industry.

Concerning *similarities*, all three facilitate a lot of social gatherings, the employees feel that the social environment is good, they emphasise that they have

a good relation to the managers and often look upon colleagues as friends. Further, these companies invest a lot to ensure the well-being of the employees, that they feel at home, and perceive that they have enough opportunities for growth and development. Besides this, they are unconventionally open in comparison to the industry average and the organisational structure is flat with a significant focus on self-driven work. The employees feel like they have significant insight into decisions being made, they feel safe, and they would not hesitate to refer a person to apply for a position, if they are the right fit.

Table 1. *Overview of key findings from the three companies.*

Variable	Blank AS	Fink AS	Variant AS
Year of establishment	2015	2016	2018
Number of employees	40	33	20
Employee turnover	14	0	0
Pioneering mindset	Particular desire to be at the forefront of changing the industry.	Desire to be an inclusive company that stands out in the "cold" industry.	Desire to be unconventionally transparent and open.
Flat organisation	Trust-based management system with a small management team.	Trust-based management system with a small management team.	Trust-based management system with a small management team.
Investments in the employees	Fixed salaries and equal profit-sharing schemes. Strong employee benefit programs, covering uncommon expenses in the industry.	Fixed salaries and equal profit-sharing schemes. Strong employee benefit programs, covering uncommon expenses in the industry.	Fixed salaries and equal profit-sharing schemes. Strong employee benefit programs, covering uncommon expenses in the industry.
Openness	Exceptionally transparent compared to industry average both internally and externally.	Exceptionally transparent compared to industry average both internally and externally.	Exceptionally transparent compared to industry average both internally and externally.
The physical environment	Own well-designed venue with a high degree of personalisation. Currently refurbishing.	Well-designed coworking space, not as personalised.	Well-designed coworking space, not personalised. Currently relocating.

Variable	Blank AS	Fink AS	Variant AS
Growth opportunities	Vast opportunities for development and career advancement, but no budget set aside.	Vast opportunities for development and career advancement, with an annual budget of 100.000 NOK per employee.	Vast opportunities for development and career advancement, but no budget set aside.
Perceived safety	The employees feel very safe with regards to financials, experimentation, socially and the management.	The employees feel very safe with regards to financials, experimentation, socially and the management.	The employees feel very safe with regards to financials, experimentation, socially and the management.
Social environment	Considered very good by the employees, and they frequently arrange social meet-ups. Employees frequently use office outside work hours.	Considered very good by the employees, and they frequently arrange social meet-ups.	Considered very good by the employees, and they frequently arrange social meet-ups.
Feedback	Feedback is given sporadically and is often self-initiated, but the threshold for asking is low.	Feedback is given frequently face-to-face or over "Finkekvitter" and the threshold for asking is low.	Feedback is given sporadically and is often self-initiated, but the threshold for asking is low.
Stretch zone	The work tasks are varied, and workers often step out of their comfort zone.	The work tasks are varied, and workers often step out of their comfort zone.	The work tasks are varied, and workers often step out of their comfort zone.
Company loyalty	The employees were either very likely to promote this company or doing it already.	The employees were either very likely to promote this company or doing it already.	The employees were either very likely to promote this company or doing it already.

5.0 Discussion

As we uncovered, our findings display a wide range of beneficial outcomes related to the business model focused around employee well-being and engagement, both for the employees and the organisations. The companies are highly similar to each other, as seen in Table 1, and this study both support and extend the research field within this industry. Moreover, we have unveiled several aspects that differ from conventional high-tech consulting firms. This includes the degree of transparency, the use of fixed salaries, levels of autonomy, and comprehensive employee benefit programs. In this section, we will provide a more in-depth and reflected analysis of the occuring findings, and connect it to existing theory when applicable.

Subsequently, we will assess whether the management of the work environment in these three companies contributes to work engagement and employee retention.

5.1 Insight as a key to involvement

Starting off, all three companies displayed a strong desire to share knowledge and to increase the overall industry standard by focusing on insight, the social environment, and on the well-being of their employees. Further, the mindset of these three companies seem to contradict the traditional business model where expert knowledge is protected and used to gain a competitive advantage (Gattnar et al., 2014), as these companies have a business model that revolves around being exceptionally transparent, both internally and externally. The employees' insight into decisions made, policies, salaries, and the economic status of the companies substantiates the employees' explanation that the openness was a significant contributor to why they chose to work in these companies. As a result, there seems to be a notable link between corporate transparency and engagement levels, as the employees reported that the high degree of transparency contributed to create and sustain the feeling of individual safety, trust, fairness, and involvement *(see K3)*.

5.2 Attracting the bright minds

According to Kular et al. (2008), individual differences have a notable impact on an employee's ability to engage at work. Across the companies, there seems to be a specific type of employees who work there, characterised by being exceptionally open, self-driven, committed to the work itself, and willing to change. This may be explained by the industry itself, as the consultants have to keep pace with the rapid technological development, and that the technology contributes to unite and enable the enthusiasts to find common ground (Flanding et al., 2019). Moreover, all employees seem to be highly attentive towards the types of people they want to bring into the companies, which provides insight into how the employees safeguard the company culture when referring others.

These employees will also have a positive influence on company loyalty, as referred employees tend to stay longer at an organisation than those recruited without pre-existing ties to co-workers (Weller et al., 2009). This may contribute to partially explain the reported retention rates, as these companies have heavily relied on employee referrals in the recruitment process. Moreover, as these

companies are growing in size, they are likely to have to rely less on having to know the candidates well and can rather use the existing culture as a tool for employee training and behaviour nudging, which has been enabled due to the careful selection process from the beginning.

5.3 The value of investing in the employees

As mentioned before, conventional consulting companies are often characterised by the high levels of competition as a result of the use of the 'up or out' policy and commission-based salaries (Batchelor, 2011). On the basis of our findings, the three companies contribute to challenge this approach to salaries, and it seems as if it has contributed to increase cooperation and employee satisfaction. Thus, it seems as if the use of fixed salaries, is the preferred choice due to the aforementioned positive outcomes. As a result, these companies are likely to attract bright individuals who are not only concerned with financial gains and seniority levels, as one could potentially earn more through freelancing or receiving commission-based pay (Saether, 2019; Schmettow & Drees, 2014). It appears as if these companies attract individuals that are more concerned with co-worker relations, knowledge sharing, and the academia in itself. Moreover, the salaries are equal for those with the same number of years in experience and above the industry average. This may contribute to affect work motivation- and engagement levels, in addition to the intent to stay, as it contributes to a sense of fairness, trust, and indicates that the work the consultants do is highly valued *(see K3)*. Furthermore, findings indicate that these companies make the employees feel valued and at home by investing in them, and through covering unusual expenses, where these investments have a greater yield and value for the employees than the expenditure for the companies.

Moreover, it seems as if there are vast opportunities for employee development in all three companies, both self-driven and facilitated by the companies. Capacity building is encouraged by the management, and due to the use of fixed salaries, the companies are able to set aside specific days for social gatherings and academic days, which contributes to the cultivation of a positive social environment. From our findings, the employees perceive that they have sufficient room for growth, and that it has contributed to increase their passion for work, as they have the opportunity to pursue their interests and to broaden their horizon

(Bakker et al., 2008; Thomson, n.d). Subsequently, there appears to be a notable link between opportunities for growth and individual engagement levels *(see K2)*.

Moreover, opportunities for joint ownership and profit-sharing schemes seem to contribute to a sense of fairness, unity, and job security, leaving the employees to cooperate and foster friendships at work, rather than throwing someone under the bus for a personal gain. These are also excellent tools to motivate employees, as the employees have a vested interest in their company's success (Heathfield, 2019; Johnsen, 2016). This seems to be supported by the employees, who explain that they experience a deeper motivation and engagement when they work in this manner *(see K1)*. Due to the financial security, predictability in work hours, and feeling of alignment, it also appears as if employees are enabled to wind down, relieve stress, and engage at work *(see K5)*. Nevertheless, it also seems as if it differs slightly between the age groups, as the senior employees tend to dismiss a task if they perceive the workload to be too great, whereas the more inexperienced are less familiar with their own capacity and stress tolerance for natural reasons.

Furthermore, our study showcases how fixed salaries can lead to and enable the strengthening of social ties through social gatherings, as employees receive the same salary, regardless of attendance. This is quite different from other consultancy companies, where it has a direct impact on an employee's billing rate and salary (Booz, 2018; Grandre, 2019). From the data collected, it became apparent that in conventional consultancy companies, consultants are expected to work at the client five days a week, often with required overtime, and that capacity has to be built in client projects or during leisure. Another interesting finding is that the three companies included in our research dictate the terms of client contracts so that the employees are able to set aside days for capacity building, and they decline clients that have an issue this. This further portrays how these companies view and prioritise employee development and capacity building. According to the findings, these companies facilitate more social gatherings than the industry average and it seems as if it has contributed to make these employees more connected to their colleagues, as most of the employees emphasise that they have a great social environment, and that it is better than at any prior employments. Several employees also mentioned that if it was not for the co-workers, they would not have worked there, which further gives an indication that

the facilitation of social gatherings is a contributor to employee retainment *(see K7)*.

5.4 Empowerment through avoiding the corporate ladder

In all three organisations, the flat organisation with a trust-based management system seems to be a significant hallmark of the unconventional business model. According to research, employees who encounter high levels of autonomy experience increased accountability, well-being, and engagement at work (Halbesleben, 2010; Wheatley, 2017). Our research supports that autonomy plays a significant role in individual engagement levels, as observations and interviews portrayed that the employees felt that the autonomy led to a greater sense of influence, accountability, and insight into how they could contribute *(see K6)*. Moreover, the companies are small in size and the employees are the ones who own the company, enabling them invest money on social gatherings and on improving employee well-being as they do not have to justify their investments. Further, it looks as if any employees wish to add something to the office or to initiate a gathering, they can do so as long as all are invited, which narrates the encouragement of contributing to the fellowship.

Concerning feedback and recognition, findings suggests that obtaining feedback is a common industry problem, as it is challenging and time-consuming to provide feedback on client based work. Further, it seems as if the employees are aware of the feedback limitations imposed due to the work style, and the managers try to give feedback when possible and most of the employees perceive that they get sufficient feedback on their work. In addition, the low threshold for contacting management, to more easily voice suggestions and concerns, made the employees feel a strengthened sense of proposition acceptance, which contributed to increased well-being. In addition, the employees expressed that the encouragement and support, in addition to the management's use of recognition and feedback, have a positive impact on their engagement levels, as it contributed to increase their enthusiasm and feeling of being valued for their work (Macey & Schneider, 2008; *see K4*).

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5.5 The value of feeling at home

Our research also showed that the physical workplace across the three companies differed in terms of design, practicalities, and ability to personalise the venue. Furthermore, the employees expressed that the venue accomodated for their work-related needs, they feel prideful when they bring others to the office, and feel like it brings out belongingness and satisfaction. Thus, it seems as if there is a significant link between the office design, venue, and engagement *(see K8)*. Furthermore, the use of coworking spaces and multiple workspace options, such as break areas and silent rooms, has enabled these companies to offer their employees freedom and flexibility, as the management can easily book more space tailored to their needs if required (Morgan, 2017; Moen et al., 2016).

With regards to the venue, findings indicate that the employees at Blank are more attached to their venue than those at Fink and Variant. Several employees from Blank expressed that they feel at home in the office and feel that it is an essential element of their culture, and therefore spend time in the office outside working hours for social gatherings. Moreover, employees have arranged weddings and baptismal dinners there, which is unusual across any industries, further portraying their affection toward the office space. At Fink and Variant, employees do not consider the venue to play a significant part of their identity which is likely to be due to the limitations connected to renting a coworking space. Moreover, it is difficult to assess how Variant's new venue will affect individual engagement levels, as the relocation happened after we collected data and have therefore not been taken into consideration. However, the employees' expressed excitement related to the relocation, indicating how having an own venue can contribute to foster engagement and enthusiasm *(see K8)*. Thus, our research suggests that the use of coworking spaces fosters a feeling of temporality, whereas the social and symbolic importance of home plays a role in providing people with roots, and a sense of identity, stability, and safety. This can further give an indication of how the employees at Fink will be affected when they move to their own venue.

5.6 Getting the employees to stay

According to Bakker et al. (2008), engaged employees are more likely to stay at an organisation, they are passionate about their work, and often experience the sensation of being completely immersed in their work. Taking into consideration

the key points introduced in the theoretical framework, in addition to workplace practices derived from the findings, it seems as if there is a combination of all of these aspects, especially the coworker relations, that contribute to retain the employees.

The stories provided in the interviews portray that the employees have a high level of satisfaction related to their workplace, and that they are engaged. From findings, it looks as if only positive aspects are highlighted, however, this is due to the fact that the employees almost only had positive things to say about their employers. All expressed that they had to dig deep in order to find any areas of improvement, and emphasised that the suggestions they came up with would not affect their well-being at work, but were either related to personal preferences or workplace practices one would naturally improve with growth.

According to Brusseau (2011), there are three levels of dedication related to company loyalty. On the basis of findings, it is likely that the three companies face balanced loyalty, as the employees and organisations seem to share interests. That is, the employees are willing to work overtime for the organisation, but only if necessary, and seem to be focused around maintaining a work-life balance. Moreover, the employees also express that they would have left the company if they were dissatisfied, which implies that the people who work there that are aware of what they value and deserve in a working place.

With regards to assessing the difference in employee turnover, Blank was established before the other two companies, making it reasonable that the number of people who have quit their jobs is higher than at Fink and Variant. According to our findings, the people who have left Blank have done so because they were relocating, needed a change of occupation, or experienced other life-changing factors, not because they did not like their co-workers or the business model. Fink was established only a year later than Blank, and it is difficult to pinpoint the exact reason for the turnover difference, as it may be due to coincidences such as personal relocation opportunities. Another explanation could be related to prior employment history (Kular et al., 2008; Humphrey, Nahrgang & Morgeson, 2007). At Fink, we have recorded that they have a larger share of employees with a medium to senior level than in the other two companies, and that they have

fewer fresh graduates. Our research suggests that fresh graduates might also feel that it is too open and self-driven, and that one might have to have worked another place to recognise the true value of the business model, which further might partly explain the turnover rates in Blank. However, we have not investigated the characteristics of the employees that quit, leaving this to be purely speculation. With that being said, we do not recommend the companies to avoid hiring fresh graduates simply due to turnover rates, as they may contribute to boost innovation and bring in fresh insights that can enable these companies to improve further (Grubb, 2016).

5.7 How sustainable is the business model?

Another interesting feature to discuss is the imitability of the business model. All three companies have been capable of imitating a tailored version of the business model from each other, thus we suggest that it is likely relatively easy to imitate the structural aspects such as the capacity building budgets, bots, and fixed salaries. Nevertheless, it might be difficult for a well-established consulting company that operates with a completely different model and mindset to imitate the culture, degree of autonomy, and co-worker relations, due to established norms and behaviours. Moreover, one might meet resistance to change from senior management who have done things in an established pattern for years.

Another aspect to consider is whether the aforementioned insights are applicable to larger consultancy companies, and whether this business model will remain sustainable if the studied companies grow in size. On the basis of our findings, it looks as if the model functions and is effective up to a certain company size in this industry. This is rooted in the fact that a larger company might have difficulties to adapt parts of the model, such as cultivating the feeling of 'home', individual employee follow-up, act as a cohesive unit in social settings, and control self-governed work. Despite this, a lot of insights can be drawn from this research. For instance, larger companies could, for instance, establish subunits, utilise similar profit-sharing schemes, offer ownership shares, and include the employees in strategic decision-making processes, in order to strengthen the sense of ownership among more employees. In addition, one could utilise fixed salaries, lower the frequency of overtime, increase the degree of autonomy, and facilitate frequent

social gatherings, in order to strengthen the employee engagement and connection to work.

Another aspect to consider is whether the business model would be applicable in other countries. This study was conducted in Norway, therefore, it captures Norwegian business and societal culture, and the model might not work in other highly hierarchical cultures (Hofstede, 1984). Subsequently, this business model has the potential to be sustainable if tailored to the particular companies, and these insights are likely to be sensible for most white-collar firms in Norway.

6.0 Practical implications and future research

Our research highlights that managers in high-tech consultancy firms should acknowledge that the organisation's focus on the employees should be incorporated and reflected in their company vision and branding, and internal human resource and organisational practices. Moreover, they need to take an active part in making the well-being of the employees the main priority. Our findings also indicate that managers need to ensure the right employee fit, and frequently facilitate social events in order to foster a positive work environment.

As a result of this research, we have discovered a number of interesting concepts and perspectives. Concerning future research, we strongly encourage that one investigates findings from this study with a larger sample size, other industries, and company sizes, and to conduct a survey with more informants in order to substantiate and increase the quality of the research. In addition to this, it would be interesting to take into account the impact of age, gender, and job title on individual work engagement and how the employees perceive the work environment. With this in mind, it would be appropriate to take into consideration the aforementioned areas of improvement.

7.0 Conclusion

The purpose of this thesis was to examine how unconventional high-tech consultancy start-ups manage the work environment to foster engagement and retain employees, through a comparative case study of Blank, Fink and Variant. This study indicates that there are numerous ways a company can manage the work environment to foster work engagement and satisfaction. Furthermore, our findings display that these companies commit to being extraordinarily transparent, they provide fixed salaries, and equally-shared bonuses among the employees. These practices contribute to creating favourable outcomes, such as an increased feeling of safety and unity, and enables the facilitation of more social events, that further foster engagement. We additionally found that the companies invest greatly in the professional development of the employees. Moreover, they rely on trust-based management systems and involve the employees in decision-making processes, contributing to strengthen the desire to contribute and feeling of being appreciated. The findings are quite similar across cases and the data collected contributes to supporting and extending the existing research field.

Further, we wanted to investigate how these three companies contribute to challenging conventional consulting business models. Our research suggests that this is done through being exceptionally open in a knowledge-driven industry where knowledge traditionally has been viewed as a competitive advantage. Moreover, our research suggests that the three companies challenge conventional consulting business models by investing greatly in competence building, whereas this is not only cultivated in client projects, but done through academic days where the consultants are exempted from client work. Besides this, the unconventional use of fixed salaries has enabled these companies to frequently arrange social gatherings, enabling the strengthening of social ties. We argue that companies who facilitate the work environment to benefit their employees, by lowering high levels of competition and facilitating cooperation, will experience company success as a result of highly engaged employees. Subsequently, our research suggests that these practices should be implemented in other knowledge-based firms, if tailored to the characteristics of a company.

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Appendix A - Interview guides

All the below-mentioned questions are related to the key points from the theoretical framework. For example, "Hvor stor grad av beslutningskraft har ansatte? (AUTONOMI)", where the question we asked is first, and the relevant variable of investigation is included in parenthesis. First, we have included the interview guide to the management, and second is the interview guide for the employees.

INTERVJUGUIDE LEDELSEN

Bakgrunn

1. Hvem er du og hva er din stilling? (INDIVIDUAL DIFFERENCES)

2. Hvor lenge har du jobbet for dette selskapet? (PSYCHOLOGICAL CLIMATE)

3. Har du jobbet som konsulent før? Hvis ja, hvor lenge? (INDIVIDUAL DIFFERENCES)

Overblikk

4. Hvordan foregår ansettelsesprosessen? (EMPLOYEE FIT)

5. Hva slags type folk ansetter dere? Nyutdannede/erfarne? (EMPLOYEE FIT)

6. Ønsker dere å ansette flere? (COMPANY SIZE)

7. Hvordan fungerer lønnsmodellen deres? (REMUNERATION)

Arbeidet

8. Hvordan er arbeidsmengden og arbeidstidene? (WORKLOAD)

9. Hvor mye variasjon er det i arbeidet? (TASK VARIATION)

10. Hvordan er forholdet mellom kompetansen og arbeidet som utføres? (JOB CHALLENGE)

11. Hvor stor grad av beslutningskraft har ansatte? (AUTONOMY)

12. Får ansatte kontinuerlig tilbakemelding på arbeidet som gjøres? (FEEDBACK AND RECOGNITION)

13. Hvordan håndteres konflikter og hvordan gis tilbakemelding på mangelfull arbeidsprestasjon? (FEEDBACK)

14. Har dere medarbeidersamtaler?

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(LEADERSHIP SUPPORT AND FACILITATION)

15. Hvordan ser årshjulet ut? (SOCIAL ENVIRONMENT)

Arbeidsmiljøet

16. Hvordan karakteriserer du det sosiale miljøet i kontorlandskapet? (PSYCHOLOGICAL CLIMATE and SOCIAL ENVIRONMENT)

17. Hva slags tiltak og initiativer har dere på plass i bedriften for å bedre arbeidsmiljøet? (LEADERSHIP SUPPORT AND FACILITATION)

18. Hvordan har dere planlagt de fysiske omgivelsene? Er de nøye planlagt? (PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT)

Vekstmuligheter

19. Hva slags muligheter har ansatte på arbeidsplassen til karriereutvikling? (GROWTH OPPORTUNITIES)

20. Hvor mye ressurser settes av til bedring av kompetanseutvikling? (GROWTH OPPORTUNITIES)

Gjennomtrekk

21. Hvor mange ansatte har sluttet og hva er årsaken?

22. Hva er gjennomsnittstallet for brukte sykedager og feriedager?

Annet

23. Er det noen oppsett i bedriften som har vært endret underveis?

24. Er det noe du føler burde vært annerledes med arbeidsplassen, noe som ikke fungerer optimalt i dag?

INTERVJUGUIDE ANSATTE

Bakgrunn

1. Hvem er du og hva er din stilling? (INDIVIDUAL DIFFERENCES)

2. Hvor lenge har du jobbet i selskapet?
   (PSYCHOLOGICAL CLIMATE)

3. Hva var det som tiltrakk deg med å arbeide i dette selskapet?
   (MOTIVATION)

Overblikk

4. Hvordan foregikk din ansettelsesprosess?

5. Stemmer verdiene selskapet prøver å kommunisere med realiteten?
   (COMPLIANCE WITH COMPANY IDENTITY)

Arbeidet

6. Hvor varierte er dine arbeidsoppgaver? (TASK VARIETY)

7. Hvilke typer arbeidsoppgaver gir deg mest kick eller motivasjon?
   (MOTIVATION)

8. Når har du opplevd høydepunkt i din nåværende jobb motivasjonsmessig,
   hvor du er blitt veldig glad og i flyt, der du glemte deg selv?
   (FLOW and MOTIVATION)

9. Hvordan er forholdet mellom kompetansen din og arbeidet som utføres?
   (JOB CHALLENGE and FLOW)

10. Føler du ofte på høye nivåer av stress i arbeidshverdagen?
    (WORKLOAD and BURNOUT)

11. Hvor mye beslutningskraft har du? (AUTONOMY)

12. Får du tilbakemelding på arbeidet som gjøres?
    (FEEDBACK and RECOGNITION)

13. Har dere mulighet til kompetanseutvikling og vekst?
    (GROWTH OPPORTUNITIES)

14. Hvordan opplever du de fysiske omgivelsene?
    (PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT)

15. Bidrar omgivelsene til høyere trivsel? (PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT)

Arbeidsmiljøet

16. Hvordan karakteriserer du det sosiale miljøet?
    (CO-WORKER RELATIONS)

17. Hvordan vil du karakterisere forholdet mellom deg og arbeidsplassen?

(CO-WORKER RELATIONS)

18. Føler du tilhørighet og trygghet på arbeidsplassen?
(PSYCHOLOGICAL CLIMATE)

19. Hva slags betydning har arbeidet med kollegaene her?
(PSYCHOLOGICAL CLIMATE and MOTIVATION)

20. Hvor sannsynlig er det at du vil anbefale andre å begynne å jobbe for dette
selskapet? (COMPANY LOYALTY)

Annet

21. Er det noe du føler burde vært annerledes med arbeidsplassen?
(JOB SATISFACTION)

22. Noe annet du vil fremheve som gjør at du gleder deg til å gå på jobb?
(MOTIVATION and PSYCHOLOGICAL CLIMATE)

Appendix B - Informants

Below, we have provided an overview of the characteristics of our sample, where job levels have been separated into two categories, namely employees and managers, denoted by 'E' and 'M'. We also categorised the interviewees into three different age groups; young adult, adult, and middle aged. In addition, we have briefly explained the type of interviews conducted, namely face-to-face or online, and the length of the interviews.
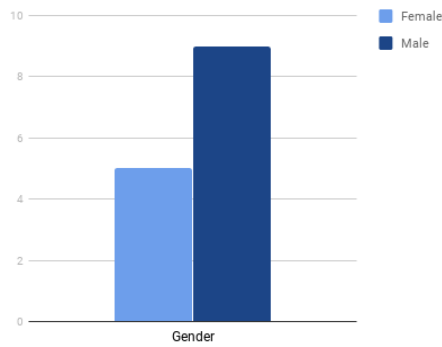
Overview of the characteristics of our sample.

Company	Job level	Age group	Interview (type and length)
Blank	E	Young adult	Skype Approx. 30 min
Blank	E	Young adult	Skype Approx. 20 min
Blank	E	Middle-aged	Skype Approx. 40 min
Blank	M	Adult	Skype Approx. 30 min
Blank	M	Adult	Face-to-face Approx. 60 min
Fink	E	Young adult	Face-to-face Approx. 30 min
Fink	E	Adult	Face-to-face Approx. 30 min
Fink	E	Middle-aged	Face-to-face Approx. 20 min
Fink	M	Adult	Face-to-face Approx. 90 min
Fink	M	Adult	Face-to-face Approx. 45 min

Variant	E	Young adult	Face-to-face Approx. 25 min
Variant	E	Young adult	Face-to-face Approx. 30 min
Variant	E	Adult	Face-to-face Approx. 45 min
Variant	M	Middle-aged	Face-to-face Approx. 40 min

In the two graphs below, we have included a brief overview of the gender distribution, and the position the employees have in the company, differing between manager, designer, and programmer.

Gender allocation

Position