Work-life balance in the knowledge intensive field - Implications of the use of electronic devices in the 24/7 economy

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Title of thesis:
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Abstract:
This thesis studies the effects of using electronic devices as working tools within the knowledge intensive field. The aim of the thesis is to provide an understanding for how the use of electronic devices in the intense 24/7 economy affect the boundaries between work and free time and how they contribute to the sense of work-life balance and the well-being of employees within the knowledge intensive field of consulting.

The theoretical base in the thesis consists of the work/family border theory by Clark (2000) and the capability approach by Sen (1980). These two theories provide a frame for evaluating and analyzing the results as well as for the discussion.

A sample of six consultants is used for a qualitative study consisting of semi-structured interviews that are analyzed through directed content analysis. The categorization of the data reveals that flexible borders are mostly perceived as positive, whereas permeable borders are mostly experienced as negative. Electronic devices stand for most of the permeability in creating a bridge between the two domains of work and home, whereas the 24/7 economy provides the expectations of always being reachable. The preferred type of work-life balance is autonomy, where flexibility is high and permeability is low.

The electronic devices are found to impact the employees mostly negatively with the following consequences: annoyance, anxiety, lack of work-life balance, lack of energy and time for private life, missing family matters, a sense of being out of control, difficulties sleeping, stress, and upsetting family and friends. For these reasons, the position is seen as a temporary solution providing fast advancement and valuable experience but not as a sustainable choice in the future. The electronic devices enable flexibility which is highly valued.

Keywords:
Work-life balance, electronic devices, 24/7 economy, knowledge intensive field, consulting, capability approach, work/family border theory, qualitative research
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1 INTRODUCTION

Does constantly being reachable through modern technology create an opportunity for employees to spend more time outside the office, or does it prevent the employee from feeling relaxation and enjoying his free time? When the employee always is at reach for clients and colleagues, it can be difficult to leave the office and call it a day. Employees within the knowledge intensive field tend to be reachable via electronic devices regardless of time and space and are often expected to act upon work issues immediately also outside of traditional work settings (Niemistö et al, 2017).

The employees within the knowledge intensive field have high demands to conform to a hectic work environment and high expectations from the employer and clients. The tough industry is bound to affect the employees in multiple ways, both positive and negative. It is important to research the consequences of working in the knowledge intensive field in order to minimize financial, organizational and personal repercussions as well as develop the field into a more sustainable work environment.

1.1 Background

Combining working and living into a functioning whole in the 24/7 economy is an issue for the majority of knowledge intensive workers today. The use of electronic devices affects the work-life balance by blurring the boundaries and can for example lead to reduced work satisfaction or workaholism. On the other hand, blurring borders can also lead to for example increased flexibility and higher morale. (Nam, 2014) Mobile technology and electronic devices in combination with the 24/7 economy allow knowledge intensive workers to work anytime from anywhere, feeding a tougher professional culture (Alvesson, 2004) and giving the employee more responsibility for maintaining their preferred balance. This has resulted in young professionals having longer working hours and higher levels of stress, not only in the past few years, but in the past decades (Moen et al, 2013; Niemistö et al, 2017).

The 24/7 economy affects employees within the knowledge intensive field due to global networks of colleagues and clients, urgent tasks and modern norms. The traditionally clear
boundary between work and home has been weakened (Geurts & Demerouti, 2003), or in some cases even erased completely (Dén-Nagy, 2014). Even though professionals across fields have conformed to the 24/7 economy and its requirements, the consequences on the employee’s personal life can be hard (Moen et al, 2013). Electronic devices bring work home and home to work, in a previously unacceptable manner. Can the knowledge intensive field with its requirements of constant availability be a change of the same caliber as the industrial revolution once was?

Much research to this date has focused on the positive outcomes of the employees using electronic devices in the 24/7 economy from a productivity point of view, as for example Middleton (2003) addresses. However, there has not been much research on how this affects the employees’ well-being (Sarker et al, 2012). This thesis aims at understanding how the electronic devices and the 24/7 economy affect the employees’ well-being and their sense of work-life balance, rather than focusing on organizational policies on the matter and implications for the employer.

1.2 Aim and Research Question

The aim of this thesis is to provide an understanding for the effects of the intense 24/7 economy on work-life balance and well-being of employees within the knowledge intensive field of consulting, and how the use of electronic devices contributes to the possibly blurring boundaries between work and free time. I strive for providing results of how the employees perceive their work-life balance and its consequences. My research questions are therefore:

1. How does the use of electronic devices in combination with the 24/7 economy influence the employee’s sense of work-life balance and well-being?

2. How does the use of electronic devices constrain the achievement of a desired work-life balance?

3. How does the use of electronic devices enable the achievement of a desired work-life balance?

With these research questions I aim to answer both how the 24/7 economy and the use of electronic devices and through these devices constantly being connected to the working
environment affect the work-life balance and well-being of these employees and what consequences this style of living and working results in, as well as what are the possible obstacles or opportunities to achieve the desired life style.

1.3 Definitions

Central terms and concepts are presented below in order to avoid misunderstandings and misinterpretations of how different terms and concepts are used in this thesis. Since terms are interpreted differently across fields and backgrounds I explain how I use the following terms in this thesis.

**Knowledge intensive:** Alvesson (2004) defines a knowledge intensive firm (KIF) as a company where most employees are highly educated, qualified, ambitious and contribute with their intellect and knowledge, thus performing intellectual work. Starbuck (1992) further argues that the term knowledge intensive has its roots in the older terms labor intensive and capital intensive firms, referring to the main input in the production process. By this thought, Starbuck (1992) argues that the main input in knowledge intensive companies is the employees' knowledge. Alvesson (2004) continues on this thought by adding the output of the production process to the term knowledge intensive, suggesting that knowledge intensive companies offer knowledge-based products or services to the market.

**24/7 economy:** The term refers to the state many companies are in, demanding their employees to be reachable and functioning around the clock (Presser, 2003). In this thesis, I use the term to illustrate that employees in the knowledge intensive field rarely are completely off duty, but their state could rather be seen as a constant mode of being on standby.

**Work:** With the term work, I refer to the definition by Clutterbuck (2003:8): *the time and energy people contract to expend to a third party in return for a defined reward.*

**Home:** With the term home, I refer to the activities the individual conducts when not working. The activities can be ranging from family responsibilities, hobbies, leisure time to self-care and so forth. In this thesis the term home is used interchangeably with terms such as family (Kossek & Lautsch, 2012; Clark, 2000), life (Diaz et al, 2012) and non-work (Moen
et al, 2013; Dén-Nagy, 2014) when referring to free time or any time the individual spends
on activities outside of conducting work-related tasks and responsibilities.

1.4 Limitations

The knowledge intensive field includes a wide range of different types of companies and
organizations. Both Starbuck (1992) and Alvesson (2004) argue that the boundaries
between knowledge intensive companies and other companies are very loose. Hence, a clear
categorization cannot be done between what is considered a knowledge intensive
organization and what is not. The traditional and most common view on knowledge
intensive work, according to both Alvesson (2004) and Starbuck (1992), includes different
kinds of consulting. Therefore, I have chosen to focus my research on companies that
operate within the field of consulting.

Another limitation to this thesis is the sample. I study employees with one to four years of
experience in their current position. These employees are in the beginning of their career or
in their current position and are not necessarily fully comfortable with the intense way of
working yet. However, these employees already have a good picture of what it is like to work
in the field and can provide valuable insight. With this limitation I aim at including
employees who have not necessarily settled down within the industry yet, rather than
established consultants. The employees studied in this thesis are all working in the Helsinki
area.

Further, I have not used statistics in this thesis to illustrate a wider picture of the situation,
but rather focused on the studied employees’ descriptions of their personal thoughts and
experiences.

1.5 Disposition

The next chapter of this thesis is dedicated to previous literature on the topics of work-life
balance and the use of electronic devices. In this chapter, two theories are presented by first
explaining the theory, then investigating relevant concepts of the theories further, followed
by critique of each theory. The ties to the topic of work-life balance are explained in this chapter as well.

In the third chapter, I present the methods used for deciding upon the sample, the chosen methods and approaches of research and finally how the data is analyzed. In this chapter, the ethics of the thesis are also discussed.

In the fourth chapter I present the results from my research with the help of tables. The results are then analyzed with the help of quotes from the interviews. In chapter five, the analysis in relation to the theories and results is discussed, as well as possible features that might have affected the results. Practical implications of the thesis and suggestions for further research finalize the chapter. Finally, chapter six consists of the conclusions reached in this thesis. In the end, there is a summary of the thesis in Swedish.
2 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

In the following section I present existing literature on the topic of work-life balance, as well as the theories and frameworks of thought that I consider relevant for the topic in question. The work/family border theory by Clark (2000) will set the base for the work-life balance theories and Sen’s capability approach (1980) will offer a different take on the topic. The purpose of the literature and theories presented below is to provide an understanding of previous studies within the topic of work-life balance and to function as a base for interpreting and explaining the data gained from the qualitative research.

2.1 Work-life balance

Work-life balance is a common concept within organizations, since it concerns most employees regardless of the field. Consequently, a big number of scholars have written about work-life balance according to their own field. In this thesis I use articles and definitions of work-life balance mainly written within a business and sociology aspect. I present a few different interpretations of the term in table one below, and finally present the concept that I refer to when using the concept of work-life balance in this thesis.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Author</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Year</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Clark</td>
<td>Focus on minimizing role conflict between the two domains of home and work and a satisfaction and good functioning at both domains</td>
<td>2000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hill et al.</td>
<td>The state where an individual is able to balance all three aspects of emotional, temporal and behavioral demands in the two domains of home and work simultaneously</td>
<td>2001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Guest</td>
<td>Anyone who regularly spends more than 48 hours per week on work has a bad work-life balance</td>
<td>2001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clutterbuck</td>
<td>Awareness of the demands the two domains bring as well as having the ability to choose how to spend the energy and time on each domain, making conscious choices and valuing the made choices</td>
<td>2003</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
With the definitions in table one above, I wish to bring forward the various ways of describing the term work-life balance, meaning different things to different researchers and employees. Guest (2001) stands out by setting a strict time limit for how much time spent on work per week is too much, equaling bad work-life balance. Most other definitions revolve around the employee’s ability to affect and manage the borders or around the aim at minimizing possible role conflicts when crossing the borders. All of these definitions are valuable in the discussion of work-life balance, since different individuals tend to evaluate their situation differently (Dén-Nagy, 2014). Hence, Nam’s (2014) explanation summarizes the other definitions well, since it recognizes the employee’s own perception of the situation as the determination whether a work-life balance is good or not.

In this thesis, I focus on the term defined by Nam (2014), where the individual’s subjective perception of his or her balance or imbalance is the key, not an objective, pre-determined amount of work hours common to everyone.

### 2.1.1 Lack of work-life balance – consequences

A lack of work-life balance is occurring when responsibilities in one domain overshadows the responsibilities of the other domain (Netemeyer et al, 2004). Work-life conflict is another term for a lack of work-life balance, suggesting that the two domains of home and work are in conflict with each other (Sarker et al, 2012), creating problems for the individual trying to handle both domains successfully in a balanced way. When discussing work-life balance, emphasis should be put on the individual’s experience and ability to balance these

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Wood</th>
<th>Various adjustments possible to make to working patterns that enable a better combination of work and non-work</th>
<th>2006</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Kossek &amp; Lautsch</td>
<td>The individual’s ability to affect and control his or her own border management</td>
<td>2012</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nam</td>
<td><em>An individual’s relative perception of the relationship between work and private life</em></td>
<td>2014 pp. 1017</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1 Definitions of work-life balance
two domains in a preferred manner, rather than focusing on the strict working hours of nine to five and perceive any overwork or working from home as a lack of work-life balance.

A lack of work-life balance during longer periods is proved to result in, among other consequences, higher staff turn-over within the organization, losing both valuable experiences and knowledge (Niemistö et al, 2017). On the individual level, the lack of work-life balance can result in dissatisfaction of one's own situation of work and life and, most drastically, burnout. (Leung, 2011) Especially employees who experience the interference type of work-life balance tend to be more prone to the negative consequences of an imbalance than employees with one of the other three types (Nam, 2014).

2.1.2 Classical theories on work-life balance

Several theories regarding work-life balance have been developed during a long period of time ever since the industrialization separated work and non-work from each other in the late 18th century (Geurts & Demerouti, 2003; Wilensky, 1960). These theories often assume that work and family life are two separate areas that exist independently from each other (Parsons & Bales, 1955). An explanation for this belief is that work and home were carried out in distinct places and time, with different codes of conduct (Clark, 2000).

However, in the 1970s researchers started to consider that both work and home are significant parts of the individual, and therefore both domains affect each other (Clark, 2000). Traditionally, work-life balance has been looked at through the conflicts between the different domains, or perceiving work as the negative domain (Schabracq, 2003).

The three most dominant traditional hypotheses on the topic of work-life balance are segmentation, compensation and spillover (Geurts & Demerouti, 2003) which will be described below.

Segmentation refers to the idea that there is no connection or relationship between work and non-work, but that these two domains are two completely separate areas of the individual’s life having no impact on each other. This hypothesis was founded by Dubin in 1956, but there has been no evidence for segmentation to occur naturally. Individuals can, however, actively work towards achieving a segregated lifestyle with the choices they make. (Geurts & Demerouti, 2003)
The hypothesis of compensation, on the other hand, recognizes a relationship between the two domains of work and non-work, where the focus lies on trying to compensate in the non-work domain what the individual is lacking in the work domain or vice versa. (Geurts & Demerouti, 2003)

The third classical hypothesis regarding work-life balance is spillover. The spillover hypothesis suggests that the individual brings aspects, either positive or negative, from work into the non-work domain or vice versa. The aspects brought into the other domain can be ideas or stress, among other aspects. (e.g. Wilensky, 1960; Staines, 1980; Leung, 2011)

The hypotheses of segregation and spillover, although opposite in their beliefs, are similar in the sense that they assume the work domain to be of negative nature. In contrast to the segregation hypothesis, the compensation and the spillover hypotheses have received quantitative evidence supporting the ideas (e.g. Rousseau, 1978; Mansfield & Evans, 1975).

Recent research proposes that work and non-work are not separate domains anymore, but rather increasingly interrelated (e.g. Geurts & Demerouti 2003; Nam, 2014). Below, the interrelation between the domains of work and non-work is discussed further in combination with the work/family border theory by Clark (2000).

2.2 Work/family border theory

The evolution of theories within the topic of work-life balance has become more complex over time and with changing social circumstances. Clark (2000) argues that existing literature on work-life balance is not sufficient to illustrate and explain the implications of modern work-life balance and hence Clark came to develop the work/family border theory based on literature across different disciplines.

The work/family border theory suggests that individuals are part of two domains; work and home, and that the individuals are constantly crossing the borders between these domains. The theory aims at providing a framework for achieving balance between the domains and to predict when and how a possible conflict could occur. Borders and domains are key concepts that build the foundation for the work/family theory. These concepts are explained below.
2.2.1 Core concepts of the work/family border theory

The two different worlds of work and home (or free time) is referred to as domains (Clark, 2000). Clark (2000) argues that the differences in behavior, thought patterns and rules between these two domains have their roots in the 18th century as a result of the Industrial Revolution, when work and home became two distinct areas of the individual’s life. Work, at this time, conducted separate from home, led to different cultures and behavior arising between the two domains. Different behaviors in the domains can be referred to as roles (Ashforth et al, 2000). Keeping the two domains separate from each other has been the reality and the norm for decades. For example, employees are expected to behave in accordance with the aim of the organization when at work, often more formal and not expressing true emotions. At home, on the other hand, the desirable behavior or role is often informal and emotionally honest. (Clark, 2000)

Socially, people tend to share similar views on what is considered home and what is considered work, especially within the same culture. However, the degree of how individuals are managing, or choosing, to separate the two domains varies greatly. Segmentation, keeping the domains of work and home completely separate from each other, with both domains having distinct behavioral expectations is on one end of the spectrum, whereas integration, where behavior and expectations are the same in both domains, is on the other end of the spectrum. (Nippert-Eng, 1996) This continuum leads to the next key concept of the work/family theory; borders. Borders separate the two domains from each other with several different attributes and qualities described below.

The borders between the two domains can be physical; the place for work and home are physically different and determine where the activities of work and home take place. The borders can also be temporal; the time when work begins and ends and the time for non-work begins and ends. Finally, the psychological aspect of the border; the individual’s sense making of work and home and the determination of what behavior is relevant in the respective domain. (Clark, 2000)

Apart from the physical, temporal and psychological aspects of borders explained above, the borders have several different qualities. These qualities are permeability, flexibility, blending and strength and they describe the quality of the borders further in detail. (Clark, 2000)
Permeability refers to the extent to which elements from another domain may enter the current domain (e.g. Beach, 1989; Zedeck, 1992; Ashforth et al, 2000). Examples of physical and temporal permeability can be a family member calling during office hours or physically visiting the office. Psychological permeability refers to, for example, the individual bringing emotions or new ideas from one domain to the other. Permeability as a concept is similar in nature to the spillover theory by Staines (1980) mentioned earlier in this chapter.

The second quality of the borders is flexibility, and it describes the degree to which the employee can affect the border between the domains by contracting or expanding it according to his needs (Hall & Richter, 1988). Examples of physical and temporal flexibility is the freedom to work when and where the employee desires, and psychological flexibility refers to the ability to think about the other domain while being in the other domain (Clark, 2000).

When the two formerly explained qualities, permeability and flexibility, are strongly present in the employee’s life, blending of the borders is occurring. When the employee’s borders are both permeable and flexible, the two domains of home and work are starting to blend together, or blur. (Clark, 2000) Temporal and physical blending can be an employee working from home, feeding his infant while having a work conversation on the phone. An example of psychological blending is when experiences from one domain are used in the other domain. (Clark, 2000)

When all of the qualities mentioned above are put together, the strength of the border can be evaluated. A strong border suggests that the border between work and home is impermeable, inflexible and does not blend. Thus, when at work the employee only manages work-related matters and when at home, there are no work tasks reflected upon. A weak border, accordingly, describes a permeable, flexible and easily blending border, meaning that the individual is simultaneously handling matters from both domains. (Clark, 2000)

The work/family border theory is helpful when evaluating an employee’s work-life balance, by defining different aspects and qualities of what plays a central role of work-life balance; the borders. The theory cannot, however, determine which situation is the best or most appreciated, as the preferred work-life balance varies between individuals.

The work/family border theory has received some criticism for e.g. simplifying the individual’s life into the two domains of work and home. This and other areas of criticism are looked into below.
2.2.2 Critique of the work/family border theory

The work/family border theory has been criticized for being too simplified regarding the two domains an individual’s life is classified into, presenting a too narrow approach on the individual’s free time as family (Middleton, 2003; Ransome, 2007). Because of this narrow presentation researchers have come to include a third domain, recreational work (Ransome, 2007) or third places (Ashforth et al, 2000) to the two domains of work and family that Clark (2000) includes in her theory. These additional domains include activities striving for pleasure and enjoyment, such as relationships or self-care.

The understanding that the family-domain does not include other aspects of free time, for example physical activities or spending time with friends, can be complemented by a third domain as done by Ransome (2007) and Ashforth et al (2000). However, in Clark’s theory, the domain of family can be interpreted in a wider setting, including the life outside work, as it is being explained as having the goal of attaining close relationships and personal happiness (Clark, 2000), that equals the previously mentioned goals of the recreational labor or third places of attaining pleasure or self-care, among other purposes.

Another point of criticism is that the work/family border theory does not recognize the electronic devices as impactors on work-life balance (Middleton, 2003). The electronic devices can function as a bridge between the two domains by intruding with aspects of the other domain along the day, creating high permeability. The use of electronic devices creates a domain that is neither regarded as work or as non-work. However, this is not discussed in the work/family border theory nor is it added by the above-mentioned critics regarding the lack of a separate domain for third places or recreational work. (Dén-Nagy, 2014)

The aspect of electronic devices will be added to the discussion of blurring borders further in this thesis.

2.2.3 The work/family border theory and work-life balance

Kossek & Lautsch (2012) state that achieving the desired balance between work and non-work depends on the individual’s capability to control the borders separating the two domains. The term flexstyle describes three different types of employees’ border
management and their preferred flexibility and permeability of the borders between the two domains. These flexstyles consist of integrators, who blend the domains on all three aspects of the borders; physically, psychologically, and temporally. The separators see to it that they keep work and non-work as distinct domains, where strong borders are the goal. The third flexstyle is called the volleyers, who are alternating between the previous two styles. The flexstyles are types of behavior that rise from the employees’ preferences within the possibilities and restrictions of the employer. Therefore, it is not always possible to choose the most preferred flexstyle, and some must conform to the requirements of the employer. (Kossek & Lautsch, 2008) The more the employee can control his or her own border management, the better he or she perceives his or her work-life balance. Therefore, it can be suggested that an employee that must conform to the flexstyle demanded by the employer struggles more to create a satisfying balance between work and life than an employee who can affect his or her borders. (Kossek & Lautsch, 2012)

Nam (2014) created a table including the different implications on work-life balance depending on the dimensions of flexibility and permeability based on Clark (2000) among other researchers. In figure one below I illustrate these different types of the work-life balance.

![Diagram showing different types of work-life balance](image)

**Figure 1** Four types of work-life balance, adapted from Nam (2014)

Based on figure one above, when both flexibility and permeability are low, the employer’s domains are separated into two segments. The work time and place are determined by the
employer and are not the employees’ choice according to his or her desires, and there is low or no interference or spillover from one domain into the other. (Clark, 2000; Nam, 2014) This type of work-life balance is in line with early studies by Dubin (1956), suggesting that industrial workers are typically experiencing a segmented work-life balance. Kossek and Lautsch (2012) describe this type of work-life balance to include the separators, employees that actively work towards segmentation of the domains.

Interference is a type of work-life balance that occurs when the flexibility stays low, but the permeability is high. This type of work-life balance suggests that the work has to be carried out at a certain location at a certain time, much like the type of segmentation described above. However, the permeability of the border is high, meaning that the employee is often disturbed in his or her current domain with for example phone calls, emails or other interruptions from the other domain. An employee with this type of work-life balance can never fully be concentrating on one domain at a time. (Nam, 2014; Clark, 2000)

When the permeability, on the other hand, is low, but the flexibility is high, the type of work-life balance is called autonomy. Autonomy, in practice, means that the employee can be flexible in for example where or when he or she is working. The borders not being permeable translates into the employees doing their work when they decide to, that there are no unexpected phone calls or emails demanding attention when the employee is involved in the other domain. Autonomy allows choice and arranging the domains to meet the demands of the other domain. (Nam, 2014)

The last type of work-life balance according to Nam (2014) is the state of integration, where both the flexibility and the permeability are high. This translates into the employee having, practically, only one domain, rather than separate work and life domains. Employees that are actively choosing this type of work-life balance are also called integrators (Kossek & Lautsch, 2012).

Clark (2002) states that the best balance between the two domains of work and home is created when the employee’s borders are flexible, but not permeable, translating into the autonomous type of work-life balance (Nam, 2014). This statement is confirmed by Leung et al’s (2017) study that gained the same results. Also from an organizational point of view flexible borders are a desired state, since employees with flexible borders are proven to have a higher tolerance for long work hours before a negative impact on the perceived work-life balance (Hill et al, 2004).
In the next chapter, the capability approach is presented.

2.3 The capability approach

The capability approach has been developed by Amartya Sen, professor in welfare and development economics, over a long period of time. The first version of the capability approach was introduced in 1979, when Sen discussed the human well-being at a Tanner lecture called *Equality of What*. Sen presents and critically examines three approaches to equality; utilitarian equality, total utility equality and Rawlsian equality. Sen argues that these three types of equality all are severely limited in their attempt to define equality, and that not even a combination of the three types can be considered a valid theory of equality.

The concept of equality presented above is relevant when discussing the capability approach for the following reasons. The approach is based on the idea that all people should be equal in terms of their effective freedoms to attain a desired outcome (Gasper, 2007). The approach does not focus solely on the achievements per se, nor satisfaction or the different means individuals have, but rather on the *effective freedoms which people have to achieve prioritized outcomes* (Gasper, 2007:337; Cohen, 1993).

In order to provide a tool for assessing equality and well-being in an adequate way, Sen argues that in order to achieve a comprehensive framework the element of capabilities has to be included in the three existing approaches to equality. Sen calls this the basic capability equality. Sen stresses that the framework takes different cultural settings into account, as well as the human being’s differing needs. (Sen, 1980)

Sen later has developed his capability approach further in, for example, the books *Poverty and Famines: An Essay on Entitlement and Deprivation* (1982) and *Development as Freedom* (1998). Sen has also cooperated with Martha Nussbaum, philosopher and professor in law and ethics (University of Chicago, 2016), who later developed Sen’s capability approach to include elements of capabilities such as individual skills and personality traits (Nussbaum, 2000). More about Nussbaum’s alterations further below.

The two terms capability approach and capabilities approach are often used intertwined. However, the approach developed by Amartya Sen is referred to as the capability approach, whereas the versions developed by Nussbaum is referred to as the capabilities approach.
The difference is slight, but noteworthy. Capability refers to the full set of attainable alternative lives that face a person (Gasper, 2007:336). This explanation is in line with Sen’s purpose of the capability approach as a wider framework with diversity to apply the framework to different situations. Capabilities, on the other hand, refer to a concrete focus on specific attainable functionings in a life (Gasper, 2007:336). This slight variance explains the difference between the original version of the approach by Sen and Nussbaum’s alterations.

Sen’s capability approach is more of a framework of thoughts rather than a specified theory. This allows for applying the approach in a variety of fields and situations, depending on the targeted aim. (Robeyns, 2005; Gasper, 2007) However, the approach is most often used for evaluating human well-being, whether in welfare economics or in developing countries. Therefore, there is not solely one way of explaining the approach and the use of it, but instead the field and/or phenomenon being studied determines how the capability approach is interpreted and applied. Depending on what field the approach is used in, different aspects of the approach are focused upon.

In this thesis I use the capability approach for evaluating employees’ well-being within knowledge intensive companies, by focusing on the employees’ work-life balance and/or imbalance and the capabilities the employees have to make a difference to their current situation.

2.3.1 Core concepts of the capability approach

The capability approach consists of two core concepts that build the framework of thought; capabilities and functionings. Although these concepts are closely related, they play an important distinct role within the approach. Sen (1987) defines the concept of capabilities as the individual’s ability to achieve something or what real opportunities or effective freedom the individual has when it comes to the life they try to achieve (Sen, 1987; Gasper, 2007). The term functionings, on the other hand, is defined by Sen (1987) as the achievement itself, in contrast to the ability to achieve it. More simply put, functionings equal a certain living condition desired by the individual.
Sen has written several pieces on famine, and a rather popular example of the difference between the capabilities and functionings can be illustrated by famine. Starving and fasting are two different states that lead to the same thing: the individual lacking food and not being well-nourished. In this example, being well-nourished is the functioning. The difference between fasting and starving is therefore in the capabilities and the effective freedom the individual has to be well-nourished. The starving individual is not able to provide enough nutrition to obtain well-being due to a lack of food. The second individual, on the other hand, has chosen to be fasting because of for example religion, political protesting or a new health trend. This individual is able to eat when he wishes to, he does not lack the capability to obtain food. In this example, the choice or ability of eating or not eating, the capability of achieving the functioning, is the central part. (Sen, 1981) This example is well-used to explain the difference between the core concepts of Sen’s capability approach, by easily illustrating the somewhat abstract concepts and framework as a whole in a simple way.

### 2.3.2 What capabilities?

Sen’s capability approach does not include a fixed list of capabilities always considered when using the approach (Clark, 2005). Since the approach can be and is used through different academic fields and for different purposes, Sen argues that a fixed list of capabilities would undermine the diversity provided by the approach. He argues that universally relevant capabilities through time cannot be decided upon through theory alone. A fixed list of capabilities would be neglecting the progress within social understandings and the importance of public discussions. (Sen, 2004a; 2004b)

The capability approach is designed by Sen to be used together with relevant theories of the studied phenomenon (Robeyns, 2006) and the capabilities that should be focused on depend on the people being affected by the usage of the approach (Sen, 2004b). This means that if the approach is used for developing policies within an organization, the people being affected by the policies should provide the relevant capabilities. (Robeyns, 2006)
2.3.3 The capability approach and work-life balance

Sen’s capability approach, as a framework of thought, can and has been used in various areas for different purposes. Common uses for the approach include welfare societies and other areas focusing on well-being. Work-life balance is of great importance for the employee to feel at peace with his or her everyday life, and therefore, the capability approach is relevant when studying work-life balance and the obstacles and opportunities to obtain the desired balance (Hobson et al, 2011).

In this chapter, I focus on combining the theoretical contents of the capability approach to the topic of work-life balance and the implications of electronic devices on the borders between work and non-work. As explained in previous chapters, the capability approach is aiming at providing a model for what the individual would like to achieve and how the individual is supported or hindered in achieving the desired state. Hobson et al (2011) conducted a similar study using the capability approach where a comparison of the capabilities to reach the functioning of work-life balance between Swedish and Hungarian parents with a focus on policies and norms.

In theoretical terms, the state of life that the individual is striving for is called the functioning, and the means in achieving this desired state are called capabilities. The capabilities reflect the individual’s real opportunities to reach a certain desired lifestyle. (Sen, 1987) It is important to note that all individuals are not coming from the same circumstances and everything from gender to family background is affecting the real capabilities an individual has. In this thesis, the main area of focus is the individuals’ field of work, and how this affects the capabilities.

What different degree of separation or integration, as discussed previously, the individual prefers, is highly dependent on the individual, according to Nippert-Eng (1996). However, the desired outcome might not be possible for everyone to achieve. Let us assume that the desired lifestyle includes work-life balance as well as achieving a promotion. Achieving these goals will look very different from the view of different employees. Single parents have a lot of responsibilities outside work and may not always be able to work on their own conditions. They will have to conform to their children’s sick-days, school events and other responsibilities connected to caring for others. Young individuals without family responsibilities, on the other hand, will be able to work on their own conditions. They do not
have to include other people in their schedule, they have less responsibilities outside work and therefore more time for themselves. These groups of people strive to achieve the same goal; work-life balance and being promoted. However, they do not possess the same capabilities to achieve these functionings.

2.3.4 Critique of the capability approach

The capability approach is criticized for being too vague and unclear as well as using too common language causing several misunderstandings (Gasper, 2007). Segal (1998) suggests that the name of the approach is referring to only part of the approach, where the name The functioning and capability approach would provide a better name for the approach. Gasper (2007) agrees on the name of the approach being too narrow and suggests that the capability approach should be called Capability approaches in plural because of the various fields and uses the approach can be applied to.

The capability approach has also been criticized for excluding any sort of time frame or dimension for achieving the desired functionings. Gasper (2007) points out how the approach is concerned with attainable future opportunities, however, it does not give any specification of what time these possible futures are to be achieved in, whether it is to be attained during the individual’s life span or perhaps during a longer time. (Gasper, 2007)

Because of the unspecified purpose and vague nature of the approach, it has been criticized for being unfinished (Gasper, 2007). Especially when operationalizing the theoretical approach, the danger of applying the approach inappropriately is inevitable according to Gasper and van Staveren (2003).

The lack of a fixed capability list, being part of the unfinalized and vague critique, has given fuel for criticism of the approach by Martha Nussbaum, among other scholars (Nussbaum, 2000; Clark, 2005; Gasper, 2007). Nussbaum has actively worked to modify Sen’s capability approach by adding a list of set capabilities that should be evaluated in each situation the approach is used in. (Nussbaum, 1988; 2000)

Although being vague and unspecified in terms of purpose, the approach can be applied in different situations and for different topics, making it a diverse and conformable theoretical ground. This has made it possible to include the framework in this thesis and to add the
aspect of capabilities in the discussion of work-life balance and the use of electronic devices. I have not used a set list of capabilities, as Nussbaum suggests, as I see the value of evaluating every situation differently and in accordance to the needs of the interviewees. For example, Hobson et al (2011) have used Sen’s capability approach in their work investigating how institutional contexts affect the employees’ sense of entitlements by creating their own questionnaire and gathered the relevant capabilities for this particular research. A set list of capabilities could have limited the research.

2.4 Combining the work/family border theory with the capability approach

It is important to consider both Clark's (2000) work/family border theory and Sen’s (1987) capability approach when discussing work-life balance and the desired life style of the employees. Attaining the preferred work-life balance is not always a pure choice, but rather a combination of opportunities and obstacles limiting the possibilities for the desired outcome. Therefore, investigating work-life balance simply through directly related theories can provide a one-sided and incomplete picture of the situation as a whole.

Combining both theories provides a bigger picture of the employees’ situation and the choices they have trying to achieve the preferred work-life balance. It has been emphasized that one type of work-life balance does not suit every employee equally, but rather that they have different preferences (Clark, 2000). Whether these preferences, or functionings, are possible to achieve depends on various factors discussed below.

The work itself is highly regulating the possibilities of the individual to affect his or her own desired state of work-life balance. Flexible borders can help the employee to work on his or her own terms and in accordance to his or her own needs and can therefore work as a capability to achieve the desired functioning. On the other hand, permeable borders often implicate an involuntary intrusion, especially if it is happening in the direction from the work domain to the home domain (Leung, 2011). Permeable borders can therefore be experienced as a hindrance to achieve the desired functioning or type of work-life balance.

A company that requires constant availability from the employees will not offer the same opportunity for the preferred work-life balance as a company that respects strong borders.
and working hours in a more traditional way. In this example, the opportunities, or capabilities, that the individual has to affect the own work-life balance are limited.

The employee’s own ambitions might also affect whether or not the desired work-life balance is achievable. The knowledge intensive industry, and especially the consulting firms, tend to have ambitious employees that are working hard to advance in a steady pace through every promotion round. If advancing to the next level requires long hours, it can be difficult to combine a healthy work-life balance with the goal of being promoted. The choice seems to be on an either-or-basis, where the employee can choose one out of the two scenarios. However, if succeeding in the field requires having a bad work-life balance, there seems to be no other choice than to work according to the terms of the company.

2.5 The 24/7 economy

The 24/7 economy concept suggests that the employee is available around the clock (Presser, 2003). Traditionally, for example hospitals and fire stations operate in shifts around the clock with necessary on-call surgeons and fire fighters. The knowledge intensive field is very different from these traditional 24/7 organizations. Technical devices have enabled a global 24/7 economy where multinational organizations operate simultaneously over several different time zones and require the employees always to be available (Presser, 2003) for colleagues or clients.

The knowledge intensive field is to a large extent emphasizing the flexibility of both the organization and the employee, which often leads to more and later hours spent working at home (Niemistö et al, 2017). The knowledge intensive employee’s input and working tools are the knowledge and skills of the employee (Alvesson, 2004) as well as knowledge or experience in a particular case or personal networks within a client organization. The employee always brings these assets with him or her, which enables working whenever and wherever.

Living and working in the 24/7 economy can affect both domains in positive as well as negative ways for individuals. Presser (2003) has identified some positive outcomes in a family setting to be increased gender equality in household duties or more time spent with one’s children, whereas negative consequences can be marital instability or difficulty of
planning child care (Presser, 2003). This thesis aims at finding other consequences of working in the 24/7 economy.

2.6 Electronic devices

The term electronic device is an umbrella term for different kinds of devices enabling constant reachability. Smart phones, tablets and laptops are examples of common electronic devices today. The Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) in these electronic devices enable data communication (e.g. emails), telecommunication (e.g. phone calls) and mass communication (e.g. access to online news) (Dén-Nagy, 2014).

Electronic devices have changed the way individuals work and live their lives for decades (Golden & Geisler, 2007). The development of new devices is constant, and it is impossible to predict what features and devices will be created in the future. Newer additions to the electronic devices are smart watches, that allow their users to wear all features of their smart phones on their wrists, including taking calls and sending emails. Since these watches also typically track the user’s sleep patterns, exercise routines and heart rates, among other things, they are typically worn around the clock, even when sleeping. (Apple, 2018)

The outcome of this enormous change can be both positive and negative, depending on the individual’s preferences (Dén-Nagy, 2014). This aspect is discussed further below.

2.6.1 Electronic devices and their implications on borders and work-life balance

The use of electronic devices influences work-life balance to a large extent. Electronic devices affect the borders between the domains as well as the perceived work-life balance. (e.g. Nippert-Eng, 1995; Hill et al, 1998; Golden & Geisler, 2007, Middleton, 2003; Den-Nagy, 2014) Electronic devices also contribute to an increased amount of interruptions in the daily work (Jett et al, 1995).

The more an employee uses electronic devices for work purposes at home, or for private matters at work, the more flexible and permeable the borders between work and home
become (Leung & Zhang, 2017; Golden & Geisler, 2007). When both the permeability and the flexibility of the borders are high, as a result of using electronic devices, the type of work-life balance is integration. This type of work-life balance implies that the employee has weak borders or that the employee might not be experiencing any borders at all. This experience is often caused by the enabled state of being reachable anywhere, anytime. (Clark, 2000; Nam, 2014)

Electronic devices themselves neither create absolute positive nor negative consequences for the employee. Whether the consequences are positive or negative is determined by the individual’s personal preferences and the experienced results of being connected through the devices. Being available at all times for the other domain is seen as both giving more autonomy and being invasive, liberating and constraining. (Dén-Nagy, 2014; Leung & Zhang 2017)

A study conducted by Sarker et al (2012) suggests that the use of electronic devices can affect the employee negatively regarding their productivity, psychological and physical health as well as commitment to the workplace. Nam (2014) adds increased overwork or workaholism, both physical and psychological stress, negative implications on team work and problems in the private domain with relationships and marriages to this list.

On the other hand, electronic devices allow for a more flexible life style, perceived as a positive outcome for many. Increased productivity, higher work morale and better work satisfaction can all be positive implications due to electronic devices (Hill et al, 1998) as is better psychological and physical health (Steward, 2000).

2.6.2 Electronic devices as a capability

The use of electronic devices plays an important part in how the employee can achieve work-life balance. The electronic devices used in the employee’s work are often brought home after the day at the office. Similarly, private devices are brought to the office. It is also common to have integrated devices for both domains. This enables the employee to stay connected to one domain while being in the other (Nam, 2014). This can be seen as both a capability and an obstacle to the desired functioning of work-life balance, depending on the subjective opinions of the employee and on the demands of the employer.
If the employee chooses to stay connected to the work domain during free time, the electronic devices enable an easy and smooth way of doing so. In this case the electronic devices are a capability of achieving the desired functioning of staying up to date in the work domain. Having the opportunity to stay connected to the work domain and having the necessary tools constantly present give the employee flexibility to leave early or work from other places than the office and still be able to react if something work-related appears.

On the other hand, if the employee wishes to stop thinking about the work domain when starting his free time, the electronic devices are most likely an obstacle on the way to achieving the desired functioning of focusing on the home domain. If the employer is requiring the employee to be reachable during free time, the employee does not have the capability of reaching his functioning.
3 METHOD

In this chapter, the method and methodology used for reasoning, gathering the data and analyzing the data is presented and the choices are motivated. A wider context for the research is also presented. First, a figure illustrating the choices is presented in figure two below. These concepts and choices are explained in the paragraphs to follow.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Paradigm</th>
<th>• Constructivism (/Interpretivism)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ontology</td>
<td>• Relativism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Truth exists in relation to the surroundings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Epistemology</td>
<td>• Subjectivism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Knowledge is subjective, no objective truth exists</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Methodology</td>
<td>• Qualitative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Method</td>
<td>• Semi-structured interviews, weekly diaries, background forms</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 2 Illustration of the research paradigm, based on Guba (1990)

A research paradigm can widely be defined as a basic set of beliefs that guides actions (Guba, 1990:17). This thesis is written from the constructivist paradigm, where the goal is to capture different views on reality and gain a deeper understanding of the individual’s perceived truth and experienced situations (Patton, 2015). I am not looking for a generalized truth or explanation of the phenomenon of work-life balance, but rather for a subjective and individual view of the matter. This will result in multiple different explanations of reality, providing us with understandings on a narrow but deep level.
Constructivism has been criticized for not depicting reality but rather creating stories. Patton (2015:127) claims that constructivism to some has *inescapable connotations of manufacturing* and that it therefore cannot illustrate reality. However, the philosophy behind constructivism suggests that every individual experience the world differently and that reality is the result of social interactions and different backgrounds. (Patton, 2015)

As mentioned, generalizations cannot be made based on this thesis partly because of the constructivist approach. Guba and Lincoln (1989) emphasize that the experiences and phenomena gathered within the constructivist approach cannot be understood outside the context they are studied in. What is true for the interviewees may not be true for another group of people or in another location or context (Patton, 2015).

Hence, the ontology in this thesis is relativism and the epistemology is subjectivism. Ontology refers to the nature of reality (Hudson & Ozanne, 1988). The ontology in this thesis being relativism implies that there is not one single reality, but that the interviewees create their own realities in their minds based on their experiences and surroundings, and one interviewee’s reality can differ greatly from another interviewee’s reality (Guba, 1990).

Epistemology refers to how the researcher attains the studied realities (Carson et al, 2001). In this thesis, the epistemological choice is subjectivism, that implies that knowledge is subjective. In order to access the subjective realities of the interviewees, a subjective interaction has to take place (Guba, 1990).

The unit of analysis (Patton, 2015) in this thesis is the individual. Therefore, the focus when sampling is laid on the individual’s experiences and situation rather than on the company or other aspects. Partly because of this, and partly for confidentiality, the companies the interviewees are employed by are not disclosed.

### 3.1 Qualitative research strategy

I have chosen to use qualitative research methods for my thesis. I aim to find a deeper understanding of knowledge intensive firm employees’ sense of their work-life balance and barriers and opportunities for achieving and maintaining a healthy work-life balance.
An interview-based method provides the deeper knowledge and understanding that I am looking for (Silverman, 2006). Interviews are a good method for finding out the interviewees’ way of thinking and seeing the world, their values, attitudes and meanings, among other factors (Patton, 2002). These factors would not be easily expressed in or gathered from quantitative methods such as questionnaires.

Structured interviews are too narrow and strict for gaining the deeper understanding of the interviewees’ thoughts and values that I look for (Silverman, 2006). Since focus groups play on the group dynamics and interactions (Silverman, 2006) they are not best suited for my aim either. Employees have very different life and family situations as well as different personal levels of energy. Discussing individuals’ work-life balance and its implications on their lives might be tough in an environment where ambition and strong work ethics is admired. The group dynamics might work against itself in this case and therefore, I am not considering using focus groups.

Based on Silverman (2006), the semi-structured interview is best suited for my research topic. Semi-structured interviews use a prepared interview guide with often open-ended questions. In contrast to structured interviews, the interview guide in semi-structured interviews is not followed as strictly regarding the order of the questions or read word-for-word, but rather in interaction with the interviewees and their answers and comments. Probing and improvisation play a big part in semi-structured interviews, however, the predetermined topics in the interview guide should be covered. (Wengraf, 2001)

Semi-structured interviews allow me as the interviewer to develop the answers by probing, while following the themes of an interview guide, ensuring consistency in the gained data. This provides an environment where the interviewees feel that their own personal thoughts are valued and important, regardless of their colleagues’ opinions.

Semi-structured interviews provide more freedom during the interview and can look more like a discussion than a structured interview. This might lead to unexpected data that would not have been discovered using a strict interview guide, providing new angles of the topic that are worth looking into. The data from a structured interview is easier to analyze, however, I see the value of probing and the building of rapport with the interviewee as more important than having easily handled data.

The first step towards conducting semi-structured interviews is to create an interview guide in accordance to Patton’s (2002) suggestions. I see the value of a carefully created interview
guide to cover all areas of interest and staying on topic during the interviews. The interviews will be conducted in the preferred language of the interviewee, in order to create a comfortable environment and to obtain as precise information as possible, without verbal challenges due to an uncomfortable language. Five interviews were conducted in Swedish and one in English. None wanted to be interviewed in Finnish. The interview guide is created in Swedish based on the interview guide from the WeAll project, and then translated into English before the interview carried out in English.

As Patton (2015:433-434) describes it, interviews are *dialogical performances, social meaning-making acts, and co-facilitated knowledge exchanges*. Using semi-structured interviews, I participate in the conversations to a bigger extent than in interviews with strictly standardized questions. This kind of interactivity reflects romanticism and aims at creating a deeper understanding between the interviewee and the interviewer (Silverman, 2006, Alvesson, 2003).

### 3.2 Abductive research design

The abductive research design provides flexibility of the direction of the research. The focus of the abductive research design lies in the experiences and views of the interviewees regarding the researched topics and combining these with relevant theories without predetermined explanations (Silverman, 2006). The information gained from the interviewees sets the direction for this thesis, since the aim is to understand the interviewees’ way of thinking and experiences on the topic of work-life balance, rather than to test pre-set hypotheses and theories.

Although the categories in the interview guide are drawn from existing theories, the interviewees have determined the direction of the interviews based on what is the most pressing issue in their current situation. The abductive research design allows the focus to lie on individual behavior and thought patterns, rather than on average or mean behavior and for a simultaneous bottom-up and top-bottom approach (Silverman, 2006).

However, the interview themes and questions are based on theoretical aspects of the topic of work-life balance, the use of electronic devices and the impacts of the 24/7 economy presented above in chapter two. The difference between the inductive and the deductive
research designs is that in this thesis the information gained from the interviews via open-ended questions will set the direction for the thesis as a whole. Themes or patterns are searched for in the gained data, and from these patterns the theories presented above can either be confirmed, or new findings be added to existing literature.

An abductive research design, however, is not a separate design, but rather a mix between the inductive and deductive approaches (Patton, 2002).

### 3.3 Sample

The sample used in this thesis consists of six employees from three different companies in the Helsinki region. All three companies are operating in the knowledge intensive field with different types of consulting.

In order to find a purposeful sample with information rich cases, I started by setting some criteria for the sample. This method is called criterion sampling and is ensuring that the interviewees are relevant for the research being carried out (Patton, 2002). The criteria for my sample is that (1) the company the employee works for is operating within the knowledge intensive field and more specifically in consulting, (2) that the employee has at least one year of experience in his or her current position but has not yet reached managerial positions. The purpose is to interview typical cases rather than extreme cases, and therefore the criteria were set quite loose. When finding a few information rich cases fitting the criteria, snowball sampling was used in order to gain access to more interviewees with the required experiences and information. (Patton, 2002)

In practice, I gathered my sample by sending an introduction of my thesis project to the career services at Hanken School of Economics, who forwarded my quest for participants to three of Hanken’s partner companies fitting the criteria for my sample. Two of these companies answered the email and stated willingness to participate. However, only one of these companies found employees willing to participate in the research. The third company did not answer the proposal.

One participating company was acquired during a guest lecture at Hanken School of Economics where I personally asked the representative to participate, after noticing that he fitted the set criteria. In this case snowballing was used, when the representative promised
to get in touch with his colleagues and invite them to participate in the research as well. This resulted in one other participant.

An employee from a third company was acquired through my personal contacts. I knew beforehand that the individual fits the criteria for my sample. Being an acquaintance with this interviewee slightly affected the interview, for example by allowing for more targeted probing than for the other interviewees.

The sample is presented in table two below, where gender, year of birth, family, degree, current position and the length of the current position is presented for each interviewee.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sample</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Year of birth</th>
<th>Family</th>
<th>Degree</th>
<th>Position</th>
<th>Length in current position</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A.1</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>1989</td>
<td>Girlfriend (lives alone)</td>
<td>M. Sc</td>
<td>Consultant</td>
<td>2 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A.2</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>1990</td>
<td>Boyfriend</td>
<td>M. Sc</td>
<td>Consultant</td>
<td>1.5 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A.3</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>1988</td>
<td>Wife</td>
<td>M. Sc</td>
<td>Consultant</td>
<td>1 year</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B.4</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>1979</td>
<td>Wife and child</td>
<td>M. Sc</td>
<td>Consultant</td>
<td>1 year</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B.5</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>1967</td>
<td>Wife and two children</td>
<td>M. Sc</td>
<td>Consultant</td>
<td>1.5 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C.6</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>1988</td>
<td>Girlfriend</td>
<td>M. Sc</td>
<td>Consultant</td>
<td>4 years</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2  Presentation of sample

As can be seen in table two above, the participants are very similar when it comes to educational background and position. The majority of the sample is male and have worked in their current position for slightly over one year. The age varies from 28 to 51 years and all but one participant live with their spouse. Two of the participants have children and three are married.

A noteworthy aspect of the sample is that all participants are graduates from Hanken School of Economics. Many interviewees stated that their motivation to participate in the research was to help a Hankeit. This can be seen as a limitation of this research. A certain type of people is attending Hanken, and a certain type of people are interested in being active alumni, for example by participating in research made by master students. Therefore, I
consider my sample as relatively one-sided, even though employees from three different companies are used. The fact that all participants have attended Hanken and are working within the same field suggests that these employees are similar in nature. The generalization of the acquired results can therefore be questioned.

### 3.4 Data collection

Methodological triangulation consisting of three parts is used in this thesis for the data collection. Each participant completed a diary as well as filled out a background form for one week prior to the interview. These documents are created by the project WeAll and are designed to get a bigger picture of the interviewees’ situations before the interview itself, to ensure that the focus of the interview lies on the most relevant issues.

The sample, described above, required me as the researcher to conform to the interviewees’ busy schedules. Therefore, the interviews are conducted over phone at a time chosen by the interviewee. Conducting the interviews over phone created a safe space for the interviewees, where they could focus on the topics at hand rather than at the social interaction. The interviews being carried out over phone demanded a longer introduction before starting the interviews in order to build rapport and trust. Alvesson (2003) considers rapport as necessary for the interviewer to be able to understand the deeper meanings or feelings, or the *experienced social reality* of the interviewee (Alvesson, 2003:16).

The aspect of observation is lost when interviewing over phone, and therefore I focused on tone of voice and other verbal clues instead. On the other hand, phone interviews limit the affect that I as the researcher could have on directing the answers by facial expressions and body language. All in all, interviewing over phone strips away some good qualities of a face to face interview, such as observation, whereas it adds to genuine answers by not including body language or facial expressions of the interviewer in the process.

The interviews take approximately 60 minutes and are recorded with the consent of the interviewees. The themes of the interview can be divided into four sections. First, the employees background is discussed, including questions like why the interviewee has chosen their current employer and how they perceive their current situation at work.
The second part of the interview consists of questions related to the balance between work and non-work, with regards to the use of electronic devices and working from home as well as during unconventional times. These questions also concern the perceived flexibility and permeability of the borders between the work and home domains.

The third section focuses on different roles of the employee and his or her colleagues, working overtime and the role of the employee regarding these long hours. Last, the ideal situation of the employee is discussed.

Noteworthy is that the interview guide functioned as merely a guideline to the interviews, while the interviewee to a big extent talked about what is important for him or her within these topics. My role as he researcher was solely to steer the discussion in accordance to the topics in the interview guide, concentrating and probing on the issues relevant for the interviewee.

The information collected through the weekly diaries and the background forms was used in the interviews as a pre-understanding of the interviewees’ situations, making it possible to focus on the most relevant topics during the interview itself.

The data gathering process and methods are summarized in table three below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Data type</th>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Purpose</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>6 interviews conducted over the phone. Each interview lasted approx. 60 minutes.</td>
<td>Audio recordings</td>
<td>The interview consists of eight themes: (1) background/current situation, (2) balance between domains/electronic devices, (3) flexibility/electronic devices, (4) roles, (5) employer involvement, (6) overtime, (7) ideal situation and (8) common questions for the WeAll project</td>
<td>To gain a deeper understanding of the thoughts and reality of the participants</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Transcripts</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Weekly diaries</td>
<td>Excel file, one sheet for each day for 7 days</td>
<td>Daily entries regarding work and personal life and the transition between these two</td>
<td>To create an understanding of the participants’ work and life situations before the interview</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
days total per participant | Created by the WeAll-project | To mold the interview questions better to the specific participant
---|---|---
The weekly diary was sent to me before each interview

| Background forms | 6 documents with background information of each participant | The background form is created by the WeAll project but is modified to better fit the aim of my thesis | To create an understanding of the participants' work and life situations before the interview
The background form consisted of questions regarding the current situation of the job and of combining work and life | To avoid spending excess time during the interview on background details
The background form was sent to me before each interview | To mold the interview questions better to the specific participant

### Table 3 Presentation of the data collection

#### 3.5 Data analysis

Immediately after conducting the interviews, I transcribed each interview with the help of the recordings.

Directed content analysis is the method of analyzing the gained data that I have used in this thesis. The method provides a structured and theory-based path for analyzing the interview transcripts. The theories used in this thesis, Clark’s work/family border theory and Sen’s capability approach, serve as a base for the coding of the transcripts.

The first step of the directed content analysis is to identify the key concepts of the used theories (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). The key concepts derived from Clark’s (2000) work/family border theory are translated into four main categories of flexibility, permeability, border strength and border blending, and three subcategories of physical, temporal and psychological. The key concepts from Sen’s approach are ideals, functions and capabilities, with focus on hindrances and opportunities. These categories are then divided into positive, neutral or negative remarks.
The following step is to assign each category operational definitions, which is done based on the theories and the explanations of the key concepts that they present (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). The reason for this is to identify the categories in the transcripts more easily, and as I categorized the transcripts I often went back to these definitions for support, finding them very useful.

The third step using the directed content analysis is to start coding the transcripts (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). I started by highlighting all remarks that concern the wider subjects of work-life balance and ideals. The highlighted passages were then coded into the categories determined by the key concepts mentioned above. I created an excel sheet with the pre-determined categories and filled it with all the highlighted quotes in the corresponding cells of the sheet. An example of this can be seen in table four below, where the most frequently used codes are presented.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Physical</th>
<th>Temporal</th>
<th>Psychological</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Flexibility</td>
<td>Positive</td>
<td>Positive</td>
<td>Positive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Permeability</td>
<td>Neutral</td>
<td>Neutral</td>
<td>Neutral</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Negative</td>
<td>Negative</td>
<td>Negative</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4 Categories of work-life balance, adapted from Clark (2000)

Hsieh and Shannon (2005) suggest comparing the different categories for which one is used the most frequently. This way the most common topics and key concepts are identified. The description of how frequently the different codes are used can be found in chapter four further below.

The directed content analysis can support the used theories, or even extend them if new categories are created during the coding. However, the method can also steer the analysis in the direction of the pre-determined codes too strongly. I kept an open mind during the process of coding and was ready to create new categories if a quote did not fit the pre-determined codes. With this I aim at minimizing the risk of coding non-supportive quotes into the pre-determined codes.
3.6 Pre-understanding and understanding

As a researcher it is important to reflect upon one’s own pre-understanding regarding the researched issue. A strong pre-understanding can, if not recognized and considered beforehand, as well as no pre-understanding at all, prevent the data from being collected and/or analyzed in a proper and holistic manner. (Gummesson, 2000)

My pre-understanding of the topic of this thesis consists of close experience with people working in the concerned field and with the studied occupation. Through this personal contact I have learnt how people in the field can think and act regarding workload, working hours and electronic devices, among other things. The challenge with my pre-understanding in the beginning of the research has been not to let it dominate my view of the field as a whole, but rather to stay open-minded and curious on each and every interview, listening and understanding the personal, subjective views and experiences of all interviewees. The interviewees gave me insights that differed from my pre-understanding. Including all relevant remarks and views in this thesis, not only the ones compatible with my pre-understanding, has provided a deeper nuance to this research.

One advantage of my pre-understanding of the topic was that I was able to include questions that the interviewees had not necessarily thought to mention themselves, providing for more nuanced experiences. The ability to understand and empathize with the interviewees made it easier to build rapport and create a trusting environment during the interviews as well as probe as meaningfully as possible.

3.7 Context

This thesis is written as a part of a research project called WeAll. The project aims at developing the Finnish working life into a sustainable and equal environment by combining academic research and social engagement across different disciplines and stakeholders. The Strategic Research Council at the Academy of Finland is funding the project being carried out at the University of Helsinki, Hanken School of Economics and the University of Jyväskylä.
The project is divided into three areas of interest; work-family relationship and gender, work-life balance in the 24/7 economy, and equality through different marginalized groups. This thesis is written within the second area of Social sustainability in work organisations, which focuses on maintaining a healthy work-life balance and through that the ability to work, equality in work life and lengthening of careers.

The material for gathering the data for this thesis are all used in the WeAll project. The weekly diary is used in this thesis in its original form. The weekly diary is used to gather information about the interviewees’ day-to-day activities and consists of ten questions answered every day for one week. The questions concern the interviewees’ whole day with topics of working times, attitudes, patterns, habits and blurred work-life boundaries. The weekly diary can be found in appendix 2.

The background form is used in a modified version to include only the questions that are relevant for the scope of this thesis. The questions used concern the interviewees’ educational background and work experience as well as their current state at work, work-life balance, family relationships and responsibilities and coping at work. The background form can be found in appendix 3.

The topics for the interview guide are also provided by the project and then modified to better fit the aim of this thesis. The interview guide is further discussed in the chapter below and can be found in appendix 1.

### 3.8 Ethics in research

The topic of my research can be experienced as sensitive by the interviewees. Employees within the knowledge intensive field tend to be pressured into putting on a brave face and not letting their colleagues or managers know how they are coping physically and mentally with the intense work pace.

Before each interview, the research topic has been discussed with every interviewee. This enables the interviewees to understand what the aim of the research is and in what way their statements will be used. Permission of recording the interviews and using the statements was asked for and received before starting the recorder or asking any questions related to the research topic.
All interviewees have asked to stay anonymous. This request has been respected by transforming each interviewee’s name into a number, and each company into a letter for identification during the analyzing process. This combination of letter and numbers gives the opportunity to distinguish between the interviewees without exposing the identity or employer. In the interview transcripts comments of the employer are replaced by an X and the transcripts, recordings, background forms and diaries are saved without the name of the respondents attached.

Although these precautions are taken to ensure the anonymity of the respondents, the sampling method of snowballing exposes some of the interviewees to each other, even though the interviews themselves are anonymous. The interviewees might also have struggled with how much information to provide me as the researcher, in a fear of exposing themselves to their colleagues or of loyalty to the employer.

Several interviewees expressed how relieving and important it felt to discuss these matters and the current situation with somebody who was there to listen and who could ask the right questions to get the interviewees reflecting on topics they had not reflected upon before. These comments expose an underlying need for support for the employees within the knowledge intensive field that I as the researcher could not provide.
4 RESULTS AND ANALYSIS

In this chapter the results of the data gathered through the interviews, weekly diaries and background forms is presented and analyzed. First, the background of the interviewees is presented in regards of working hours, overtime, fatigue, role behavior, employer involvement and use of company policies, in order to provide a better picture of the current situation of the employees. Thereafter, the data gathered in the interviews is presented and analyzed according to the theories presented in chapter two. Last, a suggestion for the most suitable type of work-life balance according to the interviewees is provided.

The combination of letters and numbers used in the tables below are codes for the respondents. All interviewees asked to stay anonymous, both regarding their name and their employer. The letter stands for the company and the number stands for the individual. The same coding will be used when presenting quotes further on in this chapter. All quotes incorporated in the tables to follow will be distinguishable through the cursive font. Quotes outside the tables are distinguishable through the separate paragraphs and smaller font. All quotes are marked with the combination of letters and numbers explained above.

4.1 Background and context

Below, table five presents the results regarding working patterns and times as well as fatigue. These results are gathered from the background forms and interviews. This information provides a wider picture of the interviewees’ current situation for a better understanding when further analyzing the data gathered in the interviews.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>A.1</th>
<th>A.2</th>
<th>A.3</th>
<th>B.4</th>
<th>B.5</th>
<th>C.6</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Do you have set working hours?</strong></td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>How long days do you do on average?</strong></td>
<td>8,5h</td>
<td>8,5h</td>
<td>10h</td>
<td>8h</td>
<td>9h</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do you work overtime?</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-----------------------</td>
<td>-----</td>
<td>-----</td>
<td>-----</td>
<td>-----</td>
<td>-----</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>When do you work?</td>
<td>Office hours</td>
<td>Office hours, evenings and nights</td>
<td>Office hours and evenings</td>
<td>Office hours and evenings</td>
<td>Office hours, evenings and nights</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do you work on weekends?</td>
<td>Only when the project demands</td>
<td>Only when the project demands</td>
<td>When the project demands and when preparing for the week</td>
<td>When the project demands and when preparing for the week</td>
<td>Only when the project demands</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do you want to work these times?</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Does not know</td>
<td>Does not know</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Does not know</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Are you required to be available outside work?</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Have you felt symptoms of fatigue /burnout?</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Have you talked about the symptoms with professionals or colleagues?</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Table 5** Results; overtime and fatigue

Based on table five above, none of the interviewees reports having set working hours, but rather working with flexible hours. Having the choice of when to start the work day increases the sense of control and flexibility. However, the interviewees do have to conform to meeting schedules which decreases the choice of when to start or end the day. Nevertheless, flextime is experienced as a positive aspect by all interviewees.

The length of the work days varies between the interviewees; the reported hours in the background form implicate that the employees have average working days of eight to twelve hours. However, based on the interviews, all interviewees currently work overtime and more.
than their average reported in the background form. Minimizing the worked hours in reports or tracking systems can result in a polished view and the true situation stays uncovered by the employer.

Regarding the timing of the work, all respondents work during office hours (here, ranging from 8 o’clock to 18 o’clock). On top of the office hours, five out of six interviewees work during evenings as well, and finally three out of these five continue working into the night regularly.

When it comes to weekends, all respondents report having worked on weekends, some more regularly than others. There are three reported reasons for working during the weekends; (1) the interviewees want to prepare for the following week, (2) there is an ongoing project that currently demands more effort and time and (3) the work load is too heavy for a normal week. The least intrusive reason of these three is working to prepare for the following week. Four interviewees work on weekends because of this. Although it seems like a choice to spend time on Sunday to make Monday and the rest of the week easier, there is still the question of why this preparation is not done on Friday afternoon or Monday morning. The interviewees report that there simply is no time during office hours for this. What seems like a choice at first is not necessarily voluntary after all.

The second reason for working on weekends is that the current project the interviewees are working on demands so due to tight deadlines. Five interviewees work on weekends for this reason. When a deadline is approaching, the employee does not have the choice to work or not, since the project has to be finished regardless of when the work is carried out. Usually this kind of weekend work is not chosen by the employees, but rather forced upon them.

The third and last reason for weekend work is the work load being too heavy to manage during the normal work week. This is a severe state that in this case indicates a shortage in staff and therefore poor resource allocation. This can also be the result of an employee’s challenges with time management or a strive for perfection. Work weeks frequently overlapping with weekends can result in minimal to no recovery of stress levels and in the long run this can result in burnout (Leung, 2011). One of the interviewees frequently work during the weekends because of this as well as the two above mentioned reasons, and it is not done by choice.

All six interviewees confirm that they are available for work purposes during their free time. Two employees are required by their employer to always be reachable outside office hours,
and one is required to be reachable when the project demands so. The remaining three
interviewees report being reachable also outside office hours by choice, to make their own
lives easier and not to miss any urgent work matters happening during their free time.

As these tables mainly based on the background forms implicate, the employees frequently
work long hours. Correspondingly, half of the respondents have experienced some degree of
fatigue because of their work. None of the interviewees have asked for help for these
symptoms. One of the respondents would like to receive help but does not know how to
access it.

Although the interviewees report being able to control the hours worked through flextime in
theory, these results do not indicate a large extent of choice in practice. Only one interviewee
wants to work during his reported hours, whereas three do not know if they want to work
the hours they currently work and two do not want to work the hours they do. The three that
do not enjoy working the times they currently do expressed a subtle hesitation to whether
they are allowed to complain about the working hours.

The results discussed above indicate that the employees spend most of their days and
sometimes also weekends conducting work-related tasks. All interviewees have some sort of
families that are affected by this way of working, although only one has actual care
responsibilities.

Table six below presents the answers of the interviewees on topics related to care
responsibilities, employer involvement, policies for combining the domains and it also
touches upon role behavior at work and at home. This information is gathered through the
background forms and the interviews.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Do you have care responsibilities?</th>
<th>A.1</th>
<th>A.2</th>
<th>A.3</th>
<th>B.4</th>
<th>B.5</th>
<th>C.6</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes (Young child)</td>
<td>No (Grown children)</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Does your workplace have/should it have policies for</th>
<th>A.1</th>
<th>A.2</th>
<th>A.3</th>
<th>B.4</th>
<th>B.5</th>
<th>C.6</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes, it has</td>
<td>No, it does not have. Does not know if it</td>
<td>Yes, it has</td>
<td>No, it does not have. It should have</td>
<td>Yes, it has</td>
<td>Not sure if it has. It should have</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>combining work and life?</strong></td>
<td>should have</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------------------------</td>
<td>-------------</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Do you feel that you need these policies?</strong></td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Does not know</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Does not know</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Do you feel that these policies work?</strong></td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Does not know</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Does not know</td>
<td>Does not know</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Have you used these policies?</strong></td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Does your employer support well-being at work? How?</strong></td>
<td>Yes, social events and health care</td>
<td>Yes, social events, health care and early prevention</td>
<td>Yes, possibility to work from home</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes, flexible working hours, health care</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Do you feel like it is enough?</strong></td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Does not know</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Does not know</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Do you have different roles at work and at home?</strong></td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 6: Results: employer involvement, policies and roles

Table six above shows us that only one of the respondents have care responsibilities for underage children, and one has grown children. All six have a significant other whose schedules and emotions they need to consider in addition to their own.

Three of the respondents report that their workplace has policies that aim at facilitating the combination of the two domains. All of these three have also used these policies whereof two say that they work. Two respondents report that there are no policies, one of them thinks there should be and the other is not sure whether there should be any or not. One respondent does not know if there are any policies but would like there to be. Four of the respondents say that they need these kinds of policies, and two say that they do not know if they need them.

Four interviewees say that their employer supports well-being at work, and two say that the employer does not support it. The ones who feel that the employer is supporting well-being
are reporting health care, social events and flexibility as examples of how the employer supports it.

Since most of the interviewees spend a considerable amount of their time with their colleagues, they experience a need for being themselves at work, without changing behavioral patterns or having different roles. Three out of six interviewees feel that they are not changing the way they behave at work considerably compared to how they behave at home or during their free time. According to Ashforth et al (2000), this allows for an integrated work-life balance with an easy flow between the domains. However, several interviewees state that they do behave differently with their colleagues and especially with their clients. Separating the behavior between the different domains can result in the border crossing being more challenging and exhausting (Ashforth et al, 2000).

Above, an introduction to the employees' current situation is presented for better understanding of the background and current situation of the employees. Below, the concepts from the theories presented in chapter two are analyzed further with the help of quotes from the interviews. Some aspects presented above are investigated further, such as being available around the clock, whereas other aspects presented above solely function as the context, such as the existence and use of policies.

### 4.2 The concepts of work-life balance in practice

In this chapter, the results from the interviews regarding the concepts of the work/family border theory are presented and analyzed. First, the categorization of the interviews, based on key concepts from the theory, is presented for an overview in table seven. Thereafter, these categories are analyzed one by one and supported by quotes from the interviews.

The categories in table seven below represent the most frequently mentioned topics during the interviews. Although not included in table seven below, the aspects of blending and the strength of the borders are also analyzed further. These concepts build upon flexibility and permeability (Clark, 2000) and are therefore not included in the table below as separate categories. The key concepts from the capability approach are presented in a separate table later on in this chapter.
Some of the remarks and comments regarding flexibility and permeability concern two or more of the physical, temporal or psychological aspects of the borders at the same time. Often, a comment can concern both physical and temporal or both temporal and psychological aspects of flexibility and the categorization can be challenged. In the categorization and in the chapters to follow, the division has been made based on the primary focus of the comment and the context of the comment in the interview is also considered.

Table seven below illustrates the trends in the categorization of the interview transcripts. The numbers stand for how many times the interviewees mentioned something related to the categories of physical, temporal and psychological flexibility and permeability. The comments are further divided in different categories depending on whether the comments were positive, neutral or negative. This division is made based on the tone of voice, context and wording.

Positive comments express content and appreciation towards the situation, neutral comments express acceptance, and negative comments express dissatisfaction and unhappiness with the current situation. The categories were not discussed with these theoretical terms during the interviews. The comments and remarks made by the interviewees regarding their view on their situation were later translated from the transcripts into these theoretical categories by me as the researcher.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Physical</th>
<th>Temporal</th>
<th>Psychological</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Flexibility</td>
<td>Positive</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Neutral</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Permeability</td>
<td>Negative</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 7  Results: trends in the categorization of interview comments

As table seven illustrates, the most frequently mentioned categories are temporal flexibility and temporal permeability. The second most frequently mentioned categories are physical flexibility and psychological flexibility. The categories of physical permeability and psychological permeability are the least mentioned categories. Below, these remarks will be explained further.
4.2.1 Flexibility

As the results in table seven above illustrate, physical flexibility generates mostly positive comments, temporal flexibility generates neutral and negative comments and psychological flexibility generates a few but fairly equally divided comments. Flexibility allows the employee to tailor their days according to their needs and in many cases it makes the life of the interviewees easier to manage and control.

However, the results illustrate that not all kind of flexibility is perceived as helpful and positive, as the category of temporal flexibility generates an equal amount of negative remarks as the physical flexibility generates positive remarks. This proves that flexibility and permeability as factors of work-life balance cannot be solely evaluated as either helpful or hindering, positive or negative, but indeed require the physical, temporal and psychological aspects to provide a holistic and accurate view. These are considered in the chapters to follow.

4.2.1.1 Physical flexibility

Physical flexibility means that the place where activities of the two domains are conducted is negotiable and can, among other examples, translate into working from home or doing private matters at the office (Clark, 2000). When it comes to physical flexibility, the majority of the remarks in the interviews are positive with roughly a fourth of all comments being neutral. No comments on matters concerning physical flexibility are negative. This division shows that the employees appreciate and value the physical aspect of flexible borders without any downsides.

The positive remarks on physical flexibility mostly concern the ability to choose where to work from, a feeling of control over one’s own situation and being responsible for one’s own way of working. The neutral comments are accepting remarks regarding the ability to continue working from home if necessary after a long day, rather than staying at the office late at night. Physical flexibility allows the employee to work from a place of their own choosing. One interviewee explains the positive aspect of physical flexibility in the following way:
It helps a lot that I can bring my laptop with me home. [...] If I have to work in the evening or wait for an email or approval from my boss before I can do something, then it's nice to go home and cook or something and wait there instead of sitting at the office. (A.2)

This interviewee can leave the office at her own choice, but still react on work inquiries using her laptop. She does not need to stay at the office in case of urgent inquiries but can rather bring her laptop with her and address possible work issues from where she is. This allows the employee to engage in her free time while waiting for further instructions or for an approval needed to continue on a project. She also finds value in being able to choose where she works from, instead of having a set working space that she needs to conform to:

I can work on trains, from home and a bit from everywhere. (A.2)

This statement is confirmed by another employee, whose team is not physically working from the same office:

The rest of my team is located abroad, so it doesn’t matter if I work from the office, my cottage or from Spain. (A1)

Working from anywhere is enabled by electronic devices and their portable features. The fact that the employees can bring their laptops with them when leaving the office enables them to work from the place of their own choice. Without electronic devices, the employee would either have to stay at the office until the work is done or return to the office in case of further work during the evening. Below, two interviewees conclude it as follows:

All the tools I need [for working] are in my bag. (B.4)

I can do pretty much anything from home [...]. They [electronic devices] give me the opportunity to work from anywhere and anytime where there is internet. (A.3)

The tools used in the interviewees’ work are most often a computer, a headset for online meetings and a phone. All other possible tools, such as various documents, are found on the laptop. As the interviewee above states, the only other tool needed is the internet, available everywhere today. Stationery tools, like multiple screens or office chairs, are convenient but not necessary in the daily work, and therefore, as mentioned in the quote above, all tools needed fit in a bag and can be brought anywhere.

Physical flexibility does not only enable working from different places, it also includes being able to take care of private duties or tasks when most convenient for the employee (Clark, 2000). This benefit is often similar to the temporal aspect of flexibility. Knowledge intensive
workers work long hours, and sometimes taking care of personal matters will have to be done intertwined with working. The following statements illustrate how physical flexibility allows for the employee to combine work and private life in a smooth way:

If I'm expecting the janitor at my house on a Tuesday, then I can work from home that day. (A.1)

The above comment proves that some personal errands must be ran during office hours. These types of errands can be, as in the example above, a janitor arriving to work on the house, but also for example bank appointments, doctor’s appointments or other matters that will have to be handled in person during official office hours. It is not unusual that the interviewees participate in meetings while driving to a doctor’s appointment or write emails in the waiting area at the bank.

If I get an email that I need to react on straight away, then I work from where I happen to be at that point. I don’t drive to the office to work or home to work, so if I sit in the car and it's possible to do it from there then I work from the car. (B.4)

While many of the previous comments concern work overlapping with free time, the following employee stresses that his flexible work enables him to be present for his family:

It would have been completely impossible to provide support and help for my children unless I would have this kind of flexibility in my work. It's give and take. (B.5)

This employee describes how often he has taken his children to their figure skating hobby and worked from the arena during their practice. Being able to work from the place he chooses has enabled him to be there for his family when they needed his help or take some time for himself at the time of his choosing:

I think it [the use of electronic devices] gives more than it takes. For example, I can tell my manager that I’m going on a weekend trip with my wife, and then we leave on a Thursday and it's completely fine, because the tools [that I need for work] are with me. [...] We are usually abroad, in Spain, during the summers, but if something happens that I need to react to, if it wasn’t for electronic devices it could be bad. Now I can react and take care of it. (B.5)

If it was not because of the flexibility that the nature of the work and the electronic devices bring, this employee could not live the same way he is currently living.

The following interviewee stresses that it is the accountability that allows these knowledge intensive workers to have a lot of flexibility in their daily work. What is of importance is the work being done within the agreed time frame. As long as the employee is delivering, he can take the time he needs for personal matters without it being questioned.
We are given that flexibility to work on our own terms, and my manager and our management know that we work long hours, and that more often than not we will work significantly more than what’s expected of a normal working day. So then again, it’s a matter of accountability. As long as we deliver what’s expected out of us, people don’t really care how we get there. (C.6)

This indicates a mutual flexibility between the employer and the employee that is based on trust. The employer trusts that the employees are delivering the work and therefore there is no need for strict regulations or rules. The following statement touches upon the same argument as the interviewee above, with a slightly different angle. He argues that the work within the knowledge intensive field is motivation based and therefore the employer is approving of the flexibility in the work.

Since we work a lot, and it is motivation based, it’s not like the employer is making us do something, we need to have the motivation to do it. So, because of this, the employer does not disapprove if we book a personal flight or something [from the office during working hours], it’s totally approved of. (A.3)

Concluding, the priority is for the work to be finished within the given timeframe no matter from where it is done, whether from the office, from home or from a vacation destination. Physical flexibility can increase the free time and family time of the employee and provide the opportunity for more time spent outside the office. Physical flexibility would not be possible without the electronic devices that allow the employee to work from various locations. Physical flexibility is in other words enabled by the electronic devices and using electronic devices is in this case the capability for reaching the functioning of physical flexibility, according to the capability approach (Sen, 1980).

Consequently, physical flexibility gives the employee the sense of power and control of the situation. The feeling of being in charge of one’s own situation increases the satisfaction level of the work-life balance and of the overall situation, explaining why the majority of all comments regarding physical flexibility are positive. Next, the temporal aspect of flexibility is analyzed.

### 4.2.1.2 Temporal flexibility

Temporal flexibility means that the time when work is conducted and the time for free time is negotiable (Clark, 2000). In practice, this means that the start or the end of the work day
can vary depending on the needs of the employee and that matters from one domain can be done while in the other domain at a convenient point of time. Temporal flexibility is the most frequently occurring theme in the interviews and it is present in every interviewee’s life. Temporal flexibility is most often mentioned in a neutral and accepting way and concerns the long hours demanded, cancelling of plans due to work and working during weekends. The neutral comments sound like negative aspects of the job but are expressed as inevitable and normal in the field without further thoughts.

However, the negative comments regarding temporal flexibility are almost as many as the neutral ones, and three times more frequent than the positive comments. Most of the negative comments regarding temporal flexibility concern long working hours and tight deadlines, not deviating majorly from the neutral comments. The negative comments indicate a lack of self-actuated flexibility and present a sense of helplessness and being out of control of their own work-life balance.

One interviewee describes the very first moments of the job, the interview. The interviewee knew beforehand that the knowledge intensive field she is applying for is known for its long workdays. The hiring managers did their best to make sure that the applicant knows exactly how bad it can get before hiring.

I heard that the days were pretty long. But at the interview I really understood how it was. And they wanted to be sure I knew what I was getting myself into. (A.2)

It is widely known that the situation is not ideal, and the hiring managers need to make sure that the applicants hired are aware of the workload, the working hours and the expectations before accepting the job for a successful and long-term employment. All interviewees have the same accepting view on the intensive work pace, and one of them concludes it as follows:

That kind of approach [only working according to the contract of 37.5h] does not work here. It's expected that the employer is flexible with the working days here, but when you take a job in my team it's also expected of the employee to be flexible. It does not work like you say now I won't work a single hour overtime. It does not work, that's something you have to accept when you take a job here. (A.3)

He stresses that while the employer is flexible regarding for example physical flexibility discussed above, the employee is also expected to be flexible. He also states that it is not possible to work according to the contract hours and that it has to be accepted. With this prevailing attitude from the employees, the situation is seldom challenged. Therefore, rather
than trying to solve the infamous problem within the field, the hiring managers only hire candidates that are willing to conform to the intense pace.

The recruiting process is so long and thorough and complicated, so you simply can’t get people here that are having a 9-17 mindset or that don’t want to do or enjoy what we have to do here. (B.5)

The comment above not only shows acceptance of the long working hours, it also indicates that the employees within the field are enjoying their work and therefore not interested in challenging the intense pace. However, whether an employee lives to work or works to live, they all agree upon conforming to the intense pace in the field when accepting the employment.

We commit to working over normal working hours when needed. (A.2)

Tight deadlines and heavy workloads require the employees to be available for work when needed, even if that means working long nights or during the weekend.

You have to be quite flexible with the working hours, and the days are long sometimes. (A.3)

However, there are differences in the companies in the field. The Big 4 consulting companies (Deloitte, PwC, KPMG and EY) are known for providing their employees a better work-life balance than other consulting companies.

I wanted to work at Big4, because I heard that Big4 have a bit more humane working hours [than other consulting firms]. (A.1)

The interviewee above chose to apply to his current company at a Big 4 consultancy company because of the working hours. He had heard about other consulting companies having bad work-life balance beforehand and was not ready to start his career with an employer like that. This employee has the lowest number of working hours based on the background form, the weekly diary and the interview. What seems to be the difference between the Big 4 and the other consulting companies that are represented by the interviewees in this thesis is the power of choice:

You have quite a lot to say, if you want to work more you can be part of several projects, and if you don’t want to kill yourself working you can just say that you don’t have time. (A.1)

Although the Big 4 is known for slightly better work-life balance, the employee confirms that even they allow their employees to work according to the norm in the field:

Some people are okay with working 12 hours a day. (A.1)
Although the knowledge intensive field requires long hours and for the employees to be flexible in cases of urgent tasks, the flexibility is mutual. If there are no urgent work tasks currently, the employee can flex towards the home domain:

We have flexible working hours. The most important is that what needs to be done gets done. If I need to be away for two hours during the day I can, if it fits in my schedule. (A.3)

The employees within the knowledge intensive field commit to completing the work in the given time frame, regardless of how many hours per day are needed, as previously mentioned. This leads to a way of work where working hours are erased and task-oriented working is introduced. Opposing to professions where presence at certain hours is the most important part (e.g. kindergarten teachers), consultants often work free of time restraints but with the pressure to finish projects instead.

We are technically on flex time, so as long as we deliver on time what we are expected to do, we can manage our own schedule and decide to work when we want to. (C.6)

The following interviewee confirms this way of working by stating that he is not sure about the working hours in his contract, and it does not seem important to him.

My contract says 37.5h. I think. I haven't checked. (B.5)

Regardless of the long hours and hectic schedules, temporal flexibility enables fitting the two domains together to a certain extent. The only interviewee with current care responsibilities avoids working from home when he is around his child.

I try not to work at home when my daughter is awake. [...] I keep working after 20 o'clock if necessary. (B.4)

The temporal flexibility allows for this employee to leave work in time for picking up his child from kindergarten and spend time with his family during the evening, even if he has not finished working for the day. He states that he continues working from home after his child has gone to bed. In this case, flexible working hours provide this father with the opportunity to spend time with his child while she is awake, while not compromising the amount of work completed during the day. This would not be possible if he would have to stay at the office until all work is done for the day.

Other employees see the downsides of the temporal borders between the work and home domain being flexible, when it translates into them not being able to make plans for the evenings due to unpredictable schedules:
At one point I avoided making plans after work, to the point where I never planned anything with my friends during the weeks. (A.2)

This employee explains how her friends and family are employed in different fields and do not understand why she has to work late and often cancel plans for the evenings. She found it hard to explain and stand up for herself and her work, so in order to avoid these conflicts she stopped making plans altogether. Other interviewees experience the same difficulties due to unpredictable workdays:

It's hard to know how long my days will be. (A.3)

The main reason for not wanting to make plans for weekday evenings is that the interviewees never know in advance when their days will end. A few interviewees solved this problem by always expecting the day to be slightly longer than planned:

I plan activities for after work, but usually I plan for quite late in case I have to work a bit longer. Very rarely do I have anything planned for before 18.30-19. (A.1)

This precaution, however, does not always work. There are days when the employees have to cancel the plans due to work. The interviewees explain that friends or family within the same industry are understanding, but that friends or family who are not working within the knowledge intensive field often challenge the intense way of work and question how healthy it is to work so much. The employee below seems to be used to these situations and regards it an accepted and inevitable part of his job.

Of course it [cancelling plans because of work] is not optimal in any way, but that's life. (A.3)

Concluding the temporal flexibility, the above comments often seem negative in nature, whereas they are expressed in an accepting and neutral way. When accepting an employment within the field, the employees are accepting the working hours. Although often working late, the interviewees appreciate the flexibility that they have where possible, and that seems to compensate for the long days. The following chapter analyzes the psychological aspect of flexible borders.
4.2.1.3 Psychological flexibility

Psychological flexibility refers to thinking about one domain while being in the other (Clark, 2000). The psychological aspect of flexibility divided the comments quite evenly between positive, neutral and negative comments, although there were not as many comments on this aspect of flexibility as there were on the temporal and physical aspects. The positive comments regard a good atmosphere at work, whereas the negative comments revolve around stress and the difficulty to stop the work thoughts when at home. The neutral comments mostly regard shifting from one domain to another in the psychological sense.

The knowledge intensive field and consulting largely consist of problem solving and a large part of the job is finding different solutions and strategies. This aspect contributes to the feeling of never really being off work that the interviewees mention regarding the psychological flexibility:

I spend a lot of time of the day thinking about how we could solve an issue. It is quite hard to turn off your brain at the end of the day, so you kind of walk around all the time thinking about how to solve a problem. (A.1)

When the whole day is spent trying to find a solution for a problem, it is almost impossible to decide to stop thinking about the problem. Also, often unexpected tasks occur during the day, which decreases the time available for problem solving. When the time at the office is divided between several tasks and interactions with colleagues and clients, the time spent finding solutions is minimized. In these cases, the thinking will be done whenever possible, often after the working day at home, where there is more time and less distractions.

Another interviewee also claims that his daily work is so busy that there is rarely time to sit down and reflect upon an issue or problem during the day. However, the problems need a solution, and it is then natural to leave work physically but keep thinking about the problem mentally. Even if the employee would aim at separating the two domains and having strong borders, the constant thinking of solutions can be beyond the active choices made by the employee:

Our main role is problem solving, so sometimes it is not easy if we have a problem that needs a lot of thinking around, then we can’t just turn the brain on and off to think about that but it’s always going to be at the back of our minds. Even when we go home we are going to reflect on it unconsciously. (C.6)
This is a bigger issue when it concerns the spillover from the work domain to the private domain than the other way around.

I think it’s easy to take the private thoughts out of the work but the work thoughts out of the private life is much more difficult. (C.6)

The biggest reason for this is that the work domain is often busy, whereas the private domain is more laid back. The interviewees experience that they do not have the time for private thoughts at work, but during free time it is more problematic to turn off the work thoughts.

I haven’t had the time to think about my private life at work lately. (A.3)

Psychological flexibility is an issue for the interviewees in the sense that they do not experience being in control over their thoughts and the timing of them. This brings us over to the next aspect of the borders, permeability.

4.2.2 Permeability

Permeable borders mean that elements from the other domain easily and unexpectedly can enter the current domain (Clark, 2000). Permeability does not usually involve the aspect of choice or control, as flexibility does to a certain extent. As the results in table seven further above illustrate, positive comments are lacking and permeability is experienced in a clearly negative way in all three categories of physical, temporal and psychological permeability. The majority of all comments on permeability regards the temporal aspects. It is the lack of control that drives the thoughts and opinions to the negative sides of permeability (Kossek & Lautsch, 2012), as opposed to flexibility where control to a bigger extent lies in the hands of the employee.

Next, each aspect of permeability is analyzed further.

4.2.2.1 Physical permeability

Physical permeability includes having the work email in the mobile phone used also during free time, or members from the home domain visiting the office. As mentioned above, no
positive comments regarding physical permeability are positive. The neutral comments on physical permeability, on the other hand, regard having the work email in the mobile phone and having to act on work matters coming in through that channel during free time. The negative comments concern receiving work emails in the phone and the underlying pressure of attending to them immediately, also during free time.

All interviewees have one phone for both work and private matters. Some of the interviewees turn off the sound of their phones in the evening, however, they regularly check if something has happened in the work domain. Others have sound or light notifications on around the clock and immediately know if something work-related happens, like the interviewee below:

I immediately see if I receive an email. It keeps reminding me of its existence all the time. (A.2)

The interviewee above feels that work is always present through her electronic devices. The interviewee is worried that she might miss something important unless she stays on top of work matters by being available also during her free time. She also notes that trying to ignore an email is not working due to the light notifications and visual reminders on her screen. The fear of missing something urgent keeps all interviewees on constant standby. The interviewee below is compromising by reading all emails that arrive during his free time, but only acting on the ones that require immediate response:

If it's [task in email] not urgent then I definitely won't do it after I've decided that the day is over. If it's urgent, then I just open my computer and do what has to be done. (A.3)

He is checking every email that comes in during his free time in order to evaluate if the task or request is urgent or not. If it is not urgent and he chooses to leave it until the next morning, he has still transferred himself into work mode for a while. This adds to the feeling of never being completely off work, even though he did not conduct any work-related tasks. If the task is urgent, all tools are available to start working immediately, since the uncertainty causes all interviewees to bring their laptops when leaving the office.

I don't always know when I leave the office if there will be more work or if I get a response from a client that I need to work on, so then I bring my computer home with me just in case. (A.2)

Above in the chapter regarding physical flexibility, positive remarks about the freedom of choice of where to work from are expressed. However, the very same aspect quickly turns to dissatisfaction when it is not predictable or controllable. The feeling of not being in control of one's own situation adds to a feeling of a bad work-life balance (Kossek & Lautsch, 2012).
4.2.2.2 Temporal permeability

Temporal permeability refers to for example taking private calls at work or work calls at home. When it comes to the temporal aspect of permeability only two comments are positive. The positive aspects of temporal permeability are taking private calls at work, giving a break in an otherwise hectic day. The neutral comments concern receiving work-related phone calls during evenings or hearing the phone and recognizing it as a work notification. The negative comments, which are the majority of the category, regard the need for always being on standby in case something work-related suddenly occurs, cancelling plans because of sudden overwork or the unspoken expectations of always being reachable.

Not being prepared or in control of the situation adds to the feeling of never really being off work, and the temporal aspect adds to this feeling even more than the previous physical aspect where looking through work emails can be seen as voluntary on a certain level, whereas phone calls are unavoidable from the recipient’s side.

I do feel that when I leave the office my work ends, but I know there’s a big chance that somebody calls me or that I receive an email I need to answer. (B.4)

The fact that different time zones and other aspects in the 24/7 economy cause the organization to be active around the clock, leading to for example emails coming in late at night, could be manageable through strong borders and company rules. However, the demand for or expectation of immediate action on these inquiries causes irritation and a sense of helplessness.

Sometimes it is expected that I am receiving a phone call at night, so I can plan my day a bit around that, and usually that is fine. But when it’s unexpected and sometimes it’s disturbing private life activities, so it’s, it can be frustrating, that there is the expectation, especially from clients, that we are reachable at all times. And that we are going to react at all times as well. (C.6)

The interviewee above describes the situation of temporal permeability as frustrating and as disturbing private life activities. Even more disturbing than the actual work during free time is the expectation of always being available from both colleagues and clients.

It [always being reachable] is probably taken for granted, but everybody knows that nobody likes it. (B.4)

Unpredictable work is not only disturbing the employees’ own free time but can also cause friction between the employees and their family or friends.
Sometimes maybe my family thought that does he really have to talk on the phone again on a Saturday night. (B.5)

The employee is then caught in a situation where he needs to assure his family that they are the first priority, whereas he cannot affect if urgent work appears, even if it is on a Saturday night. The sense of not being enough for both the family and the work tears on a person’s psychological health.

4.2.2.3 Psychological permeability

Psychological permeability refers to bringing emotions or ideas from one domain to the other and can in practice mean for example bringing negative emotions from work to home, or applying problem solving from the home domain to a project at work (Clark, 2000). The psychological aspect of permeability gained mostly negative comments on stress turning into dreams about work and transferring negative feelings from work into the home domain. The only positive comment concerns bringing positive emotions from the home domain to the work domain.

The comments on psychological permeability show how hard it is for the employees to experience a time or place where they can focus on something else than work. Psychological flexibility already illustrated how hard it can be for the interviewees to shut off their work thoughts and worries after the workday. Psychological permeability takes the same issue a little further by infiltrating work thoughts into the interviewees’ dreams:

Lately I’ve dreamt about work almost every night. (A.1)

Dreaming about work usually happens when the interviewees have experienced more stressful periods than usually at work. Dreaming about work causes the employees, again, to feel they are never completely off work and increases the stress:

I usually wake up stressed when I dream about work, and I also don’t feel like I’ve been really sleeping. (C.6)

This can lead to a downward going spiral where a stressful period leads to worse sleep quality, leading to less rest and tiredness, resulting in inefficient work causing more stress. The interviewee below unsuccessfully tries to have clear borders between the work domain and the home domain, because of the permeable borders.
It's tough trying to live another life outside of work. I mean, you can't escape this job. (B.4)

The fact that this employee uses the word “escape” when describing his work is alarming since it expresses a strong desire for time without work-related phone calls and emails, but first and foremost, without the constant thoughts about how to solve a project at work.

On top of the work thoughts infiltrating the dreams of the interviewees, more common is the emotions crossing the borders with the employee:

> It [a bad day at work] surely affects me when at home. I would lie if I would say that it doesn't. It's pretty common that things don't go as we planned at work, and it does partly affect me at home. [...] If something in my private life is really good, then surely it affects my overall mood. You can't completely shut off these things, it's a part of your life and all. (A.3)

If problems occur at work, it will affect the mood of the employee. As the employees bring their electronic devices and thoughts across the borders, that is also the case with the emotions. This aspect of psychological permeability can both improve and impair the domains. As the interviewee above states, if he has a bad day at work, he is likely to bring this negative state of mind home, whereas a good day at home is likely to improve the day at work.

Flexibility and permeability are qualities of the borders, and the next chapter looks at the borders from a more holistic point of view.

### 4.2.3 Borders

The previous chapters analyzed the qualities of the borders; flexibility and permeability. These qualities together form the strength of the borders. (Clark, 2000) Since both flexibility and permeability are high for all interviewees, they all experience a weak border between the work domain and the home domain.

The borders are not included in the categories in table seven on page 46 mainly because the borders are constituted of flexibility and permeability that are mentioned in more abstract ways and translated into the theoretical categories above. Borders, when mentioned as such, however, received mostly negative or neutral remarks regarding the lack of borders between work and free time.
The biggest problem in today's working life is that there are not clear enough boundaries between work and free time. [...] I do see a clear boundary between work and free time, but it doesn't work in practice. (B.4)

With this statement the employee above describes a state of high permeability. He is seeing the borders in the sense of arriving or leaving the office or mentally deciding to take the evening off. In practice, however, there are colleagues and clients reaching out to him outside the office, and therefore he experiences that the borders are weak.

The interviewee above feels that the lack of clear borders is a problem not only for himself but overall within the field. Based on the comments regarding permeability from the other interviewees, it is clear that they agree. The interviewee below experiences issues with permeability as well. He tries to keep the domains separate without succeeding.

I try to have a clear boundary between work and free time, but it's not always that straight forward. (A.3)

We know from previous chapters that all interviewees have long and sometimes unpredictable days that they accept and see as part of the job. The two comments above, however, refer to the permeability of the borders. When the employee has decided to put his computer away and enjoy the time off, it is likely that a phone call or an email will intrude the home domain and require instant action at the most, and psychological disturbance at the least. This causes feelings of not having control of the situation, anxiety and annoyance which is in line with the findings of Jett and George (2003).

The following interviewee, however, accepts the situation as part of the job and his life. This interviewee has worked in the field for a long time and sees the integrated lifestyle as the norm, even when going on vacation.

The borders are fading, that's just how it is. I don't categorize anymore what is work and what is free time [...] that would be artificial for me. [...] We travel abroad for a few weeks so is that then vacation or not. (B.5)

Two opposite views on borders are presented by the interviewees above, of which one wishes for stronger borders and the other enjoys weak borders. It is not uncommon that the employee is striving for a strong border between the domains but acts according to the integrated work-life balance and is still happy with the current state:
I make a clear difference between when my work ends and when my free time starts, I think. Even if I might check an email or read an email quickly and see if it is something I should do straight away or if it can wait. But I see it as just a short break in my free time, but still as free time. (A.3)

What the quote above is representing is common for all interviewees. They all stay connected to their work through their electronic devices during their free time. Reading an email to see whether it requires urgent action or if it can wait until the next morning is seen as innocent and an isolated action not interrupting the free time. However, when this is done frequently, as it is for the interviewees based on the weekly diaries and the interviews, the individuals’ actions quickly turn into high permeability, which in turns leads to dissatisfaction of the work-life balance. A trend in the field is evident, since similar results are found in the research of Niemistö et al (2017).

All of the interviewees are relatively new within their current positions in the knowledge intensive field, and the majority does not have any care responsibilities. Their current priority in life is to advance in their careers as fast as possible and not yet having care responsibilities enables this focus. Although the borders are flexible and permeable both in the directions of the home domain to the work domain and vice versa, the interviews clearly indicate that the work domain is stronger than the home domain. If work intrudes on the home domain, the work will be done, but if home intrudes on the work domain, it will only be done if the schedule at work allows it. This indicates that the work domain is more strongly bordered than the home domain (Clark, 2000). Since advancing the career is the current focus of all interviewees, the interests of the stronger domain correspond with the individual interests, facilitating a better work-life balance, according to the work/family border theory (Clark, 2000).

The work domain being the stronger domain is evident based on the comments below:

We don’t have rules, it’s just common sense: don’t let your work suffer from private matters. (A.1)

The interviewee above feels that it is common sense not to let one’s private life interfere with work. What this statement subtly expresses is that private life intruding on work is not acceptable, whereas work can occupy one’s free time. This shows a ranking of the domains where work comes first and private life comes second. The interviewee below also confirms the superior state of the work domain:

I have different vibrations for work and private so I know if it’s private I don’t have to look at it immediately, and then I look at it when I have time. (C.6)
The above interviewee says that private inquiries at work are handled if the work domain allows so, and the interviewee below states that work inquiries at home have first priority:

I always have my work email on my phone, so if I receive an email I read it immediately (when at home) (A.1)

As mentioned above, prioritizing the work domain is common in the beginning of one’s career. Another factor for the interviewees behaving in this manner although wishing for clearer borders, is the time pressure and heavy workloads at work. They simply have so much to do at work that they cannot take time for personal matters even if it is allowed and accepted:

I haven't had the time to think about my private life at work lately. (A.3)

Neither is it a pure choice to prioritize the work domain, but since it takes more capacity and gives more pressure, it is evident that the energy is going towards work. While all interviewees say that they accept long hours and the intense work pace, they also rarely have other choices than to conform to the industry and its requirements.

While putting work first and regarding it as the stronger domain in the beginning of the career, with no care responsibilities, several interviewees voice a concern of the current work-life balance in combination of having a family:

I don't think this is the best job if I wanted to have kids, to be honest. (A.2)

Most of the interviewees do not have children, and they do not find it possible to combine their current work with starting a family. Despite this feeling, the interviewees see their work as an investment for their future career and fitting their current life style, but not as a preferable, or even sustainable, choice in the long run.

I don't see myself working the way I do now in ten years. It's more like it's part of my career now, but later I see that I have the opportunity to work in a different way. (A.3)

That the current position often is experienced as a temporal solution is confirmed by results from Niemistö et al’s (2017) research. Next, the enablers of flexibility and permeability are looked at; the use of electronic devices.
4.3 The use of electronic devices

Many of the comments regarding flexibility and permeability above revolve around electronic devices. This is because the electronic devices are enablers for the flexibility and the permeability. The devices make it possible to stay in touch with clients and colleagues regardless of time and space. In other words, they make the 24/7 economy possible within the knowledge intensive field. On the organizational level it can be beneficial to have reachable and flexible employees, but on an individual level the reality is not as straightforward.

Some interviewees feel that the electronic devices do not bother them, whereas others feel that these devices create all the problems regarding their work-life balance:

Electronic devices are the worst things to exist. If there wouldn't be phones like this then people could maybe live their private lives too sometimes. (B.4)

The interviewee quoted above feels that the electronic devices dictate his life. He reported feeling stressed when hearing the phone at home, because of the very likely scenario of having to interrupt his free time activities and go back to work.

It [electronic devices] put a much bigger pressure on yourself to make a clear boundary between work and free time. (B.4)

The interviewee claims that the responsibility for the work-life balance has shifted from the employer to the employees themselves as a result of using electronic devices. Shutting down the computer can be easy, but as all interviewees report, they use the same phone for both work and private matters. None of the interviewees turn their phones off during evenings. At most they turn off the sound, however they keep checking it during free time.

I feel that I’m off work, but I always, well not always, but two to three times every evening I check my email if I’ve received any work-related emails. (A.2)

Checking the phone in case of work-related matters is done to prepare for the following day by keeping themselves up to date, as well as validating the following day’s schedules. Also, the 24/7 economy demands instant action in some cases. This will be discussed more in the following chapter. However, this does not seem like an issue for all interviewees:

My phone is always on sound, but I also get a lot of private emails and WhatsApp-messages, so I don’t think it affects me. (A.1)
This interviewee does not make a distinction between work and private messages on his phone, and he does not have different sounds for these. He also reports bringing his phone on his vacations, as does the other interviewees. This, again, leads to these employees never having the full sense of completely being off work and having the time for themselves and for their families and friends.

The only trade off with having only one phone is that people can call me anytime. But it does not bother me, if they are clients who want something from me it means they need my help and I help my clients. (B.5)

It is noteworthy to mention that most of the interviewees are not demanded to be reachable outside their work days. They choose to keep themselves up to date in order to make their own lives easier, and not to miss anything crucial or urgent. However, if the employees feel they must spend their free time ensuring that nothing work-related needs actioning, it is arguable if these employees really have a choice. This will be looked at further in the next chapter dealing with the 24/7 economy.

### 4.4 Working in the 24/7 economy

When it comes to the 24/7 economy, all interviewees explain that being reachable around the clock is normal within the knowledge intensive field. Most of the interviewees claim that they are not required by their employer to be available around the clock. However, as the interviewee below illustrates, there is an unspoken expectation of the employees to be working outside official office hours.

Often we get contacted either by managers or clients outside the normal working hours and often there’s an implied expectation of a quick answer. (C.6)

The expectation of being reachable comes from both the management within the company and from the clients. However, getting contacted by a colleague is not uncommon either.

If my colleagues are expecting me to answer an email at night they would give a heads up before that they would appreciate an answer straight away. But if it would be something important they would call or send a text message. (A.1)

Many of the interviewees cooperate with employees in foreign offices with different time zones, both their own employers’ offices and client sites. If a certain task must be finished
before a deadline and answers or material needs to be received from other offices in order to finalize an order, it inevitably means that there will be a waiting period for the employees before they can continue working on the received material.

We have really tight deadlines, and you can't just keep doing stuff forever, so sometimes you have to have longer days. Sometimes fast answers are required, so you can't leave it to the next day or that after 17 o'clock you don't answer emails anymore. It may be that something really happens tonight or something... (A.2)

The interviewee above explains a common situation where a task needs to be finalized the same evening. She also points out how crucial it is to meet the deadlines that very often are set with a tight schedule.

Another aspect of the 24/7 economy that the interviewees brought up is the constantly changing plans, schedules and times of meetings. It is not possible to leave the office at 17 o’clock and expect that the schedule for the next day remains unchanged until the next morning.

Usually, for example internally people send emails later at night, and sometimes it’s important for the next morning the day after, so just to validate schedules for example then I need to look at my emails the night before to ensure that my schedule is what I expect. I think that if I would not look at emails or notifications outside of normal working hours I would miss some meetings and it would have pretty negative consequences. (C.6)

Often, consultants not only work in their own office but also in their clients’ offices. Events rescheduled during the evening will have to be checked up before the next morning in order for the interviewee to know where to be at what time and regarding what matter. As mentioned by the interviewee above, it is crucial to stay in the loop also during free time. This, on the other hand, leads to the following issue:

Do you have to work outside office hours? -Well define office hours. (A.3)

The interviewees do not feel they have separate work time and free time, but that everything blends together into an integrated life:

Our CEO calls it integrated life, not work-life balance. Everything blends together. Partly it is because technology makes it possible. (B.5)

A segmented work-life balance is not possible within the 24/7 economy, and the interviewee’s CEO above has realized and accepted this way of life. An employee striving for a segmented lifestyle and working in the knowledge intensive field in the 24/7 economy will
have a harder time feeling balanced than an employee that has accepted the integrated work-life balance.

The great workloads and pressure of meeting deadlines and targets without any real downtime creates an atmosphere where achievements are the only valid measures of worth. Three of the interviewees report having experienced stress and fatigue in their current positions and even a fear of burnout. Although a small sample, this gives an indication of how well-spread the issue in the field could be. None of the interviewees that have experienced fatigue or symptoms of burnout have reached out to anyone, neither to their colleagues, employers nor to doctors or other professionals.

I would say that people avoid talking about it [stress and burnout, too much work] because you don't want to come across as somebody who whines or can't do his job. I have never heard anyone talk about burnout. I think it's a bit taboo. (A.2)

This quote provides a good insight in the ruling mentality within the field. The knowledge intensive field requires top performance at all times, strong work ethics and ambition. Signs of not conforming to the standards within the field are perceived as weakness that no one is willing to show. It is expected to work hard even when sick:

We don't take sick leave in this industry. We aren't on sick leave, we are just sick and work from home. (B.4)

This interviewee concludes what several of the interviewees expressed. Being sick does not mean that work seizes and the employee takes time to recover, it simply means that the employee works from home in order not to infect colleagues and clients. One interviewee describes how he takes a long enough break to go to the pharmacy for medicine that gives him enough strength and energy to continue working for the rest of the day.

4.5 Consequences and benefits of electronic devices in the knowledge intensive field

The chapters above have presented different outcomes, both positive and negative, of working in a company within the knowledge intensive field with the frequent use of electronic devices. A compilation of these common consequences of working in the knowledge intensive field within the 24/7 economy with constant reachability through
electronic devices, based on the interviews, is presented in table eight below with a corresponding quote.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Consequence</th>
<th>Type</th>
<th>Quote</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Annoyance</td>
<td>Negative</td>
<td>Knowing that I’m always a text or phone call away from work is stressful and maybe bit annoying at times as well. (C.6)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anxiety</td>
<td>Negative</td>
<td>Are you worried that you might receive work-related emails when you are at home? - Yes, sometimes I have anxiety. (A.2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of work-life balance</td>
<td>Negative</td>
<td>I don’t have a clear border between work and free time. (A.2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of energy for private life</td>
<td>Negative</td>
<td>[a bad day] will definitely affect my mood and I will probably be more impatient. Probably very tired as well so I won’t want to do much. (C.6)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of time for private life</td>
<td>Negative</td>
<td>It’s tough trying to live another life outside of work. I mean, you can’t escape this job. (B.4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Missing family matters</td>
<td>Negative</td>
<td>I don’t want to be that dad who works all the time. (B.4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sense of being out of control</td>
<td>Negative</td>
<td>I am always on my guard in case something would happen. I don’t want that panic if I don’t notice it [a work task] until the next morning. You have to react quickly. (A.2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sleepless nights</td>
<td>Negative</td>
<td>How often do you think about work at home? -It happens at the gym or if it's a stressful period, then at night in bed. (A.2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stress</td>
<td>Negative</td>
<td>95% of the time I’m certain it’s a work email [when hearing the phone go off at home]. It makes me stressed. (B.4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Upset family members and friends</td>
<td>Negative</td>
<td>I’m not happy about it [cancelling plans because of work] and surely my friends and family aren't happy either, but it is what it is. (A.3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Temporary solution</td>
<td>Negative</td>
<td>I’m not gonna be able to do it [staying at the current job]. Five years can be tough already. Or I could if I wanted to, but I don’t see it [the way of work] being worth it. (B.4)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Fast advancement | Positive | *For the moment I think it's a great way to start my career and to develop fast.* (C.6)
--- | --- | ---
Flexibility | Positive | *We can manage our own schedule and decide to work when and where we want to.* (C.6)

**Table 8** Consequences and benefits of using electronic devices in the 24/7 economy

The first column in table eight presents 13 results of working in the knowledge intensive field using electronic devices as tools. These results are annoyance of never being completely off work, anxiety of not knowing what is to come, lack of experienced work-life balance due to permeability, lack of energy for private life after long and stressful workdays, lack of time for private life due to permeability and a heavy workload, missing out on family matters, a sense of being out of control of the own situation both home and at work, sleepless nights when work is difficult to stop thinking about, stress caused by the electronic devices and family and friends being upset by the unpredictability of the job. Because of these negative results, the employees often consider their current employment as a temporal solution, also confirmed in the research of Niemistö et al (2017). The two last results are positive implications of the way of working: having a fast advancement, lots of experience and great career opportunity and flexibility of where and when to work.

As these results clearly illustrate, most of the experienced consequences are negative in nature. Stress and anxiety are found to be negative consequences of frequent intrusions in one’s work (Jett & George, 2003), that resembles permeability to a large extent. The question is therefore why the consulting companies in the knowledge intensive field are so popular. This will be discussed below.

### 4.6 What makes it all worth the hard work?

The comments of the interviewees above in table eight prove that the field has a widespread issue with the heavy workload and long working hours, recognized by the employer and the employee as well as possible applicants, family and friends. Why are there so many applicants for these positions when the issue is widely known?
Although there are many times more negatively experienced consequences, the positive ones are outpowering the negative consequences in terms of value put into them. All of the interviewees agree that the benefits their jobs bring, specifically with the two benefits (flexibility and fast advancement) in mind, make it worth suffering with the negative aspects of the job.

Here it is important to note that the two positive consequences outpowering the negative ones concern their current and immediate future, and that most of the interviewees are striving for development on a fast-paced track in order to advance into higher positions. The interviewees explain why they consider their way of work worth the bad or non-existent work-life balance, long hours and heavy workload in table nine below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Interviewee</th>
<th>Reason</th>
<th>Quote</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A.1</td>
<td>Learning</td>
<td>To learn a lot of new things, different tasks and learn about different industries.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A.2</td>
<td>Learning</td>
<td>I learn new things every day at work. It is rewarding, and then you have the energy to keep going again.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A.3</td>
<td>Development</td>
<td>It’s interesting and I’m constantly developing. [my future possibilities on the job market] are one reason for me to be okay with my schedules.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B.4</td>
<td>Challenges</td>
<td>The tasks are challenging, and I like that. If you make it here it feels better than in many other companies [I’ve worked for].</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B.5</td>
<td>Problem solving, challenges</td>
<td>I get a huge satisfaction when I get great deals when it’s challenging, and you have to think about it, solve problems and fix everything.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C.6</td>
<td>Experience, learning, development</td>
<td>Challenging and diverse tasks, proximity and closeness to C-suite people, good understanding of different companies, industries and styles of management. [This is] a better career opportunity to define my future in the next few years and decades in my career.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Table 9** Individual motivators for working in the knowledge intensive field

Table nine is based on the interviews and presents the individual reasons for appreciating their current position. None of the interviewees mention the salary as their driver. Of course, the salary is a factor, but other factors such as intrinsic motivation, valuable experiences and
fast development are more frequently mentioned as the reason the interviewees work within this field. Another aspect speaking for the salary not playing a big role is the fact that five out of six interviewees in this research are compensated for their overtime either in money or vacation days, but the one who works the most hours and during the most inconvenient times is not compensated. This employee is driven by his career development possibilities instead of the thought of extra vacation days or overtime compensation.

All interviewees mention the career development and experience as valuable for them. With this comes higher positions and better financial stability in the future. This being said, money is probably a factor in the long run for the interviewees wanting to kickstart their career in this field with long hours while not yet having a family.

If you are ready to work 60-70h/week I’m sure you can advance faster and get a salary increase, as long as you do a good job as well. (A.1)

However, money in the short term is not a big enough motivator to solely drive these knowledge intensive workers. Instead, the intrinsic motivation comes first, whereas the salary is a good extrinsic pusher when the work feels exhausting.

### 4.7 Capabilities, functionings and ideals

Many of the interviewees agree that they would appreciate shorter hours and less permeability, however, none of them see it being possible within their current positions. On the other hand, none of the interviewees actively work for achieving their ideals either. One interviewee explains how she wishes to have separated domains, but at the same time she is content with her current situation.

Right now, it [integrated work-life balance] is quite okay. It feels natural. (A.2)

There is a wide-spread acceptance of the situation that is also evident in the comments regarding flexibility and permeability, where a lot of the comments are expressed in a neutral and accepting way. Many of the negative and frustrated comments as well are wiped out by the way the interviewees express their content and happiness with their situation, even though it gets rough at times.
This can be an indicator of the current work situation of the interviewees being the capability whereas a different higher position or good career is the functioning they are striving for. As another interviewee puts it:

I am happy with the way I am working now, but in the future, I think that the days should be a little shorter […] I am not prepared to work this way the following ten years, or maybe even five years. (A.3)

Seeing the current work place and position as the capability to achieve something greater in terms of career explains why the interviewees accept the current long hours and heavy workloads. In table ten below the ideals of the interviewees are presented with a quote from the interviews and corresponding obstacle that they are experiencing.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Interviewee</th>
<th>Ideal</th>
<th>Quote</th>
<th>Is the ideal attainable?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A.1</td>
<td>Flexibility</td>
<td>Not very different from now. The more freedom the better. [I wouldn't choose to not work weekends and evenings], I get a lot of flexibility through that.</td>
<td>The interviewee wouldn’t change anything.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A.2</td>
<td>Keeping the domains separate</td>
<td>In an ideal world I would have work at work and free time during free time. [...] When I leave work, I wouldn’t have to think about work and I could focus 100% on my friends, my boyfriend and kids one day.</td>
<td>Not at the department where I am now, no. The deadlines are really tight, and things have to be done on short notice. [...] You can’t just leave it until the next day or decide that you won’t answer emails after 17 o’clock.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A.3</td>
<td>Shorter days</td>
<td>I am happy with the way I am working now, but in the future my days would have to be shorter.</td>
<td>I would have to advance to another position for it to be possible.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B.4</td>
<td>Keeping the domains separate</td>
<td>When I close the door to the office I wouldn’t have to think about work until the next morning when I show up at the office. Well, maybe not to not even think about work, but that I wouldn’t have to live with my phone in</td>
<td>I've never dared to see what it leads to. I'm not ready to take the risk.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
my hand and look at every email [during free time]

B.5 Less self-induced stress Stop thinking about the results pressure […], but it’s also positive because it motivates you. I’d say the pressure is positive. (The interviewee wouldn’t change anything)

C.6 Keeping the domains separate/shorter days Ideally, I would rather have very clear boundaries between private life and work time. […] working between 50 and 55 hours a week. And no work on weekends. We have to have understanding that there are periods that are going to be busier than others. […] I can’t expect week after week to be around that (50-55h), there are going to be some variations.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 10</th>
<th>Individual ideals and obstacles</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

Table ten presents the ideal situation of the interviewees derived from the interviews, as well as their explanation of whether it is reachable or not. Two of the interviewees do not want any change to their current situation, and the rest cannot see the ideals being possible to reach within their current positions.

Summarizing the analysis, the interviewees have different experiences and ideals, but a common pattern of the desired type of work-life balance is evident. Figure three below was first presented in chapter two to illustrate the different types of work-life balance. After analyzing the material gained from the interviewees, it is clear that the interviewees currently experience the red box of integration as their type of work-life balance. Some researchers suggest that this type is in fact the type of work-life balance that is the most balanced (e.g. Clark, 2000). Nam’s (2014) research, however, disagrees and suggests that the integrated work-life balance may not the most desired type of work-life balance after all. Based on the findings in this thesis, the green box, autonomy, is the type of work-life balance that the interviewees would like to experience.
In figure three, the current state of the interviewees’ work-life balance and the ideal work-life balance of the interviewees is presented. Autonomy has the appreciated high level of flexibility, but a low level of permeability. Since most of the interviewees experience the permeability as one of the toughest parts of the job, they would logically prefer to work according to the autonomous type of work-life balance instead of integration. Moving from the red box of integration to the green box of autonomy would decrease, or at least control, the reported negative aspects of the job.
5 DISCUSSION

In this chapter the results are discussed in relation to the research questions and to the theories presented in chapter two. Practical implications of this thesis both on a national and international level are presented and finally, ideas for further research are discussed.

All of the topics discussed in this thesis are intertwined. The 24/7 economy sets the expectation for being reachable at all times, whereas electronic devices make it possible. The use of electronic devices for work matters enable flexibility but also leads to higher permeability, that in turn makes the borders fade. When the borders fade involuntarily, the choices of preferred work-life balances may not be possible to achieve.

Noteworthy is that the knowledge intensive field, and in this case consulting, cannot be generalized as such on a detailed level. There are differences in the work habits between companies, the departments within the company, the teams within the departments, individuals within the teams and also between the types of consulting. The overlaying trend, however, of heavy workloads and tight deadlines is the same over companies and teams.

Below, the topics of work-life balance and the factor of choice derived from the capability approach are discussed in correlation with the use of electronic devices.

5.1 How are electronic devices affecting the work-life balance?

According to the work/family border theory (Clark, 2000), there is no right or wrong answer on what type of work-life balance is the most balanced or ideal, but rather that the preferred type of work-life balance depends on the individual employee. The interviews carried out in this thesis confirm this statement, and it is clear that different employees prefer different types of work-life balance. Although individual preferences and differences are an important factor, there are certain patterns that indicate what type of work-life balance is the most appreciated for certain types of work.

When it comes to the physical attributes of the border qualities of flexibility and permeability, all interviewees reported working from home during evenings or weekends. While all interviewees blend the domains to the extent of working from home, some
Interviewees report having separate areas in the home where work is carried out, and others state that they work in the same spaces that they live in with no experienced conflict. Where one person has a home office or a designated desk for work in an attempt to create physical borders, another person works by the kitchen table or under the duvet in bed, areas often considered the most personal in one’s home. Personal preferences and the need for distinct areas for the two domains vary greatly and illustrates how no conclusions can be drawn for a whole group of people.

On a bigger scale it is valuable to pay attention to the levels of blending of the domains. As said above, all interviewees accept working from home during evenings and weekends or for a whole day, and through that their physical and temporal borders are extremely weak, regardless of one individual preferring to work from a specific place in the home and another working and eating dinner at the same table. On a wider context, outside the knowledge intensive field, employees might never accept bringing work home in the first place. General conclusions can, after all, be made on a higher level, whereas details in preferences can vary greatly.

Personal differences in the preferred way of work are a big factor playing in on the experienced work-life balance. As noted in the results, the individual perception of what is an ideal work-life balance varies and also the personal tolerance for fading borders and heavy work load is dissimilar between respondents.

Although no general conclusions can be drawn on specific preferences, it is easy to find a pattern among the interviewees. The results from the interviews suggest that the preferred type of work-life balance is neither integration or segmentation, but autonomy. The state of autonomy has high levels of flexibility that is appreciated, and low levels of permeability that make the employees feel out of control.

These results confirm the hypothesis made by Clark (2002) and Leung et al (2017). The modern employee in the 24/7 economy is striving towards flexibility and is approving of working outside of office hours, as long as it is done on their own terms. When the sense of being in charge and having control over the situation is stripped away by the borders being permeable, the employee is feeling unsatisfied and overwhelmed. These results also correlate with Kossek & Lautsch’s research (2012).

The results gained in this thesis confirm the statement by Clark (2000) and the results in Leung et al’s (2017) research that the common preferred work-life balance indeed consists
of flexible but not permeable borders, translating into the autonomous type of work-life balance (Nam, 2014). Based on my results I would like to develop this statement by adding the importance of the different aspects of the borders; physical, temporal and psychological. Although flexible borders are preferred, it is relevant how the borders are flexible. Physical flexibility is appreciated due to increased choice and control, whereas temporal flexibility causes some negative emotions among the interviewees due to for example time constraints between family and work.

5.2 What real choices do the employees have to reach their ideals?

Sen’s capability approach (1980) adds a nuance to the understanding that even though the employees have chosen their education and employers themselves, leading them to a tough work-life balance by an acknowledged choice, it does not mean that these employees can choose how they work within the employer. The tough industry, both in terms of the work itself and the competition in the field, make high standards possible to maintain. If one employee is not able to conform to these standards, there is somebody else who will. In other words, if an employee wants to succeed and advance in the field, the pressure needs to be accepted and conformed to.

The findings in this thesis suggest that employees within the knowledge intensive field appreciate the autonomous type of work-life balance. As explained in the chapter above, the autonomous work-life balance has flexible but impermeable borders, letting the employees control when and where to work. However, the use of electronic devices creates a bridge between the work domain and the home domain that allows for constant reachability. Through this, the electronic devices make the borders not only flexible, but also permeable. High flexibility and high permeability translate into the integrated type of work-life balance currently experienced by all interviewees. Consequently, there is a conflict between the desired type of work-life balance; autonomy and the experienced type of work-life balance; integration.

Can the employees switch from the integrated type of work-life balance to autonomy in accordance with their desires? As noted in the results, most interviewees state that they are not explicitly required by their employer to constantly be available in work-related matters.
In practice, however, there are strong expectations from the employer, the colleagues themselves and the clients of always being able to reach one another. When the norm within the field pressures the employees to be reachable at all times, it can be impossible to deviate from it.

All interviewees express a need to stay ahead of work matters during their free time to be able to deliver the best possible work. If choosing not to stay connected to the work domain while being in the home domain results in not being able to do the job as well as expected, there is not much choice for the employee if they want to stay within the industry. Based on the interviews, reaching the desired work-life balance requires an exit from the current position or department.

Most interviewees do not have care responsibilities at the moment, which gives them the capability of focusing on their careers and advancing in a fast pace before starting their own families. All four interviewees without children expect themselves to exit the industry or change positions at the time of creating a family, in order for them to be able to reach the needs of family life. The interviewee with an underage child expects himself to exit the field within the few following years, since he is struggling with combining work and family. The physical and temporal flexibility allows him to tailor his evenings to fit the needs of his child at occasions, but work does inevitable interfere with his home domain. He is currently able to combine the two with the help of his wife, and he does not see a single parent managing both domains with his current work requirements.

On the other hand, if the factor of choice is considered on a more detailed level, the employees can make choices enabled by flexibility. These choices are often smaller in nature than the previously discussed preferences between different types of work-life balances. The employees report for example being able to choose when they start their day, when they end their day, where they work during the day and so forth. However, also these smaller choices seem to be made based on the restrictions in the work domain. Unless there is a meeting that requires face-to-face interactions, the employee can choose to work from wherever he or she chooses to. Unless there is unexpected urgent work popping up in the afternoon, the employee can end the day whenever they choose. These choices are experienced as positive by the employees based on the interviewees, however, they seem very restricted.

Concluding, according to Sen’s (1980) capability approach and the results from the interviews, the employees do not have any real freedoms or capabilities to attain their
desired functioning of the autonomous work-life balance without exiting their current positions. What is expressed as a choice by the employees (e.g. making their own life easier by staying connected and working around the clock) is in fact a requirement by the industry standards and norms.

5.3 A summary of the research questions

The research questions have set the direction for this thesis. The questions are answered in chapter four, and a summary is provided below.

The first research question, *How does the use of electronic devices in combination with the 24/7 economy influence the employee's sense of work-life balance and well-being?*, aims at explaining how the employees experience the use of electronic devices in their work. Several outcomes are expressed in the interviews and discussed in the chapter above. Here, the outcomes are summarized.

Using electronic devices and conforming to the 24/7 economy causes the employees to feel that they do not have a balance between work and life, since the electronic devices allow for constant reachability and the 24/7 economy demands it. It also causes the employee to feel annoyance, anxiety and stress in their daily work due to unpredictable working patterns enabled by the electronic devices, which in turn can lead to sleepless nights. A lack of control, energy and time for activities outside the work domain is also a common effect of the use of electronic devices.

The employees are not the only ones experiencing the effects of the 24/7 economy and the use of electronic devices. The way of work easily upsets family and friends through for example cancelled plans or a feeling of being a second priority in the employee's life. Because of all these effects, the employees see the current position as a temporal solution for advancing in their careers as fast as possible.

To end on a positive note, the interviewees experience increased flexibility through the use of the electronic devices and the fact that the field is active around the clock, giving increased opportunities to work outside of traditional office hours and locations if desired or needed.
The second research question, *How does the use of electronic devices constrain the achievement of a desired work-life balance?*, aims at investigating how the use of electronic devices can hinder the employees from living the life that they desire. The use of electronic devices, and also the expectations that the 24/7 economy adds, lead to highly permeable borders between the work domain and the home domain. Permeable borders are perceived as negative due to their often unpredictability and difficulty of planning ahead. Therefore, the electronic devices can be seen as hindering the achievement of the desired work-life balance.

The third and final research question, *How does the use of electronic devices enable the achievement of a desired work-life balance?*, aims at finding what aspects of using electronic devices in the daily work help the employees to achieve the desired way of living and working. Similarly to the hindrance of achieving the desired work-life balance, also the answer to this question is straightforward. The electronic devices allow the employee to be flexible between the two domains by enabling working from home at the desired point of time, to name an example.

### 5.4 Practical implications

As mentioned by previous research and confirmed by this thesis, the implications of a lack of a work-life balance affects the employees to a great extent and drives them to take decisions otherwise unnecessary. While companies have seen the positive outcomes of employees working around the clock from a productivity point of view, it is important to realize the damage done to employees and through them to the company as a whole.

As this thesis implicates, young professionals might see the consultancy firms as providers of value creating and educational work experience that is highly appreciated on the job market in the future. It is not sustainable for either the employees, who drive themselves to a critical health situation, nor the companies, who lose social capital, tacit knowledge and value-adding experience because of high staff turnover.

Driving employees beyond their limits is creating costs for the employee, the company and the society. The employee, in the worst scenario, suffers a severe burn out that can impair their ability to work for a considerable amount of time. The company suffers financial losses
from sick leaves as well as recruitment and training costs and indirectly from a loss of valuable knowledge and experience in the form of social capital. The society carries the cost of treating individuals for burn out and from their inability to work.

Since the knowledge intensive field often functions on international basis with offices and/or clients in multiple countries and international cooperation is common, it is fair to assume that the way of work presented in this thesis is similar in the knowledge intensive field or in the consulting scene on an international scale. All interviewees in this thesis report working closely with foreign clients and foreign colleagues both in the home office and in offices abroad. Although the research is carried out in Finland, the findings can be applied if not directly, but partially, to the consulting scene in an international setting due to the strongly intertwined field across national borders.

This thesis in itself is not able to make a change in the way of working in the knowledge intensive field. The needed change within the field is enormous and will take time to be implemented both in practice but foremost in the attitudes and mental models that currently dominate the field. There is an acceptance among both applicants in the field and the current employees that the way of work is the only way of work possible, and this acceptance fuels existing patterns. A fundamental change in these attitudes and in the acceptance must happen before a change can take place. As long as the companies do not see the negative consequences as bigger than the positive ones a change will be hard to implement.

This thesis, in its limited scale, can affect the interviewees and inspire them to critically examine the way they work and the acceptance behind it, spreading the critical thinking forward to colleagues and others. The WeAll project and the research Social sustainability in work organisations that this thesis is a part of, can bring awareness and research to the field on a bigger scale being supported and funded by the Strategic Research Council at the Finnish Academy.

5.5 Suggestions for further research

In this chapter I will present three main suggestions for further research that I see relevant within the topic.
The concept of work-life balance has raised doubt among the interviewees, which raises the question if work-life balance and its related terms are irrelevant concepts within the knowledge intensive field today. Many of the interviewees expressed that the concepts of work-life balance such as borders, private life, work life and office hours, among other concepts, felt outdated and artificial for their situations. A lack of proper words and concepts was evident when discussing with the interviewees. These concepts seem to illustrate an outdated world where the assumption is to have two separated domains. In today’s 24/7 economy with the increasing use of electronic devices completely new concepts and theories are needed.

This thesis has provided a deeper understanding of a limited number of employees and therefore the results cannot be standardized. I suggest conducting a quantitative research of the work-life balance of the knowledge intensive field to investigate how widely spread the phenomenon of blurring boundaries is across several companies. After understanding how the lack of a sufficient work-life balance affects the employees and how it shows in their everyday life, a quantitative questionnaire could be formulated and thereafter tested on a larger group of employees.

In my thesis, the interviewees have answered the question “Do you consider your current work pace sustainable in the future?”. The answers to this question are only estimations, and all of my interviewees have had relatively short employments. A longitudinal study could give valuable insight in how the fast-paced work life and blurring boundaries are affecting the employees in the long run. Many interviewees also see themselves working in these fast-paced companies in the beginning of their career in order for them to gain as much knowledge and experience as possible before moving on to more sustainable employments.

Conducting a longitudinal study could provide the researcher with an understanding of how long these young professionals are willing to put their career first, and which factor, if any, proves to be the final stepping stone before leaving the industry or position. According to the interviews conducted in this thesis, two major estimates of reasons for leaving the industry is changed family circumstances and the personal well-being and coping. Perhaps a longitudinal study would find other major deal breakers or go as far as to prove the what now seems as inevitable leaving at a certain point as not certain at all, but rather find ways to change the industry to having a more sustainable future.
Another path for further research is within neuroscience to create an understanding of what happens in the body and brain when the employees are constantly ready to work. In this study, many of the interviewees have mentioned that they know the instant they hear their phone if it is work-related or not, whereas others are not sure whether it is private or work-related messages or emails when they hear their phones. Some of the interviewees reported feeling stressed and worried when hearing their phone during their free time, not sure if they would have to start working and have a late night unexpectedly. Others said they do not react in any specific way to hearing the phone. What unconscious or conscious reactions and emotions the sound of the phone triggers in the employees could be investigated with physiological and psychological testing to gain a scientific result of how the unexpected but constant worry of work and work-related matters affects the individual.
6 CONCLUSION

The 24/7 economy in the knowledge intensive fields is enabled and empowered by the possibilities electronic devices bring. The international or global settings of many companies today, functioning over different time zones, make contact outside of local office hours inevitable, fueling the sense of a 24/7 economy. However, while companies may benefit from the 24/7 economy the employees are struggling with combining work and free time into a functioning whole.

The industrial revolution in the late 18th century has laid the base for the early theories and concepts of work-life balance, and also Clark (2000) motivates the formation of domains as a result of the revolution. The big difference before and after the industrial revolution is the separation of the two domains and the attitudes and behaviors that go with the domains, giving fuel for new research and theories. Three centuries later it is arguable that the 24/7 economy in combination with the use of electronic devices affect the working culture in a similar, although not yet as dramatic, manner.

The work/family border theory provides a framework for evaluating the employees’ work-life balance with the help of concepts like borders and domains, where the attributes and qualities of the borders determine the nature of work-life balance. Sen’s capability approach brings the aspect of real choice and capabilities to affect one’s own situation and to achieve the preferred work-life balance. Together these two theories or frames of thoughts create the base for a wider understanding of the topic of work-life balance; how the employees within the knowledge intensive field experience work-life balance and how they can or cannot affect their own situation.

In this thesis, six employees within the knowledge intensive field have been interviewed on the topics of the 24/7 economy, their use of electronic devices and their perceived work-life balance. The interviewees answered a background form with questions regarding their previous and current situation as well as a weekly diary with daily remarks of the workdays prior to the interviews. The data gained from the interviews, background forms and weekly diaries was analyzed according to the directed content analysis and categorized into 18 categories derived from the work/family border theory (Clark, 2000) as well as in accordance to Sen’s capability approach (Sen, 1980).
The aim of this thesis is to provide an understanding for the effects of the intense 24/7 economy on work-life balance and well-being of employees within the knowledge intensive field of consulting, and how the use of electronic devices contributes to the possibly blurring boundaries between work and free time.

Living and working in the 24/7 economy using electronic devices as tools affect the employees in multiple ways, most of which are negative. Negative consequences based on the data gathered in this thesis are anxiety, annoyance, stress, lack of work-life balance, lack of energy and time for private life, upsetting family and friends as well as missing family matters, sleeping difficulties and a sense of being out of control of their own situation.

Positive outcomes are being able to advance fast in one’s career and having a great extent of flexibility in balancing the different domains. Even though the positive outcomes are fewer than the negative consequences, the interviewees put more value into them and because of that they can function in this challenging setting.

My findings suggest that the preferred type of work-life balance is autonomy with low permeability and high flexibility. Autonomy would decrease the negative consequences and interferences that permeable borders bring the interviewees and therefore the satisfaction of the work-life balance would improve.

The results of this thesis indicate that it is not the long work days or the heavy work load that create the negative experiences among the interviewees, but rather the permeable borders that strip away the sense of being in control. Most of the interviewees agree that their current way of working is not sustainable in the future and see it as a temporal solution. However, based on the findings in this thesis, having a good work-life balance does not translate into only working from nine to five, but to be in charge of the situation and to be able to plan activities in both domains according to one’s needs. While more stable work conditions are preferred for the future, all interviewees agree that their current positions with their challenges contribute to their career advancement with valuable experience.

This thesis contributes to the understanding of the employees within the knowledge intensive field of consulting, and although not generalizable, the results can be applied and tested also in an international setting.
7 SVENSK SAMMANFATTNING

7.1 Introduktion

Modern teknologi skapar förutsättningar för arbetstagaren inom den kunskapsintensiva branschen att konstant vara i kontakt med kolleger och kunder i arbetsrelaterade ärenden. Då arbetstagaren är nåbar av kolleger och kunder via sina elektroniska apparater utanför traditionella arbetstider, och ofta förväntas agera på förfrågningar och uppgifter med omedelbar verkan, kan det kännas svårt eller nästintill omöjligt att avsluta dagens arbete då man lämnar kontoret. Å andra sidan har arbetstagaren möjlighet att via elektroniska apparater arbeta från bilen, sommarstugan eller från semesterdestinationen, vilket möjliggör en flexibel livsstil. Hur påverkar användningen av elektroniska apparater den kunskapsintensiva arbetstagaren i 24/7-ekonomin?

Kunskapsintensiva arbetstagare påverkas av 24/7-ekonomin på grund av globala nätverk av kolleger och kunder, strama tidtabeller och moderna normer. Den traditionella gränsen mellan arbete och fritid har försvagats (Geurts & Demerouti, 2003) eller i vissa fall helt suddats ut (Dén-Nagy, 2014). Att kombinera arbete med fritid till en välfungerande helhet i den rådande 24/7-ekonomin är en utmaning för de flesta kunskapsintensiva arbetstagare i dag.

Användningen av elektroniska apparater i 24/7-ekonomin tillåter den kunskapsintensiva arbetstagaren att arbeta när som helst och var som helst, vilket leder till en allt tyngre arbetskultur (Alvesson, 2004) med längre arbetsdagar och större resultatspress (Moen m.fl, 2013) vilket kan leda till bland annat sämre arbetsprestationer, höjda stressnivåer (Nam, 2014) och i slutändan utbrändhet (Leung, 2011). Å andra sidan kan flexibilitet och högre arbetsmoral vara positiva följder av att arbeta med elektroniska apparater i den intensiva branschen (Hill m.fl, 1998).

Trots att detta sätt att arbeta har blivit den nya normen inom den kunskapsintensiva branschen är riskerna för den enskilda arbetstagaren för stora för att ignoreras eller ställas i skymundan av de positiva följder detta kan ha för företaget. Konsekvenserna är viktiga att identifiera och diskutera såväl för arbetstagaren, företaget som samhället, då till exempel utbrändhet påverkar alla tre i en hög grad.
7.2 Syfte

I tidigare forskning har ämnet undersökts med tyngdpunkt på de positiva följder som användningen av elektroniska apparater i 24/7-ekonomin medför för ett företags produktivitet (Middleton, 2003), medan negativa följder för arbetstagares välmående inte behandlats med samma intensitet (Sarker m.fl 2012). Föreliggande avhandling fokuserar därför på hur den kunskapsintensiva branschen och dess krav påverkar arbetstagares välmående och syn på balansen mellan arbete och fritid samt hur de elektroniska apparaterna bidrar till de allt mer diffusa gränserna mellan arbete och fritid.

Syftet med denna avhandling är att skapa en förståelse för hur arbetstagarna rättfärdigar arbetstakten och arbetsättet i sin nuvarande situation och i framtiden, samt hur de påverkas av den strikta arbetstakten som 24/7-ekonomin och de elektroniska apparaterna bidrar till.

Mina forskningsfrågor är således:

1. Vilka följder har användningen av elektroniska apparater för den kunskapsintensiva arbetarens välmående och balansen mellan arbete och fritid?

2. Hur påverkar användningen av elektroniska apparater arbetet inom 24/7-ekonomin?

3. Vilka hinder eller möjligheter påverkar arbetstagarens chanser att uppnå den önskade balansen mellan arbete och fritid?

I följande kapitel presenteras tidigare forskning inom området samt de två mest relevanta teorierna i denna avhandling.

7.3 Teori

Balans mellan arbete och fritid är ett välkänt koncept inom de flesta organisationer i dagens samhälle. Ämnets relevans för flera områden och branscher har gett upphov till ett stort antal vetenskapliga artiklar med olika utgångspunkter och syften. I denna avhandling

Brist på balans mellan arbete och fritid uppstår då plikter från en domän överskuggar plikter i den andra (Netemeyer m.fl: 2004; Sarker m.fl; 2012). Brist på balans mellan arbete och fritid under en längre period kan påverka företaget genom bland annat hög omsättning på arbetskraften och genom det förlust av värdefull kunskap och erfarenhet. För individen kan en brist på balans leda till missnöje och i slutändan utbrändhet. (Leung, 2011)

Balansen mellan arbete och fritid har intresserat forskare sedan den industriella revolutionen separerade arbetet från hemmet (Geurts & Demerouti, 2003; Wilensky, 1960), och då har de två domänerna setts som två separata områden i individens liv (Parsons & Bales, 1955) med olika beteendemönster och en stark särskiljning mellan tid och plats för de två domänerna (Clark, 2000). Nyare forskning föreslår att arbete och fritid inte längre kan klassas som två separata domäner, utan att de i allt högre grad är interrelaterade (Geurts & Demerouti 2003; Nam, 2014).


Gränserna mellan de två domänerna definieras av olika egenskaper som fastställer hur starka eller svaga gränserna är. Genomtränglighet (eng. *permeability*) undersöker hur enkelt aspekter från det ena området inkräktar på det andra området, och kan ta sig uttryck
i exempelvis en familjemedlems samtal under arbetstid eller ett arbetsrelaterat e-postmeddelande på fritiden (Clark, 2000).

Flexibilitet syftar till hur enkelt individen kan påverka gränsslagningen mellan de två domänerna, och kan uttrycka sig som förmågan att åka från kontoret tidigare för att utföra privata ärenden för att sedan ta igen den förlorade arbetstiden hemifrån på kvällen. Då individen har hög genomtränglighet och flexibilitet mellan de två domänerna uppstår en sammansmältning (eng. blending) mellan arbete och fritid, till exempel då individen deltar i en telefonkonferens samtidigt som hen skjuter barnen till deras hobby. (Clark, 2000)

Dessa egenskaper tillsammans – genomtränglighet, flexibilitet och sammansmältning – bestämmer hur starka gränserna mellan domänerna är. Då genomtränglighet och flexibilitet är en del av vardagen har individen svaga gränser mellan arbete och fritid, medan gränserna är starka då domänerna strikt hålls isär (Clark, 2000). 


De två centrala begreppen i Sens ramverk är förmåga (eng. capability) och funktion (eng. function), där förmåga syftar på individens verkliga möjligheter att uppnå ett mål, medan funktion syftar på själva målet eller den ideala livssituationen (Sen, 1980). En funktion kunde vara att arbeta endast åtta timmar per dag, medan verkligheten är att företaget har brist på arbetskraft så att den individuella arbetstagaren måste arbeta mer, vilket leder till att ideala inte är möjligt att uppnå.

Elektroniska apparater kan ses både som hinder och möjlighet för att uppnå den önskade balansen mellan arbete och fritid. Om individen önskar hållas à jour med pågående projekt och kolleger även utanför kontoret fungerar de elektroniska apparaterna som en förmåga för att uppnå denna funktion. Om arbetstagaren å andra sidan önskar hålla arbete och fritid
separata, men arbetsgivaren kräver konstant närbarhet, fungerar de elektroniska apparaterna (och arbetsgivarens krav) som ett hinder för individens ideal.

I följande kapitel behandlas avhandlingens metodval och material.

7.4 Metod


Intervjuerna spelades in och transkriberades efter varje intervju. Transkriberingarna används som bas för en kategorisering där de centrala delarna av teorierna användes som kategorier med en ytterligare indelning i positiva, neutrala och negativa kommentarer. Kategoriseringen ger en överblick av vad som påverkar arbetstagaren positivt och negativt och vad som accepteras utan större eftertanke som en del av arbetets karaktär.

Nedan presenteras de mest centrala resultaten i avhandlingen.
7.5 Resultat

Genom kategoriseringen skapades en tydlig bild av vad deltagarna ser som positivt i sitt arbete och arbetssätt, samt vad de ser som negativt inom sin bransch. Flexibla gränser mellan arbete och fritid uppskattas högt av alla deltagare eftersom de ger en möjlighet att planera arbetet och fritiden till en helhet. De elektroniska apparaterna är ett hjälpmedel här, eftersom arbetstagaren kan lämna kontoret tidigare för att sedan kunna ta igen den förlorade tiden hemifrån på kvällen via sin bärbara dator, eller genom att ringa några arbetssamtal från bilen på väg till en fritidsaktivitet. Arbetstagaren är alltså inte bunden till en tid och plats för att utföra arbetet, utan kan bestämma själv när och var arbetet utförs tack vare den brobyggande egenskap de elektroniska apparaterna medför mellan arbetet och fritiden.


Trots att flexibilitet och genomtränglighet kan uttrycka sig på samma sätt i vardagen, exempelvis då individen arbetar hemifrån på kvällen, ligger den stora skillnaden i hur individen kommer att arbeta just då. Om det är ett medvetet val att åka tidigare från jobbet för att ta igen den tiden på kvällen, eller för att förbereda sig inför följande dag så att schemat inte är lika späckat, ligger beslutet hos individen själv och i den egna valmöjligheten och gynnas således av gränsernas flexibilitet. Om arbetet på kvällen härsleds av ett samtal eller e-postmeddelande av chefen eller en kollega som kräver att något ska vara åtgärdad före midnatt har inte individen själv något val utan drabbas av gränsernas genomtränglighet.

Således ökar belätenheten med den egna situationen då gränserna är flexibla och de egna besluten påverkar arbetet, medan belätenheten minskar då genomträngligheten ökar, eftersom valfriheten och kontrollen över situationen då ligger hos någon annan än individen själv.
Detta sätt att arbeta ger upphov till åsikter och känslor hos såväl arbetstagarna själva som hos deras närstående. De upplevda konsekvenserna är mestadels av negativ karaktär, medan enstaka positiva följer tycks väga upp de negativa aspekterna.

Deltagarna rapporterar känslor av irritation och ångest på grund av gränsernas genomtränglighet, de känner att de saknar en balans mellan arbete och fritid samt energi och tid för fritid. Utöver detta känner de att de går miste om familjeangelägenheter på grund av arbetet, något som ibland leder till att de närstående blir upprörda. Detta resulterar ofta i känslor av stress och att inte ha kontroll över den egna situationen samt sömnlösa nätter. De flesta intervjuade ser arbetet som en tillfällig lösning då de inte ser att det är en hållbar lösning några år framåt i tiden.

Dessa negativa aspekter följs av två positiva konsekvenser: flexibilitet och snabbt avancemang i karriären. Utöver dessa positiva konsekvenser berättar arbetstagarna att de kämpar sig igenom de negativa aspekterna av arbetet eftersom de lär sig mycket nytt varje dag, de utvecklas i en snabb takt, de utmanas intellektuellt dagligen, blir bättre på problemlösning och de får värdefull arbetsfarenhet. Alla deltagare är ense om att deras framtid ser väldigt ljus ut tack vare det arbete de utför nu och att det är en orsak till varför de sökte sig till branschen från början.

Trots att denna kvalitativa undersökning inte är generaliserbar, kan man utgående från dessa resultat identifiera ett mönster som föredras där gränsernas flexibilitet är hög och genomtränglighet är låg. Arbetstagaren inom den kunskapsintensiva branschen godkänner att jobba utanför den traditionella arbetstiden och arbetsplatsen då det genomförs på egna villkor (flexibilitet), men då kontrollen över situation tas ifrån dem (genomtränglighet) växer missnöjet snabbt.

7.6 Slutledning

Den kunskapsintensiva branschen fungerar inom den intensiva 24/7-ekonomin och kräver ofta konstant närbarhet av sina arbetstagare. Denna avhandling syftar till att undersöka hur detta påverkar den individuella arbetstagaren samt vilken roll de elektroniska apparaterna spelar i sammanhanget.
Work/family border theory (Clark, 2000) används som en teoretisk bas för avhandlingen med fokus på balansgången mellan arbete och fritid medan Sens capability approach (Sen, 1980) bidrar med en dimension av ideal samt som ett ramverk för att granska om det liv som individen strävar mot över huvud taget är möjligt att uppnå inom den kunskapsintensiva branschen.

Avhandlingen utförs som en kvalitativ studie med sex deltagare som genom veckodagböcker, bakgrundsblanketter och individuella semistructurerade intervjuer delar med sig av sin verklighet och via det bidrar till att skapa en djupgående förståelse för deras upplevelser och erfarenheter.

Resultaten av denna avhandling föreslår att det inte är de långa arbetsdagarna eller den stora arbetsbörden som skapar negativa tankar om arbetet, då arbetstagarna godkänner att jobba med en intensiv takt och är förberedda på det innan de mottar anställningen. Att ha en bra balans mellan arbete och fritid betyder inte att lämna kontoret klockan 17 och återvända följande morgon klockan 9, utan att själv kunna bestämma och planera dagen i enlighet med de egna behoven. Missnöjet uppstår av att förlora kontrollen över den egna situationen.

Arbetstagarna är mestadels ense om att det nuvarande arbetet inte är hållbart i längden och att de kommer att söka sig till nya utmaningar med stabilare balans mellan arbete och fritid framöver. Alla anser dock att de uppförningar de nu gör är värt det för den framtida karriärutvecklingen.

7.6.1 Praktiska implikationer

Tidigare forskning har fokuserat på de positiva följderna av att arbeta dygnet runt ur en produktivitetssynvinkel, medan fokus nu borde skifta till de negativa konsekvenser arbetssättet medför individen och således indirekt företaget och samhället. Då arbetstagaren ser anställningen som tillfällig och som en sluss till bättre positioner lider företagen av förluster av både finansiellt och socialt kapital, medan samhället bär risken att behandla utbrändhet och de följer det innebär.
Avhandlingen i sig är inte tillräcklig för att skapa en förändring i det rådande klimatet inom den kunskapsintensiva branschen, då en förändring i praktiken, men framför allt i attityder och normer, kräver både tid och större insatser än så. En fundamental förändring i det tysta godkännandet och idealiseringen av branschen måste ske innan företagen ser en nytta i att ändra sina till synes lönsamma arbetsförhållanden. Vad denna avhandling kan bidra med är att inspirera deltagarna till att kritiskt granska den egna situationen och sitt förhållande till arbetet, för att möjligens diskutera detta med sina kolleger och på så sätt sprida hälsosammare tankesätt vidare.

7.6.2 Fortsatt forskning

För fortsatt forskning rekommenderar jag en longitudinell kvantitativ studie som kan ge generaliserbara resultat för hur dessa arbetsförhållanden påverkar arbetstagaren i längden, och då även konkret få svar på hur länge arbetstagaren orkar arbeta under den konstanta pressen och hur länge de är villiga att prioritera arbete och karriär framför familjen. En annan väg är att rikta in sig på det neurologiska området för att undersöka hur den konstanta stressen av att bli kontaktad i brådskande ärenden oförväntat utanför arbetstid påverkar individen rent fysiskt gällande framför allt de omedvetna reaktionerna i kroppen.
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APPENDIX 1 INTERVIEW GUIDE (MODIFIED FROM THE WEALL PROJECT)

BAKGRUND

1 Varför har du valt att jobba just här? (företaget)
2 Vad visste du om arbetstakten/tiden då du tog emot jobbet?
3 Trivs du med dina arbetsuppgifter? Vilka faktorer påverkar hur du känner?
4 Tycker du att ditt arbete är tungt? Vad är tungt?
5 Är du nöjd med den nuvarande situationen i ditt arbete? Varför?
6 Tycker du att ditt nuvarande arbetssätt är hållbart i längden? Varför?
7 Hur ser en vanlig vardag ut för dig? Hela dagen, jobb och fritid?
8 Berätta lite mer om ditt övriga liv (familjeliv/fritid). Vad är viktigt för dig?

BALANS – ELEKTRONIK OCH JOBB HEMMA

9 Upplever du att du har en tydlig gräns mellan arbete och fritid?
10 Har du en skild jobbtelefon eller är din privata- och din arbetstelefon den samma? Dator?
11 Hur inverkar din telefon/dator på kombinerandet av ditt arbete med ditt privatliv? (Hindrar din arbetstelefon/mail dig att njuta av din fritid/ger mer fritid/flexibilitet?)
   a. Får du/svarar du på arbetsrelaterade email/samtal på din fritid?
   b. Får du notifikationer av arbetsrelaterade händelser? Har du dem på hemma?
   c. Svarar du? Hur känns det att svara på arbetsrelaterade samtal/mail på din fritid? Hur reagerar din familj/vänner?
12 Krävs det att du är nåbar utanför arbetstid? Går du miste om nåt ifall du inte kollar telefonen? Får du låta bli att kolla telefonen/mailen?
   a. Om inte, är du nåbar av egen vilja? Varför?
      i. Om nej, hur tycker du att detta påverkar ditt arbete?
   b. Om nåbar: Hur känner du dig av att alltid vara nåbar i arbetets tecken?

13 Hur ofta tänker du på jobbrelaterade saker hemma?

14 Påverkar en jobbig dag på jobbet hur du känner dig på din fritid? Hur påverkar detta dina närmaste? Tvärtom?

15 Har du någonsin drömt om arbetet? Hur kändes det? Vad berodde drömmen på tror du?

BALANS - ELEKTRONIK OCH PRIVAT PÅ JOBBET

16 Hur mycket hinner du tänka på privatsaker på jobbet? Tycker du att det är svårt att hålla tankarna skillt? Har du behov av att hålla tankarna skillt?

17 Hurdana oskrivna regler har ni på jobbet om att göra privata saker på arbetstid?

18 Hur upplever kolleger/förmannen det? Är det ok eller måste du göra det i ”smyg”?

19 Svarar du på privata email/samtal på arbetstid? Varför?
   a. Hur känns det att svara på privata händelser? (störande, skönt med paus, enkelt, svårt att bolla mellan två ”världar”)

FLEXIBILITET

20 Möjliggör att du är nåbar via arbetstelefon/dator dig att flexa i arbetstiderna/platsen? Hur?

21 Kan du jobba hemifrån? Vad föredrar du? Kontor eller hemma?
22 Till hur stor utsträckning får du välja var du jobbar? Är det lika enkelt för dig att jobba från kontoret som hemifrån? Finns det några verktyg på kontoret du inte har hemma?

23 OM jobbar hemifrån: Har du ett utrymme i hemmet enbart för arbete (skilt rum)? Om nej, var i hemmet jobbar du? Hur känns det att blanda?

24 Hur fungerar det i praktiken att jobba hemifrån? Vad har ni för oskrivna regler hemma för tiden då du jobbar hemma?

25 Då du jobbar hemifrån, känner du att det är svårt att skifte mellan jobb-fritid-mentalitet?

ROLLER

26 Känner du att det krävs ett annorlunda beteende hemma och på arbetet? Hur skiljer sig dessa/hur lika är dessa beteenden?


28 Spenderar du tid med dina kolleger utanför arbetstid? Beter ni er olika beroende på om ni är på arbetstid eller fritid?

ÖVERTID

29 Kan du planera fritidsaktiviteter under veckan? Om ja, händer det att du måste inhibera dem? Om nej, varför planerar du inte?

30 Kan du planera veckosluten i förväg? Händer det att du måste inhibera pga jobb?

31 Vet du på förhand om du måste jobba övertid, hur långt på förhand? Hur ofta jobbar du övertid?

32 Jobbar du övertid på jobbet, eller går du hem vanlig tid och fortsätter jobba hemifrån via dator/mobil vid behov? Varför?

33 Hur ser arbetsgivaren på övertid?
ARBETSGIVARENS ROLL

34 Hur tycker du att din arbetsplats stöder dig i att kombinera arbete med fritid?


36 Tycker du att ni på din arbetsplats har samma möjligheter att kombinera jobb med fritid oberoende av familjesituation/ålder/position/hierarki? Har du exempel? Vad tycker du om detta?

IDEALTILLSTÄND

37 Hur mycket sömn behöver du per natt idealt? Hur mycket sover du i genomsnitt per natt? Hur kan du påverka din sömnlängd?

38 Beskriv din ideala arbetssituation i sin helhet. Beskriv din ideala arbetsdag.

39 Tror du att din ideala arbetssituation skulle kunna uppnås? Varför / varför inte? Hinder?

40 Vad skulle din ideala livssituation vara gällande kombinationen av jobbet och det övriga livet? Varför?

41 Tror du att den ideala situationen är möjlig att uppnå? Med vilka medel? Hinder?

GEMENSAamma FRÅGOR FÖR WEALL-PROJEKTET

42 Hur tror du att den egna organisationen / branschen kommer att utvecklas i framtiden?

43 Hur upplever du dina möjligheter i arbetslivet i framtiden? Varför?

44 Vilka saker anser du att kan förbättra eller försämra dina möjligheter att balansera jobb med privatliv på ett ändamålsenligt sätt nu och i framtiden?
APPENDIX 2  WEEKLY DIARY (WEALL PROJECT)

1. Milloin heräsit?

2. Tuliko yöllä työstä johtuvia katkoksia?

3. Milloin ajattelit ensimmäisen kerran töitä herättyäsi? Mitä ajattelit?

4. Mistä lasket työpäiväsi alkaaneen? Missä tämä tapahtui? (esim. työpaikalle saapuminen, autoon nouseminen, tietokoneen avaaminen, työvaatteisiin pukeutuminen, sähköpostin lukeminen, puhelu, ajatteletko ylimääräisesti työpäivän alkavan)

5. Milloin ja missä lopetit työt?

6. Mikä päätitti työpäiväsi? (esim. työpaikalta lähteminen, autoon nouseminen, tietokoneen sulkeminen, sähköpostin sulkeminen, ajatteletko ylimääräisesti työpäivän loppuvan)

7. Missä teit töitä työpäiväsi aikana? Anna voidessasi myös aika-arvio. (esim. kotona, työpaikalla, asiakkaan luona, kahvilassa, junassa)


10. Tapahtuiko päivän aikana jotain, joka sai sinut ajattelemaan työn ja muun elämän rajoja?
APPENDIX 3  BACKGROUND FORM (WEALL PROJECT)

YHTEISKUNNALLISESTI JA TALOUDELLISESTI KESTÄVÄ TULEVAISUUDEN TYÖELÄMÄ:

Työ ja muu elämä, työhyvinvointi ja työssä jaksaminen
(http://www.weallfinland.fi/)

Taustakysymykset

Sukupuoli:
Syntymävuosi:
Koulutus:

A. Oma työ

1. Työkokemuksen kokonaispituus:

2. Työkokemuksen pituus tässä organisaatiossa:

3. Työkokemuksen pituus tässä tehtävässä:

4. Esimieskokemus: □ Kyllä □ Ei □ En osaa sanoa

5. Esimiehen sukupuoli:

6. Minkälaisia työtehtäviä sinulla on?

7. Mihin vuorokaudenaikaan/-aikoihin teet työtä?

8. Haluatko tehdä näinä aikoina työtä? □ Kyllä □ Ei □ En osaa sanoa

9. Onko sinulla määritelty työaika? □ Kyllä □ Ei □ En osaa sanoa

10. Kuinka pitkiä työpäiviä yleensä teet? Keskimäärin ___ h/päivässä

11. Teetkö ylimääräisiä tehtäviä? □ Kyllä □ Ei □ En osaa sanoa

12. Mistä asioista pidät nykyisessä työssäsi ja siilessä liittyvissä järjestelyissä? Miksi?

13. Mistä asioista et pidä nykyisessä työssäsi ja siillä liittyvissä järjestelyissä? Miksi?
B. Työn ja muun elämän yhdistäminen

1. Mikä on perhetilanteesi? Keitä perheeseesi kuuluu?

2. Onko sinulla hoivavastuita? Kyllä □ Ei □ En osaa sanoa □ Minkälaisia?

3. Auttaako joku taho (perheenjäsen, kotipalvelu, isovanhemmat, päiväkoti, iltapäiväkerho tms.) sinua hoivavastuiden toteuttamisessa?
   Kyllä □ Ei □ En osaa sanoa □
   Jos kyllä, mitä ja miksi?
   Minkälaiset olivat hyödyt ja ongelmat?
   Jos ei, miksi et ole käyttänyt?

4. Onko työpaikallasi työn ja perheen tai työn ja muun elämän yhteensovittamista helpottavia käytäntöjä? Kyllä □ Ei □ En osaa sanoa □

5. Tunnetko tarvitsevasi näitä käytäntöjä? Kyllä □ Ei □ En osaa sanoa □
   Miksi?

6. Koetko käytännöt toimiviksi? Kyllä □ Ei □ En osaa sanoa □
   Miksi?

7. Käytätkö/oletko itse käyttänyt näitä käytäntöjä ja joustoja?
   Kyllä, nyt □ Kyllä, aikaisemmin □ Ei □ En osaa sanoa □

8. Jos työn ja muun elämän yhdistämiseen liittyviä käytäntöjä ei ole, pitäisikö niitä olla?
   Kyllä □ Ei □ En osaa sanoa □
   Miksi/miksi ei?
9. Hankaloittaako niiden puuttuminen työssä suoriutumista ja elämääsi?
   Kyllä □   Ei □   En osaa sanoa □
   Miten ja miksi?

C. Työssä jaksaminen

1. Oletko tässä työpaikassa tai aiemmin työurasi aikana ollut perhe- tai
   vuorotteluvapaalla? Kyllä, tässä työssä □ Kyllä, aikaisemmassa □   En □   En osaa
   sanoa □
   Käytetyt perhevapaat (kuukausina): _____ kk Vuonna/vuosina?:
   Käytetyt vuorotteluvapaat (kuukausina): _____ kk Vuonna/vuosina?:

2. Oliko työnantajasi, esimiehesi tai työtoverisi sinuun yhteydessä vapaan/vapaiden
   aikana?
   Kyllä □   Ei □   En osaa sanoa □
   Jos kyllä, miltä tämä tuntui?
   Jos ei, olisitko halunnut yhteydenpitoa?

3. Onko sinulla tässä työpaikassa tai aiemmin työurasi aikana ollut pitempiä tai toistuvia
   sairauspoissaolojaksoja?
   Kyllä, tässä työssä □   Kyllä, aikaisemmassa □   En □   En osaa sanoa □
   Kuinka pitkiä sairauspoissaolojaksojat ovat olleet?

4. Oliko työnantajasi, esimiehesi tai työtoverisi sinuun yhteydessä sairauspoissaolojakson
   aikana?
   Kyllä □   Ei □   En osaa sanoa □
   Jos kyllä, miltä tämä tuntui?
   Jos ei, olisitko halunnut yhteydenpitoa?
5. Kuinka monta kertaa olet työurasi aikana vaihtanut työnantajaa?

6. Mikä on ollut työsuhdeesi keskimääräinen kesto?

7. Tukeeko työnantajasi työssä jaksamista?
   Kyllä □   Ei □   En osaa sanoa □
   Miten? (esim. työnohjaus, työterveyshuolto, sosiaaliset tapahtumat, varhainen puuttuminen)
   Koetko tuen riittäväksi? Kyllä □   Ei □   En osaa sanoa □
   Miksi/miksi ei?

8. Ovatko työterveyshuollon palvelut riittävät?
   Kyllä □   Ei □   En osaa sanoa □
   Miksi/ miksi ei?

9. Käytätkö/oletko käyttänyt julkisia palveluja (esim. terveyskeskus) mahdollisen stressin/väsymyksen ehkäsemiseen?
   Kyllä, nyt □   Kyllä, aikaisemmin □   Ei □   En osaa sanoa □
   Jos käytät/olet käyttänyt: koetko/koitko palvelut riittävinä?
   Miksi/ miksi ei?

Kiitos taustatietolomakkeen täyttämisestä!