Strategic wellbeing management from a middle manager perspective – a case study

Ella Veijalainen

Department of Management and Organization
Hanken School of Economics
Helsinki
2018
Abstract:
The research aims to explore strategic wellbeing management from a middle management perspective focusing on a Finnish branch of a global organization present in the energy industry. The research focuses specifically on understanding the middle managers’ conceptualization of wellbeing and wellbeing management from a strategic perspective, as well as the manager’s experiences of their role in strategic wellbeing management.

The methodology used in the research is of qualitative nature and utilizes both observations and semi-structured interviews in order to get a complete understanding of the managerial perceptions and experiences.

The data analysis is built around theory of wellbeing, strategic wellbeing management and roles of middle managers. The result of the analysis is a description of how middle managers perceive the aforementioned concepts as well as their personal role in strategic wellbeing management. The analysis also describes how these perceptions influence the operationalization of wellbeing strategy.

This case study suggests that middle managers view wellbeing from an individualistic perspective highlighting the social aspect of wellbeing. Wellbeing management is considered to be a cultural phenomenon maintained by frequent informal communication. The conceptualization of wellbeing and wellbeing management affect how managers perceive their own role in the execution of wellbeing strategy.

The responsibilities of wellbeing management are generally well accepted as part of the managerial role but do create tensions and challenges such as contradicting roles and expectations set on the managers. These challenges are further emphasized by factors such as organizational structure, available resources and culture.

Keywords:
Wellbeing, strategic wellbeing, wellbeing management, strategic wellbeing management, middle managers, middle manager roles
CONTENTS

1 INTRODUCTION ................................................................................................. 1
   1.1 BACKGROUND .......................................................................................... 1
   1.2 PROBLEM STATEMENT ......................................................................... 3
   1.3 PURPOSE OF STUDY .............................................................................. 4
   1.4 LIMITATIONS ......................................................................................... 4
   1.5 METHODS ............................................................................................... 4
   1.6 DEFINITIONS .......................................................................................... 5
   1.7 STRUCTURE OF THE PAPER ................................................................. 5

2 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK ........................................................................... 7
   2.1 WELLBEING ............................................................................................ 7
       2.1.1 Wellbeing definitions ..................................................................... 8
           2.1.1.1 General Wellbeing ................................................................. 9
           2.1.1.2 Wellbeing at work ............................................................... 10
           2.1.1.3 Strategic wellbeing ............................................................... 10
       2.1.2 Wellbeing management ................................................................. 11
           2.1.3 Strategic wellbeing management ................................................ 13
   2.2 MIDDLE MANAGER ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES ......................... 17
       2.2.1 Middle manager roles in strategic management ......................... 21
       2.2.2 Middle management tensions ....................................................... 23
   2.3 SUMMARY OF THEORY ......................................................................... 25

3 METHODOLOGY ............................................................................................... 28
   3.1 RESEARCH PHILOSOPHY ...................................................................... 28
   3.2 RESEARCH APPROACH ....................................................................... 29
   3.3 RESEARCH DESIGN ............................................................................. 29
   3.4 RESEARCH METHODS ......................................................................... 30
       3.4.1 Observation .................................................................................. 31
       3.4.2 Interviews ..................................................................................... 32
           3.4.2.1 Interview Sample ................................................................. 34
   3.5 DATA ANALYSIS .................................................................................. 35
   3.6 TRUSTWORTHINESS .......................................................................... 36

4 RESULTS AND ANALYSIS .............................................................................. 39
   4.1 CASE ORGANIZATION .......................................................................... 39
   4.2 OBSERVATION RESULTS ....................................................................... 41
       4.2.1 General observations ................................................................... 41
       4.2.2 Wellbeing workshop .................................................................... 43
   4.3 INTERVIEW RESULTS .......................................................................... 47
       4.3.1 Wellbeing .................................................................................... 47
       4.3.2 Strategic wellbeing management .................................................. 51
       4.3.3 Manager roles in wellbeing management ...................................... 53

5 DISCUSSION .................................................................................................... 58
   5.1 MANAGER’S PERCEPTIONS OF WELLBEING AND WELLBEING MANAGEMENT FROM A STRATEGIC PERSPECTIVE ........................................... 58
       5.1.1 Individualistic happiness oriented view ....................................... 59
       5.1.2 Socially oriented view ................................................................. 60
       5.1.3 Cultural view with focus on communication ............................... 61
   5.2 MIDDLE MANAGER’S EXPERIENCES OF THEIR ROLE IN STRATEGIC WELLBEING MANAGEMENT ........................................................................... 63
1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background

Organizational wellbeing and employee wellbeing are topics that have gained a lot more attention in recent times. According to the Human Capital Trends-research published by Deloitte in 2018, wellbeing is one of the biggest trends in a Finnish organizational context (Deloitte, 2018). Changes in the working environment and the society are the main antecedents to this trend and has led to Finnish organizations allocating more resources to wellbeing management. (Danna & Griffin, 1991, Aura et al. 2016)

With the work primarily being knowledge-based in western countries today, the employees have become one of the most valuable resources in the organization (O’Neil, 2017). This shift in the nature of work is setting new requirements on organizations to manage their employees and the working environment. Other societal changes, such as changes in demographics, higher pension ages and changes in overall health of the population also set more pressure on the society and organizations to maintain the working ability of the population (Loretto & Virkenstaff, 2013; Virkenstaff et al. 2008, O’Neil, 2017, Aura et al. 2016).

In the Finland the societal changes have driven the government to set higher requirements on organizations to consider the wellbeing of their employees. The goal is to increase overall wellbeing and avoid the negative consequences following the loss of working ability (Aura et al. 2016). Finnish organizations are expected to create more efficient processes in gathering information on employee wellbeing and offering support and guidance to external care.

Organizations themselves have also been realizing the possibilities of wellbeing management. Research suggests that wellbeing affects the productivity of the employees, thus making wellbeing management a tool to increase results and the competitive advantage of organizations. (e.g. Robertson & Cooper, 2011; Wright & Cropanzano, 2000; Investors in People, 2017, Schulte & Vainio, 2010) At the moment there is indications of a significant productivity gap on an organizational and societal level (Office for National Statistics, 2016). This gap originates from the difference between the current and optimal level of employee productivity. This gap could be closed through efficient wellbeing management, and would lead to significant savings
on an organizational level and up to billions in savings from a societal point of view (Aura et al. 2016).

A strategic approach, including clearly defined goals, sufficient resources and systematic monitoring is considered the most efficient way to manage wellbeing. The topic of strategic wellbeing management is a quite broadly researched field in Finland and is the direction organizations are pushed to move towards. Middle managers play an important role in the success of wellbeing management and they are often the ones who are expected to implement the strategy (Aura et al. 2016; O’Neil, 2017). Defined by their hierarchical position in the organization and their role of working with neither strategic nor routine tasks, they are often the ones who are expected to interpret strategy and implement it on lower levels of the organization (Kanter & Stein, 1979, McConville, 2006). The decentralization of responsibility is proven to be more efficient since middle managers are a link between the management and the employees and often have a better understanding of the wellbeing of their teams (O’Neil, 2017).

Wellbeing is broadly researched in many different disciplines, each having a slightly different approach to the topic. (Danna & Griffin, 1991) Similarly the understanding of wellbeing as a concept might also differ between different actors depending on the their experienced identity and surrounding context. (McConville, 2006) Many stakeholders are involved in wellbeing management, thus it is important to understand how they perceive wellbeing and how these perceptions might differ form each other. (Kowalski & Loretto, 2017). Thus far research has mainly been focusing on the perception of employees in organizations and little attention has been given to managers, who play a pivotal role in the wellbeing management. (Vakkayil et al. 2017)

In addition to their important role in wellbeing management, middle managers are in a unique position in the organization where they are expected to implement strategy that they often are not a part of creating (Holden & Roberts, 2004) Due to their hierarchical position in the organization and the expectations set on them both from the senior management, employees and other stakeholders, the managers often need to fulfill several roles simultaneously. The sometimes contradicting expectations and roles might cause challenges and tensions experienced by the middle managers, which can be emphasized by adding on new responsibilities, such as wellbeing management onto their existing tasks (McConville, 2006). Therefore, understanding the way middle
managers conceptualize wellbeing and experience their own role is very central information that needs to be considered when creating a successful wellbeing strategy.

This research aims to fill this gap in research by focusing on the way middle managers conceptualize wellbeing and how they understand their own role in strategic wellbeing management. Since context and identity influences the way in which organization and people create meaning, the research will be conducted as a qualitative case study in order to fully understand manager’s conceptualizations and their background.

1.2 Problem statement

Understanding the conceptualization of different stakeholders in wellbeing management is important in the process of creating a successful wellbeing strategy (Laine & Rinne, 2015). Previous research has mainly focused on the perceptions of individual employees and has given little attention to middle managers who are considered key players in the strategy implementation. (Kowalski & Loretto, 2017)

Analyzing the complex antecedents of middle managers perceptions will help with understanding managerial systems and practices better (Ambrosini & Browman 2003, Falkenberg & Gronhaug 1989, De mattos et al. 2001) Middle managers’ perceptions of wellbeing and their attitudes towards the wellbeing management can influence how effective the strategy is and to what extent it will actually influence wellbeing in the organization (Bowsen & Ostroff, 2004, Nishii et al. 2008). Thus, increasing the understanding will contribute to the knowledge needed for the creation of more efficient wellbeing strategies. (Kowalski & Loretto, 2017)

A gap in wellbeing research exists regarding different organization sizes. Wellbeing research has predominantly focused on studying large organizations and has often disregarded small and medium sized companies. The case organization is a Finnish branch of a global organization, which provides a unique setting for studying middle managers perceptions on wellbeing management. While the branch is governed by the global corporation and has access to resources of a larger organization the strategy creation and implementation is mainly done locally. Therefore, the case organization provides an interesting insight in how wellbeing strategy is created and implemented in both in a large and middle-sized organization.
1.3 Purpose of study

The study aims to research strategic wellbeing management from the perspective of middle managers. The research questions were formed on the basis of observation results and will further be explored through semi-structured interviews.

Research question 1: How do middle managers conceptualize wellbeing and wellbeing management from a strategic perspective?

Research question 2: How do middle managers experience their roles in strategic wellbeing management?

1.4 Limitations

The research is conducted as a case study of a Finnish branch organization of a global corporation and focuses on the perceptions and experiences of middle managers. This research is aiming to contribute to organizational research and will predominantly use management and organizational theory on the topic. Therefore, wellbeing research conducted by other disciplines will not be in the focus of this thesis.

Although wellbeing is globally an increasing trend, the trend is growing faster in Finland and the Nordics (Deloitte, 2018). The organizations are experiencing pressure but also interest in adopting a more strategic approach to wellbeing in the Nordic countries, why this research will mainly focus on strategic wellbeing in the Finnish context.

Finally, a lot of research exists of middle management positions and the experiences of middle manager roles. This research aims to understand middle managers perceptions of their role in strategic wellbeing management and will therefore not focus on general experiences of challenges or tensions experienced in the role.

1.5 Methods

The research is conducted as a qualitative case study, studying the perceptions of middle managers in a Finnish branch of a global energy corporation. An abductive research approach has been chosen in order to answer the research questions. The research is exploratory in nature and uses both observations and semi-structured interviews as data gathering methods. A thematic analysis is used to make sense of the gathered data.
1.6 Definitions

The key concepts used are defined in the thesis as follows;

*Wellbeing*: the state of physical, mental and social health, satisfaction and happiness of the individual or group. (WHO, 2017, Keyes et al. 2002)


*Strategic wellbeing*: the factors of wellbeing that directly or indirectly affect organizational performance (Aura et al. 2010)

*Strategic wellbeing management*: all of the processes and activities affecting strategic wellbeing (Aura et al. 2010)

*Middle manager*: Middle management is defined based on their hierarchical position in the organization, not being part of the senior management or shop floor. (Kanter & Stein, 1979, McConville, 2006)

*Role*: totality of expectations directed by others toward an individual within a social structure (Linton, 1936; Turner 1978, Katz & Kahn 1966)

1.7 Structure of the paper

The first chapter is dedicated to providing the reader with an introduction to the concept of wellbeing management as well as information on the purpose and scope of the research. The chapter also includes definitions of relevant concepts predominantly used in the thesis.

The second chapter presents the theoretical framework forming the basis for analysis. The theory focuses on wellbeing from an organizational perspective and relevant research discussion concerning wellbeing management and strategic wellbeing management in organizations. The theoretical chapter also includes previous research of the roles of middle managers, which is combined with the wellbeing research in the analysis to provide a comprehensive understanding of middle manager roles in the execution of wellbeing strategy.
The third chapter describes the methodology used in the research, from the underlying research philosophy, through the research approach to concrete research methods. The choice of the particular methods will be discussed and the two-step data collection method will be presented in detail.

The fourth chapter will present background information on the case organization as well as the findings of the data collection in two separate sections, each focusing on the specific distinctive data collection methods used. The latter section of the findings will focus on presenting the data segments corresponding with the themes present in the theoretical framework.

The fifth chapter is dedicated for the discussion of the results, answering the research questions presented in section 1. This chapter aims to explain and discuss the collected data by connecting it to the case specific context.

Finally, the sixth chapter concludes the findings of the thesis and contrasts the analysis with the initial research purpose. The theoretical and managerial implications are presented along with suggestions for further research.
2 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

In this chapter the underlying theoretical framework of the thesis will be presented. Two different sets of theories have been chosen in order to provide a deeper understanding of the case study. The first theory explained describes wellbeing and strategic wellbeing management and the other set of theory concerns the middle management and the experiences middle managers have in their role.

2.1 Wellbeing

Wellbeing is originally a research field branching out from health and safety research in the 1980’s (Danna & Griffin 1991). The interest towards wellbeing has grown quite a lot during the past decades, as vast changes in the nature of work made the topic more relevant. (e.g. Schulte & Vainio, 2010, Black, 2008)

During the 20th century, the nature of work in western countries shifted from manual labor to knowledge-based work, setting different requirements on the employee and the working environment. Health and safety research, originally focusing on the physical aspect of wellbeing, started to develop towards a more comprehensive understanding of the topic (Danna & Griffin, 1991). The wellbeing research was driven even further by the realization of a connection between productivity and wellbeing employees (Boyd, 1997).

Since the emergence of the new field of research, wellbeing has been the focus of several different disciplines, each having a slightly different approach to the topic (Kowalski, Loretto, 2017). Many of the disciplines focus on overall wellbeing of individuals, while management and organization research tends to focus on occupational or work related wellbeing. The management and organization research will mainly be used as the theoretical framework, since the focus of the thesis is in an organizational setting.

Within the management and organization discipline there are also several different approaches to wellbeing research. The research often focuses on factors affecting wellbeing, wellbeing in the workplace or the outcome of good or poor wellbeing in the organization (Danna & Griffin, 1991, Schulte & Vainio, 2010). Thus, wellbeing is considered a factor, an outcome or both as a factor and an outcome in research. The wellbeing as a factor approach interprets wellbeing as a factor that might influence
other outcomes e.g. health and productivity, while the wellbeing as an outcome approach views wellbeing as the ultimate goal that can be affected by other factors such as organizational culture, leadership, work tasks etc. The last approach is a mix of both the aforementioned views. When analyzing the approaches to wellbeing management the latter seems to be the most widely adopted, since most societal and organizational policies identify factors affecting wellbeing simultaneously as they identify the effect of wellbeing on personal and organizational outcomes. (Schulte et al. 2015)

Today it is widely accepted that employee wellbeing is beneficial for the employees themselves, the organization and the society as a whole. In the western countries where work has become very knowledge-based employee wellbeing can also be seen as a way to differentiate oneself and achieve competitive advantages (e.g. Luthans & Youssef, 2004, Barney & Wright, 2004). Through investing in wellness programs, many companies are trying to decrease costs and improve the productivity of their employees, ultimately leading to better company results. (e.g. Leino & Olsson, 2004, Katz et al. 2005, Harvey et al. 2006).

Though, the connection between employee wellbeing and results have been discovered, there still is room for improvement in the attitudes towards wellbeing and the management of wellbeing in organizations. While many organizations realize the importance of wellbeing it is often not made a top priority. This can be observed for example through the way wellbeing is often mentioned in connection to other concepts in the form “…and well-being” e.g. Health, safety and wellbeing, thus expressing the need to improve the attitudes towards the concept.

2.1.1 Wellbeing definitions

Wellbeing has been researched in several different disciplines, such as Psychology, Medicine, Engineering and Management and Organization research. (Danna & Griffin, 1991) The research is scattered over a multitude of disciplines and there is no coherent, generally approved perception of wellbeing, starting with the mere definition (OECD, 2015, Kowalski & Loretto, 2017)

Wellbeing is a very broad concept that is difficult to define. Many different factors constitute the basis of wellbeing and even more factors have been identified to affect
the attainment and preservation of it. Each discipline has differing perceptions of the concept, focusing on slightly different aspects.

2.1.1.1 General Wellbeing

Health is closely linked to wellbeing and the concepts are often mentioned in connection to each other. Health is considered by many to be a subcomponent of wellbeing. The definition of health has traditionally been seen as the absence of illness. Nowadays, this definition is considered way too broad and too focused on physical health. The most used definition for health today is the one by the World Health organization. They define it as a “State of complete physical, mental and social wellbeing and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity” (WHO, 1998). Although this definition is widely used, it has been criticized by some for implying that a large amount of the population would not be considered to have good health (Schulte et al. 2015). Due to increasing levels of diagnosis and the aging population many people are living with chronic illnesses that are treatable or manageable (Schulte et al. 2015). New suggestions have been made that account for these changes. One suggestion is the one by Knottnerus et al. (2011) who propose a more dynamic definition that Health is “Based on the resilience or capacity to cope and maintain one’s integrity, equilibrium and sense of well-being”.

Most commonly the definitions of health tend to address the physical, psychological and social aspects of a persons’ life (Grant, Christianson & Price, 2007). Wellbeing on the other hand is often seen as an even broader concept going beyond the symptomologic view also including measures of life experience, such as satisfaction and happiness. (e.g. Keyes et al. 2002) Wellbeing may also be seen as a broader concept concerning the scope, since it also includes the experience of groups. (WHO, 2017)

The definition for wellbeing used in this thesis will be based on the World Health Organization’s definition of health as well as the management and organization wellbeing theory, which suggests that wellbeing also includes experiences of happiness and satisfaction. Thus, the definition used in this thesis will be “The state of physical, mental and social health, satisfaction and happiness of the individual or group.”
2.1.1.2 Wellbeing at work

Management and organization research in wellbeing is largely based on the research of other fields, resulting in a dispersed view of wellbeing at work. As the name suggests organizational wellbeing research focuses on factors at work affecting and contributing to the wellbeing of employees and the overall wellbeing experienced in organizations (e.g. Danna & Griffin, 1991, Anttonen & Räsänen, 2009, Schulte & Vainio, 2010).

According to research many different factors affect the wellbeing at work and most of the research focus on specific antecedents of wellbeing, making it hard to define the general concept of wellbeing at work. While the general definition of wellbeing considers life experience as factor of wellbeing, the organizational research focuses on the work-related experience, including the job-satisfaction and job-attachment as factors that affect wellbeing at work. (e.g Schulte & Vainio, 2010, Anttonen & Räsänen, 2009)

According to the International Labor Organization (ILO, 2018) wellbeing at work relates to all aspects of working life, from the physical and social environment to the health and safety of the employee. Satisfaction and work engagement is also specifically mentioned in the description, supporting the view of general wellbeing. Thus, the definition of wellbeing at work in this thesis will be “The state of complete physical, mental and social health at work and the experience of job-satisfaction and attachment.”

2.1.1.3 Strategic wellbeing

Strategic wellbeing can be considered a subcategory of wellbeing and wellbeing at work. Aura et al. (2010) defines the strategic wellbeing as the factors of wellbeing that directly or indirectly affect organizational performance. Although this definition is quite simple the concept of strategic wellbeing is much more complex. A multitude of management and organization theories exist focusing on different parts of wellbeing, which might affect individual and organizational outcomes.

As strategic wellbeing is connected to the results of the organization, strategic wellbeing management can be defined as all of the processes and activities affecting strategic wellbeing. Especially important activities are strategic management and human
resource management, line management and occupational health care. (Aura et al. 2016)

2.1.2 Wellbeing management

Along with the shift towards more knowledge-based work, the employees have become a more crucial resource in organizations for achieving competitive advantage (Wagner & Hollenbeck, 2015). Roslender et al. (2006b) argue that employees in addition to their expertise, experience and skills also bring their health and fitness into the organization. Healthy and wellbeing employees are better able to contribute, ultimately affecting the overall success of the organization. Although there is some contradictory research concerning the correlation of employee wellbeing and productivity, there is overwhelming evidence of the fact that employer outcomes, such as productivity, performance and retention may be predicted by employee wellbeing (e.g. Aura et al, 2016; Baicker et al. 2010; Bakker & Demerouti, 2007; Baptiste, 2008; Jain et al. 2009; Sears et al. 2013)

Management and organization research mainly focuses on work-related factors affecting the wellbeing of the employees. According to the research of Maziana et al. (2014) employee wellbeing is greatly affected by the physical and psychosocial environment at work. Of these factors work stress has been identified as one of the main threats to employee wellbeing at the workplace and plethora of research exists on this subject alone. According to Paolli and Merllié (2000) around 50 - 60% of workday loss can be traced back to occupational stress and a report by Terveystalo, one of the largest occupational health care providers in Finland, show that mental health problems, such as anxiety, depression and insomnia accounted for the majority of workday losses in Finland in 2017 (Terveystalo, 2018).

The job-demand resources model suggests that the demands of the job need to match with the resources of the employee, in order for him/her to be able to experience wellbeing. Providing the employees with sufficient resources will increase their motivation and commitment to the organization, while high job-demands drain the physical and mental resources of the employees ultimately leading to physical or psychological problems. (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007) Common work stressors tend to be work overload, emotional and mental demands, work-home interference, role ambiguity, role conflict, role stress, stressful events and time pressure (Olivares-Faúndez et al. 2014). Dybre et al. (2006) suggest that personal life events, such as
divorce, illness, death of close family members, marriage and adoption also affect the working ability, emphasizing the need to also consider the private lives of employees in organizational wellbeing management.

On the other end of the dualistic approach organizational wellbeing theory is the research focusing on the positive aspects of wellbeing. According to Dagenas-Desmarais and Savoie (2012) the subjective positive experience of an individual at work consists of five eudaemonic dimensions: interpersonal fit at work, thriving at work, feeling competency at work, perceived recognition at work and desire for involvement at work.

Controlling the negative aspects which decrease the work ability of employees and increasing the positive experience at work, contributes to the overall wellbeing of the employees and is the fundamental reasoning behind the management of wellbeing. Many organizations today are creating wellness programs to increase the wellbeing and productivity of their employees in order to cut costs and generate higher profit.

One of the main challenges of wellbeing management is the sometimes unclear relationship between wellbeing and performance (Hiltrop, 1996a, 1996b) Employee wellbeing has been proven to affect the individual outcomes such as better performance and higher levels of creativity and job satisfaction (Judge et al. 2001; Lyobomirsky et al. 2015) as well as organizational outcomes like efficiency and performance (Van Veldhoven & Peccei, 2015; Van de Voorde et al, 2012). Some practices that successfully enhance productivity may however affect wellbeing negatively (Taris & Schaufeli, 2015) as well as some practices aimed to increase employee wellbeing might have minimal or even negative effects on productivity (Vakkayil et al. 2015). Therefore, organizations should try to invest in wellbeing processes, which increase the strategic wellbeing, i.e. the factors which are closely linked to organizational performance.

According to Dagenais-Desmarais and Savoie (2015) interventions concerning job-design, such as reinforcement of relationships at work, recognition of individuals and team contributions, challenging performance objectives and development of employee competence, will more likely create better and more sustainable wellbeing in the organization. Efforts to increase the happiness of employees and programs aimed to boost positive emotions are far less effective. Additionally it is worth mentioning that some programs might increase some aspects of wellbeing while decreasing wellbeing in
others e.g. programs focusing on external rewards, such as salary increases, bonuses and workplace environment, might work as an incentive system while becoming extrinsic motivators. (Dagenais-Desmarais & Savoie, 2015)

With all research pointing towards the connection between wellbeing and productivity, one could assume that organizations would choose to have wellbeing as a central focus area. However, wellbeing is often not considered to be a priority in companies and is often excluded from the overall strategy. In the current economic environment, characterized by increased competition, employees are in expected to do more with less, increasing the need for quality wellbeing management (Evenstad, 2015)

The reasons why companies do not invest in the wellbeing of their employees are many e.g. the lack of research regarding quality wellbeing interventions (Briner & Walshe, 2015) Another considerable challenge in wellbeing management is the lack of reliable measures and limited cost-benefit analyses (Joyce et al. 2010, Kowalski & Loretto, 2017). Savings in occupational health care costs and decreases in workday losses are the easiest measure for wellbeing in an organization, while the financial effect of employee productivity is more difficult to disclose. As a result of this it is quite challenging to calculate the value of wellbeing investments.

Nevertheless, increasing emphasis is put on wellbeing management both on an organizational and societal level. Depending on the cultural context the pressures to invest in wellbeing programs is coming either from the organization itself trying to increase the competitive advantage or the government pushing companies to participate in cutting societal costs through wellbeing management.

2.1.3 Strategic wellbeing management

Communication deficiencies within the organizations and between different actors result in a reactive approach to wellbeing management in the Finnish society and companies. The main source of information used in wellbeing management is sick leave days, leading to companies losing money even before problems are identified. This realization has led to a shift towards a more pro-active approach. The pro-activity requires companies to have tighter cooperation with other actors, such as the Occupational Health Care and the Pension Insurance and requires companies with over 30 employees to create a Model of Early support. The model pushes organizations to
create a more strategic approach to wellbeing, requiring them to set goals, gather more information about the actual state of wellbeing in the organization and act upon any problems discovered. (HE, 2010)

The development of strategic wellbeing management in Finland has been followed since 2009 using a Strategic wellbeing management index (SWMI). The reports make a distinction between wellbeing and strategic wellbeing.

The SWM index and the yearly reports are based on a model of Strategic wellbeing management created by a consultancy company called Excenta Oy. (Figure 1) The model identifies the different steps of the Strategic wellbeing management process, starting with the strategic background, management factors ending with the outcomes. The model considers wellbeing as both a factor and an outcome, since it suggests that wellbeing in the organization may be affected by a wellbeing strategy and that the increase in wellbeing will affect individual and organizational outcomes.

Figure 1 Model for strategic wellbeing management (Aura et al. 2016)

The strategic background refers to the goals of the strategic wellbeing management plan. Strategic wellbeing management can be divided into two different approaches depending on the motives and goals of the strategy. These two approaches are a cost saving approach and a productivity based approach. In Finland companies have
traditionally been focusing on the cost saving approach, which focuses on cutting down costs such as sick leaves and early retirement. The emphasis in this type of strategy is on work ability, sick leaves and healthy life style. The cost saving approach is aims to control the negative effects of the physical and psychosocial work environment e.g. through reducing job stressors such as work overload, emotional & mental demands, role conflicts, stressful events and time pressure.

During 2015 the cost saving approach had a national cost saving potential of € 1,8 billion according to a study made by the Confederation of Finnish Industries, The Central Organization of Finnish Trade Unions, Finnish Institute of Occupational Health and Pension Insurance companies’ reports of costs of unfinished work. (Aura et al. 2016) Baicker et al. (2010) argue that there is a potential for significant cost savings on an organizational level as well. Their study, conducted in the USA, reveals that organizations were through wellbeing programs able to save up to 3,27 dollars for every dollar spent. Out of these savings 2, 73 dollars could be traced back to the decrease of workday losses.

The productivity based approach on the other hand focuses on improving the productivity of the employees e.g. through improvements in the organization of work and skills of the employees. The emphasis in this strategy is on leadership, management and elements of competence. Concrete efforts to improve employee productivity are e.g. training, increased involvement, receiving feedback and recognition, increased flexibility and autonomy. The growth potential of Finnish organizations in regards to the productivity based approach is € 9 billion. This amount is seven times the amount of the savings organizations can make through the cost savings approach. (Aura et al. 2016)

According to the research an effective strategic base to wellbeing management requires that wellbeing is incorporated in the overall business strategy of the organization. Hence the importance of wellbeing needs to be understood and addressed by top tier managers who are willing to integrate the concept to the overall operations of the organization. An effective wellbeing strategy needs to be in line with the organizations vision and missions, supporting its long-term aspirations. The goals, the actors and the measures of the strategy need to be clearly defined. Sufficient resources need to be granted in order for the strategy to be successful. Therefore decision-makers need to
ensure that the execution of the strategy is supported by sufficient knowledge, time, trainings and financial resources. (Aura et. al. 2016)

The management, HR and middle managers and external actors such as the occupational health and the pension insurance are of key importance in the realization of the strategy. The roles and responsibilities of these actors as well as the terms of their co-operations should be clearly defined. In Finnish companies the CEO and HR actors tend to have the biggest responsibilities in the creation and management of the wellbeing strategy. However, increasingly more responsibility is given to middle managers regarding the operational execution of the strategy. (Aura et al, 2015)

The strategy should also involve clear measures, which can be used to evaluate the success of the strategy. Concrete numeric measures are recommended for a clear an objective evaluation of the progress. For example sick leaves and annual employee surveys with numeric values are suggested as tools. Different concrete measures allow the organization to monitor the increase in wellbeing and productivity, as well as calculate actual benefits of the strategy on an individual and corporate level. Based on the results the organization is also able to develop the strategy and focus on continuous improvement (Aura et al, 2016)

In Finland most organizations report having a weak strategic base to their wellbeing management. The report by Aura et al. (2016) shows that organizations with a strong strategic foundation manage to produce significantly better results spending the same amount of financial resources as organizations without a strategic approach. The lack of objective measures and reporting is also a major downfall in many Finnish organizations. Nevertheless, the definition of roles and the co-operation with external actors is on a quite high level.

In Finland middle managers are in many cases handed a significant role in the actualization of the well-being strategy (Aura et. al. 2016). The decentralization of the operational responsibility can be seen as both a strength and a weakness. Middle managers are often working close with their subordinates providing them with a great opportunity to monitor and manage the wellbeing of their team (O’Neil, 2017). Simultaneously organizations might fail to provide the managers with sufficient recourses and support in their wellbeing management tasks, resulting in unsuccessful outcomes
2.2 Middle manager roles and responsibilities

According to Vakkayil et al. (2016) middle managers play a pivotal role in the execution of wellbeing strategy and their attitudes have important strategic implications that may affect the whole organization. Understanding the views and attitudes of managers towards their role in wellbeing management is important in order to comprehend how wellbeing strategy is actually being operationalized in organizations.

The existence of middle management is a characteristic of larger organizations and the term implies a hierarchical chain of authority ranging from senior managers, through middle managers to individual workers (Morgan, 1986). Senior management focuses on the formulation of strategy and missions, while the individual workers focus on the daily activities of the organization, traditionally working on the shop floor. Defining the middle management is more difficult, since boundaries between different hierarchical levels might be rather unclear. Middle managers are above the shop floor in the hierarchy, being responsible over some outcomes exceeding specific daily work elements (McConville, 2006). Characteristics of positions in middle management are, the position in the hierarchy (Kanter & Stein, 1979) and having a more coordinating role yet lacking autonomy (Della-Rocca, 1992). In conclusion middle managers are neither working with strategic nor routine tasks (Livian, 1997).

A role can be defined as the totality of expectations directed by others toward an individual within a social structure (Linton, 1936; Turner 1978, Katz & Kahn 1966). The expectations may be formally written down (Biddle, 1979, 1986) or they can be norms, descriptive beliefs or priorities expected from individuals. (Floyd & Lane, 2000) The expectations set on middle managers impact how the middle managers perceive their own role in the organization and ultimately influence their actions and behavior. (Eisenstadt, 1965, Graen 1976) Each position within an organization has a set of different expectations affecting the perceived roles of the employee. The experienced roles differ in the organization based on different factors such as hierarchical level, functional area, business unit and department (Mintzberg, 1973).

The type of work middle managers conduct can broadly be divided into three different areas, the first one being administrative work, which refers to routine activities of collecting and distributing information. The second area is technical work, which concerns tasks related to the original profession or trade. Managerial work is identified...
as the third area, relating to the persuasion of others to create consensus in the organization. (Torrington & Wrightman, 1987). In their role middle managers are often expected to drive change in the organization, simultaneously as they are seen as the targets of change (McConville, 2006).

The position in the middle of the hierarchical chain creates many challenges. According to research managers often experience tensions deriving from the lack of autonomy and resources. These tensions stemming from the position are only emphasized by the devolvement of HRM responsibilities, such as recruiting and appraisals (McConville, 2006). These findings suggest that it is possible that the shift of wellbeing responsibilities onto middle managers might also emphasize the tensions felt in the position.

As drivers of change, managers often have the responsibility to implement change in the organization and meet targets, while catering to the needs and requirements set by the senior management and other governing bodies. The hierarchical position of middle managers often constrict them from influencing decision-making processes, yet they are held accountable for the outcome of the imposed practices. The middle managers work as mediators representing both their teams and the senior management depending on the situation. (McConville, 2006) This role entails a heavy workload and often contributes to conflicts both on a personal and professional level. These conflicts stemming from the managers efforts to cater to everyone's needs, often lead to managers having to do more with less. (McConville, 2006).

Representing both the team and the senior management, middle managers are in a position where they possess complex and often contradictory roles, leading to the experience of role ambiguity, role strain and role conflict. For example middle managers are in a position where they are expected to implement strategy and policies whether they agree with them or not, creating dissonance between the personal and organizational values. (McConville, 2006)

The model created by McConville (figure 2), describes the tensions experienced by the middle managers, influenced by the different values and powers deriving from the organization and the individual.

The top half of the diagram visualizes how the operations and policies of an organization are constrained by two sets of variables. One being cultural and historical
factors and ideology and the other being economic, political and technological factors. The cultural and historical factors are specifically related to the products or services of the organization as well as the balance between client and employee needs.

These variables are affected by economic, political and technological environment, which create the power base of organizational control systems, referred to as cogency in the model. The cogency stems from structural legitimacy and control over rewards and resources. The cogency and organizational values are the source of the organizational culture, structure, objectives & expectations.

The bottom half of the diagram describes how individual attitudes, behavior and expectations are formed by the individual values and individual power. The individual power, called potency stems from personal knowledge, skills and overall worth to the organization, as well as labor market factors. Concretely this power can be described as the ability to make demands and convince seniors. The individual values are again affected by the cultural norms, experience and socialization. The two underlying value sets are together creating the social mechanism that ultimately affects the individual attitudes, behavior and expectations of employees.

The middle of the diagram illustrates the hierarchical chain, through which directives are communicated from the top down and depending on the balance of power, the ideas, reactions and demands of the employees are communicated from the bottom up. Differing views and expectations between the organization and its employee might lead to conflicts. In organizations the middle management is functioning as the mediating mechanism, holding the two opposing expectations in tension.
Figure 2  Tensions experienced by middle managers (McConville, 2006)
2.2.1 Middle manager roles in strategic management

Middle managers are playing a crucial part in the management of strategic change. Middle managers are often responsible of the implementation of strategy that is directed from the senior management. While implementing the strategies managers often need to work as mediators between different interest groups and cater to the needs of several stakeholders. (Floyd & Wooldridge, 2000)

Traditionally strategy has been seen as a two-step process, consisting of formulation and implementation of strategy. From the traditional point of view the senior management has been considered being responsible over the formulation of strategy, while the middle management has been in charge of the implementation. Today the strategy formulation and implementation is perceived more as an iterative process and a clear division between formulation and implementation is no longer considered to describe the reality. (O'Shannassy, 2003) Theory suggests that strategic planning has shifted from a strictly top-down process, where the senior management decides the strategic objectives, to a more involving process where middle managers have the chance to influence the strategic direction. (Brodwin, 1984) The increased involvement of middle managers in the strategy creation process has led to the managers being dealt several roles in the creation and implementation of strategy. Kuyvenhoven and Buss (2011) recognize three different views on middle manager roles, which are (1) Middle managers as implementers of top-management, defined strategy (2) Middle managers as relationship managers in strategic change management (3) Middle managers as key strategic actors.

The Middle managers as implementers of top-management strategy describes the more traditional understanding of the role of middle management. In this view the manager is responsible over the implementation of the strategy dictated by the senior management. This role entails a few challenges experienced by the middle managers e.g. unclear communication of expectations and responsibilities, lack of support from the upper-management and inability of effective change management. (Hrebiak, 2008)

The second view, middle managers as relationship managers in strategic change management refers to the middle managers role as “linking pins” between the senior management and the bottom levels of the organization. The managers are able to contribute to the strategy through the way they think and act. The middle managers
coordinate strategy through negotiating, mediating and interpreting connections between the different levels in the organization. (Floyd & Woolridge, 1992)

The third view, middle managers as strategic actors is related to the perception of strategy as practice. In this view all strategy is not considered something the organization has, but rather something the members of the organization are doing. (Johnson et al., 2003) This view suggests that middle managers act both as the targets and advocates of change and are in a central role of strategy implementation through their interpretation of the strategy and sense-making process. (Balogun, 2003) Mantere (2008) also suggests that middle managers have an important responsibility in influencing the strategy formulation. The middle managers are expected to gather relevant information and provide the senior management with sufficient knowledge for strategic decision-making. The middle managers are also expected to communicate ideas for strategic innovations.

Floyd and Wooldridge (1992) divide the middle manager roles into four categories, which reflect the view of a two-way strategy creation process i.e. upward and downward. These identified roles are (1) implementing (2) facilitating (3) synthesizing and (4) championing. This categorization is considered to entail most of the role expectations in strategy creation and implementation placed on middle managers by their superiors.

Implementing and facilitating are the two expectations that are considered to be top-down in nature. The managers are expected to interpret the strategy and communicate it to their team members and seek conformance to organizational objectives and guidelines set by the senior management. (Floyd & Lane, 2000) Facilitating on the other hand refers to expectations of the manager to develop the strategy and adapt it to the changing environment (Floyd & Wooldridge, 1992).

Synthesizing and Championing are considered bottom-up in nature. Managers are expected to synthesize information through gathering new information and keeping the senior management informed. Championing refers to the managerial expectation of promoting ideas to the senior management that might possibly change the content of the current strategy. (Floyd & Lane, 2000)
2.2.2 Middle management tensions

Being excluded from strategy work is one of the main dissatisfactions and challenges experienced by middle managers. The strategy is in many cases formulated by the senior management and the passed on to the middle managers, who need to operationalize it regardless if they agree with it or not. Being excluded from strategy formulation, middle managers often end up being accountable for outcomes they have no authority to influence (Renwick, 2003).

Not being able to influence the strategy can lead to several difficulties affecting the success of the implementation. In many cases there are differences between the strategic vision and the reality (Vakkayil, et al. 2016). This disparity often stems from the strategy failing to sufficiently consider the context and external factors. The strategy might not for example consider requirements set buy other governing bodies, like the government or watchdog organizations. For example the organizational strategy might require managers to decrease costs while some other external organization is demanding increases in quality. The manager is expected to produce more with less, increasing the pressure and role strain in felt in the position. (Holden & Roberts, 2004)

The differing values and interpretations of the organization and the manager further contribute to the gap between intended and implemented strategy. The manager is expected to interpret the strategy and policies delivered from the management and convert them to operations, possibly leading to differences in expectations and reality. The differences between the values held by the organization and the middle manager, contribute to the differing outcome and is a source of tension experienced by the manager. (Holden, 2000)

In situations where the values of the organization and the manager are conflicting, the middle managers sometimes are forced to work as change agents for change they do not fully understand or support (Holden & Roberts, 2006). In these situations managers are forced to sell ideas to their teams that they might not personally believe in or might even be disadvantageous for the team. For example cost savings and organizational restructurings might require managers to add to their team member’s heavy workloads.

The tensions experienced by managers could be decreased to some extent by increasing autonomy. While middle managers are open to the idea of more autonomy and decision-making power, they are reluctant to take on responsibility for any factors
beyond their control, leaving to a sometimes paradoxical situation of desiring more power without increased responsibility (Holden & Roberts, 2004) The senior management often see the devolution of responsibility as a way to empower the middle managers. In reality, however, they are often devolving the accountability without the necessary authority, contributing to the feeling of powerlessness. (Holden, 2000)

The second source to major tension experienced by middle management derives from the differences in organizational power and individual power. Middle managers often feel powerless and a lack of freedom to act, originating from fiscal and procedural constraints. Organizational restructuring and frugality limits the resources of managers, leading to experiences of heavy workloads, pressure to perform and inability exert any real influence in the organization. Procedures are tightly managed by performance indicators and financial targets, ultimately leading to understaffing and over-stretch. (McConville, 2006) Due to understaffing managers are forced to act as part of the team, having to prioritize other tasks over their managerial responsibilities (Holden, 2000). The need to balance between managerial expectations and the needs of employees and customers, often leave managers feeling like they are stuck in the middle. In their complex roles managers are expected to deal both with strategy and people, but the constraints and lack of resources often force prioritizing one over the other, increasing the role ambiguity experienced by the managers. (McConville, 2006) Since the expectations impose quite many difficulties in practice, managers are often unable or unwilling carry out this double role (Vakkayil et al. 2016). As suggested by research, the devolution of HRM responsibilities often emphasizes the frustrations of managers, which is exemplified by managers sometimes feeling like HR responsibilities are forced and “dumped” upon them. (Holden, 2000; McConville, 2006)

The role of the middle manager is dependent on the organizational history, culture, ownership, structure, sector and size. (Holden, 2000) In the Nordic context the managers are expected to contribute to the management of employee wellbeing and the pressure to do so is coming from the government, the surrounding culture and the organizations themselves. (Aura et al. 2016) The new role of managing wellbeing will presumably add to the existing workload and might contradict with other roles, adding to the feeling of pressure and tension (Vakkayil et al. 2016) The lack of clear definition adds to the uncertainty of conception further increasing the ambiguity related to the role. (Holden & Roberts, 2004) Inconsistent views on wellbeing in the organization
may lead to emphasizing certain dimensions over others, risking the implementation of practices which increase wellbeing on one dimension while decreasing wellbeing on another (Vakkayil et al. 2016).

In order to support managers in their role as executors of wellbeing strategy the senior management should focus on diminishing the tensions and pressure felt by the middle managers by minimizing experienced role ambiguity and providing them with proper resources to manage their tasks. In addition to a manageable workload the managers need training and continuous support from the HR department. In order to minimize the role contradictions the wellbeing targets should be part of the overall strategy of the organization, creating as little conflict between goals as possible.

2.3 Summary of theory

As presented in the above theory managers play an important role in operationalization of strategy and are essential for the success of strategic wellbeing management. (Aura et al. 2016; Vakkayil et al. 2016). In order to create successful strategies and support the successful realization of the strategy it is important to understand how the managers view wellbeing and wellbeing management. Thus far little research has touched upon this subject, since the majority of the studies tend to focus on the perceptions of the employees or senior management.

According to research middle management is experiencing pressure and tensions inherent to the position (McConville, 2006). A successful wellbeing strategy should consider the context and external factors. Therefore it is extremely important to understand and consider middle managers in the creation of strategy. The managers are already balancing with several roles in their position and devolving wellbeing responsibilities to them might emphasize the tension.

To support a successful strategy and counteract the tensions experienced in the middle management both Aura et al. (2016) and McConville (2006) suggest that the roles should be clearly defined, in order for the managers to understand what is expected of them. The managers should clearly understand what the goals of the strategy is and what they are personally expected to do in order to achieve these goals. It should be ensured that the managers and the organization have the same understanding of the strategy in order to minimize the gap between the strategic vision and reality (Holden, Roberts, 2006). For the managers balancing with many responsibilities it would also be good to know how the roles relate to each other, which are the roles and responsibilities
that are prioritized in the organization. Having to interpret strategy and prioritize themselves, will increase the feeling of uncertainty and will ultimately increase the experienced tension in the role.

Once the strategic goals along with the roles are defined, the managers need to be handed sufficient resources to meet their expectations. The adequate allocation of resources will lead to more successful strategic implementation as well as less tensions experiences by the managers (Aura et al. 2016; McConville 2006).

To support the successful creation and implementation of strategy it should take the context and external factors into consideration (Aura et al. 2016). In their role managers feel contradicting expectations and find it difficult to meet company objectives while complying with external requirements (Holden & Roberts, 2004) Therefore the strategy should take into consideration the requirements set by external organizations, customers and employees. As McConville (2006) suggests the managers should be part of the creation of the strategy. Not only would this be motivation for the manager to be able to make a difference, but it would also result in a more realistic strategy that would be easier to implement for the managers.

**Figure 3** Summary of strategy creation and expectations of middle managers

Understanding how managers perceive wellbeing and wellbeing management will also help in the creation of a successful strategy. Wellbeing is quite an ambiguous and comprehensive term, which can be interpreted in many different ways. Thus far, wellbeing management theory assumes that everyone in the organization share the
same perception on wellbeing, which might not at all be the case. Implementing a strategic approach to wellbeing management is in many ways affected of how the key players in the implementation view the concept. The way in which wellbeing is understood as a factors or outcome or e.g. synonymous to health, affects the approach managers take in their own wellbeing management. Increasing this understanding will lead to better wellbeing management on an organizational level.
3 METHODOLOGY

The research philosophy and methodology of the research will be presented in this chapter. After introducing the underlying philosophy of management research, I will proceed by describing the research methods used in this study. Based on existing research I will argue for the choice of my methods as well present the limitations of them.

3.1 Research Philosophy

Research philosophy describes how the researcher views knowledge and the creation and attainment of it. This underlying philosophy guides the researcher in their research strategy and choice of methods. (Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill 2009; Saunders & Lewis 2012) The ontological approach concerns finding out “what is”, while the epistemological approach is more concerned with answering what constitutes acceptable knowledge (Bryman & Bell 2011, Saunders et al. 2007). This research will mainly focus on manager’s perceptions from an ontological perspective. However, argumentation for the implications of the knowledge created will be made from an epistemological perspective.

The ontological approach can be separated further into objectivism and subjectivism. This division allows the researcher to interpret phenomena as freestanding entities not affected by the social actors, or entities affected by the interpretations and actions of social actors. (Saunders et al. 2007) Management research cannot be separated from the social context, which is why the subjective approach is often applied. The social context of management research in general, and the social setting of the research question are the main reasons why a subjective approach will be applied.

Disregarding the social context and subjectivity of the researcher in the creation of knowledge is impossible. Thus, it is also beneficial to apply the epistemological approach to some arguments in order to improve argumentation in the research. The interpretative approach within epistemology argues that organizations and people are complex and unique, requiring a different way of describing the reality (Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill 2007). This view is most fitting to this research since the research question concerns the perception of people, and the data is analyzed within social contexts. Therefore, I will be applying a epistemological interpretative approach to the arguments linked to the creation of knowledge.

Although interpretative approach allows analysis of knowledge creation in complex social settings, it often makes the data less generalizable. (Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill 2009) However, since this research is more focused on finding new information about
the researched phenomena and is not focused on finding generalizable and quantifiable data, this approach is justified.

### 3.2 Research Approach

The research approach is determined by the purpose and the way the research connects to existing theory. An abductive approach, which is considered to be a mix of the inductive and deductive approaches, will be used in this theory. The deductive approach assumes that research is made to test a previously formed theory, and is often used in scientific research. Contrarily the inductive approach focuses on forming the theory based on research, and is commonly used in social sciences. (Saunders et al. 2007)

Theory will be used for a pre-understanding of the concepts researched in the thesis. This pre-understanding will guide observations and interviews. However, the aim of the thesis is interpret managerial perceptions. The research process will be iterative, meaning that the course of the study and the theory applied will be affected by each other.

By gaining a pre-understanding of the themes of the thesis before gathering data. The data gathering will be more focused, enabling a more in-depth research. By allowing the gathered data to affect the theory applied in the analysis, the research maintains its flexibility. The ambiguity of the final research questions during data gathering will result in a less biased research, improving the overall credibility of the created theory.

### 3.3 Research Design

This research is a qualitative single case study, focusing on the Finnish branch of an international organization operating in the energy industry. This specific organization was chosen for this study as the result of information oriented sampling and the research is conducted by a practitioner-researcher.

The underlying research philosophy guides the strategy and the methods chosen in this thesis. According to the ontological subjective philosophy and the abductive research approach chosen for this study a qualitative approach would be the most expedient. The complexity of the social nature of perceptions, and the exploratory nature of the study can better be grasped through qualitative methods.

The case study was chosen based on the research approach aiming for an in-depth understanding through an iterative process between research and theory and supports
the exploratory nature of the thesis. Case studies offer an excellent option for gaining a rich understanding of context and generally support answering questions that are qualitative in nature (Morris & Wood. 1991, Saunders et al. 2007)

The branch organization was chosen based on the pre-set knowledge of the organization and the interesting research topics offered by the organization. Researching the organization from within offers an opportunity for understanding the complexities of the organization and the context of the research. By understanding the context and having established familiarity and trust with the employees of the organization, a deeper analysis of the research topic is possible. Nevertheless, there are disadvantages to the pre-established familiarity. Having a predetermined notion of the organization and context may influence the data collection and analysis. The consciousness of subjectivity and the correction of biases along the process will be used to counteract the effects of the disadvantage. (Saunders et al. 2007)

Based on the available resources the time frame of the study will be more focused, meaning that the research will be cross-sectional rather than longitudinal. The ontological subjective philosophy applied in this thesis suggests that everything is created and affected by the social context. The social context changes over time and since the factor of time is not considered in the research question it is arguable that a cross-sectional study is the most fitting. (Saunders et al. 2007)

### 3.4 Research Methods

Research methods concern the methods used to gather data. The research philosophy and design guide which methods to use. The consistency of the strategy and data gathering methods is paramount regarding the outcome of the research (Saunders et al. 2007). This study will be a multi-method qualitative study since two different qualitative data gathering methods will be used. These data-gathering methods are aligned with the abductive research approach and the triangulation will improve the validity of the research.

The abductive research design, combining a deductive and inductive approach can be seen in the way the research is set up. First observations will be used to identify themes of interest; observations will continuously be made, analyzed and compared to existing theory in order to form a relevant research question. The observations made in the organization are also supported by material available e.g. information of and results of a global wellbeing survey conducted in 2015 will be used to get an overview of the
wellbeing management in the organization. Once the research question is defined interviews will be conducted in order to gather more data on the specific topic. This data will ultimately analyzed and compared to relevant theory.

### 3.4.1 Observation

Participant-observation is used as data gathering method in this research. Participant-observation implies that the researcher is completely immersed in the research setting (Saunders et al. 2007). This type of observation method is chosen since the research is conducted by a practitioner-researcher who by definition already is part of the research setting.

Observations are used to identify topics of interest and patterns related to the research theme. The observations are meant to guide the research to become narrower and more focused, enabling a more comprehensive analysis of the research question.

A complete participant role is used for the observations. A complete participant partakes in the activities of the organization while making observations. The researcher does not reveal the research purpose to the group members. While complete participation allows the researcher to make observations of the authentic context, not disclosing the purpose may be seen as an ethical question. (Saunders et al. 2007)
The observations in this research are not used as a primary source of data, but merely as a way of understanding the context and defining a purposeful research question. The objects of observation were the operations and general attitudes present in the organization, therefore the ethical debate of the method in this case can be seen as quite minimal.

Descriptive observations mainly recorded as secondary data. Meaning that observations of the physical setting, events, and key actors are observed and statements of these observations are gathered as data for the research (Saunders et al. 2007) Secondary data is based on the observer’s interpretations (Saunders et al. 2007), therefore the observation data cannot be considered completely objective. Nonetheless, the observations are solely used to gain knowledge about the context and help to guide the research to interesting topics and therefore cannot be considered an issue severely affecting the validity of the research. Throughout the data collection, attention is given to the subjectivity of the researcher and efforts to correct any biases are made. In addition, some primary observations are also made during an event directly linked to strategic well-being management in the organization.

The data from observations consisted of secondary observational data gathered in the fall of 2017. General observations about the organizational context and wellbeing management were made throughout the fall, with the purpose of identifying interesting research topics.

The main event of observation was a wellbeing workshop for managers held 11.10.2017, which lasted from 10 am to 5 pm. In order not to forget valuable data notes were taken during the time of the event.

3.4.2 Interviews

Interviews are one of the most commonly used data gathering methods in qualitative research, and are an effective way of researching complex and socially constructed phenomena. (Saunders et al. 2007). This research will mainly be focusing on interview data in the creation of new theory, since other methods lack the same ability to describe the complexity.

Three different interview formats are used in qualitative research; Structured, Semi-structured and unstructured interviews (Saunders et al. 2007) In this research one-on-one semi-structured interviews are used. Semi-structured interviews are based on pre-
set themes and questions, which might vary depending on the context and person, interviewed. Semi-structured interviews allow changes in the question order and leave room for follow up questions in order for the discussion to progress naturally. (Saunders et al. 2009)

The abductive research approach and the exploratory nature of the research supports semi-structured interviews as the form of data gathering. Semi-structured interviews guide the discussion into the wanted questions, while allowing the respondents to express themselves freely. The semi-structured enable more relaxed conversations that flow naturally, also leaving room for exploring new topics that might not have been on the original agenda. The abductive research approach supports this type of data gathering, since it offers an opportunity for the research to develop in new directions.

The interview request was sent to all of the managers by email, where the purpose of the interview was explained. It was also mentioned that the interviews are confidential and anonymous and no data presented in the thesis can be connected to a specific interviewee.

The interviews were conducted mainly as face-to-face discussions between the researcher and the respondent. In two cases the interviews were held through skype, due to scheduling difficulties. With the permission of the respondent the interviews were recorded in order to facilitate the process of data gathering and the accuracy of the data used in the analysis. The recordings were be transcribed and the transcriptions were used for the interview analysis.

An interview guide (Annex 1) was used in the interviews in order to get comparable results. The interview guide was structured based on three themes; wellbeing, strategic wellbeing and the managerial role in wellbeing management and was designed to last about an hour. These themes were chosen based on the previous observations and the theoretical framework. Each theme had two to four questions that were asked each interviewee. Based on a constructionist interviewing approach the interview was designed to support personal interaction and the interview was held in a more dialogical style. This dialogical style was gained by asking follow-up questions related to the research topic.

In the beginning of each interview the interviewees were reminded of the confidentiality and anonymity of the interview and permission for recording was asked.
The managers were also informed about the way in which the data will be handled after the interviews.

Before getting into the research-based questions, general questions about the interviewee and their career background were asked in order to ease into the interview and get the interviewee to relax. These background questions also offered valuable information about the surrounding context and facilitated asking follow-up questions further on.

The interviews were conducted in English, Finnish or Swedish depending on the preference of the interviewee. Interviewing the managers in their native or preferred language allowed them to express themselves more freely, while decreasing the possibility for misunderstandings and misinterpretations.

3.4.2.1 Interview Sample

The research aims to answer how managers conceptualize wellbeing and how they perceive their own roles in strategic wellbeing management. To answer this question, middle managers of the case organization were interviewed. Since the study is conducted in a branch organization of a large international company, all of the managers in Finland can be considered middle managers. The size of the organization allowed interviews to be conducted with all managers within the available time frame.

By interviewing all managers, the possible disadvantages of sampling were avoided and the overall reliability of the interview data is increased.

All twelve respondents interviewed were managers in the Finnish branch organization, and could therefore be considered to be middle managers in the global organization. The positions ranged from managers with one level of direct subordinates to managers with two levels of direct subordinates, three of the managers being responsible over 2 levels and the rest being responsible over one level. The team sizes ranged from a team of 1 person to a team of 19. Five of the managers had a team of one person while the remaining managers had teams of 2, 6, 10, 15 and 19 members.

The majority of the managers had engineering backgrounds and previous managerial experience. 8 managers had an engineering background and the remaining four had a commercial background or background in law. 10 out of 12 managers had previously been in managerial positions.
3.5 Data analysis

The method for data analysis needs to be in line with the overall research philosophy. The topic of the research is quite abstract and complex, thus requiring a higher level of flexibility in the stage of analysis. An often-used method for the analysis of qualitative data and the most suitable method for this thesis is the thematic analysis.

The thematic analysis method is based on identifying emerging themes and sub themes in the notes and interview transcriptions. The themes are based on the codes used in categorizing the data as well as the relevant theory used in the research. Although this method for analysis is commonly used in qualitative research, it has been criticized e.g. for being an underdeveloped method and lacking clear steps and defined techniques (Bryman & Bell, 2015) The following description of the data analysis used in his thesis aims to increase transparency and counteract the abovementioned disadvantages.

In this research the interview transcriptions were analyzed mainly using a Data display and analysis approach, which is a suitable method for inductive research. (Saunders et al. 2012). The Data display and analysis approach allows the deep analysis of the themes, while taking the underlying context into consideration. The approach enables the clear categorizations of upcoming themes and enables the analysis of connections between the themes. (Saunders et al. 2012) In order to truly understand the conceptualization of wellbeing as well as the perceptions of the managerial role it is beneficial to consider contextual factors that might influence this perception. The data display and analysis approach offers the possibility to efficiently categorize and visualize connections in the data.

The interview transcripts were initially coded using the themes present in the research; wellbeing, wellbeing management, strategic wellbeing management and managerial roles. These themes were later on broken into smaller data units, describing different aspects of the themes e.g. Wellbeing definitions and wellbeing outcomes. The interview data was organized in the matrix through data reduction. The data was summarized, simplified, organized and added to the corresponding theme in a data display matrix.

The matrix was developed to fit the gathered data with the purpose of visualizing the complexities of the researched phenomena. Each interview was represented on the horizontal rows while the researched themes were represented in the vertical columns. The columns were organized in order representing the main themes of the study. The first columns included data background information of the interviewee, while the other
columns represented sub categories of the wellbeing, strategic wellbeing and managerial role themes. After the data was sorted in the data display, themes were analyzed separately in order to identify relationships, themes and patterns. After an overview of each theme was made, the data was analyzed considering the connections between the different codes and themes. This final analysis allowed the identification of possible causalities and supported the understanding of how the social context influences the results. The findings of the analysis are presented in further detail in the results section (Chapter 4).

3.6 Trustworthiness

Qualitative research is often criticized based on its ability to provide reliable and generalizable results. However, advocates of qualitative research argue that the purpose of qualitative data is not to be measurable and generalizable, but to help with understanding social phenomena and create new theory. (Bryman & Bell, 2015)

Qualitative research is based on interpretation and social phenomena may often be interpreted in several different ways. Therefore the task of the researcher is to argue for their own analysis and interpretation of the phenomenon, while being as transparent regarding the methods and the context as possible. (Lincoln & Guba, 1985)

The quality of research is ensured through conducting the research in good faith and following generally approved guidelines for qualitative research. This research has been conducted following the generally accepted guidelines, which are presented in the methods section. The aim of the methods section is to as transparently as possible describe the research process the context of the research as well as the possible downsides of the chosen research methods.

The detailed case description in the results section provides a deeper understanding of the research context. Based on this information the readers are able to make an educated evaluation if the results of this research can be applied within another context. Since only one case organization has been studied in this research, the results may vary depending on the size, culture and structure of the organization as well as the industry.

In qualitative research the role of the researcher is important to address since the research process is affected by subjectivity (Saunders et al. 2012). When analysing social phenomena it is impossible to reach complete objectivity and the background,
values, preconceived ideas and biases of the researcher affects the data collection, analysis and interpretation of the data (Patton, 2015). To address this topic and improve the transparency of this research I will discuss my role as a researcher and how it might affect the data gathering, analysis and results of this study.

Having a close connection to the case organization I have a personal understanding of the organization and its background. This pre-understanding of the context has influenced the choice of the themes researched in this thesis. The idea of wellbeing research was given to me by one of the managers but the research is conducted as an independent study. Therefore, the case organization did not have any influence on the final topic of the thesis allowing the observations to guide the direction of the research.

The topic of wellbeing is also quite familiar to me, since I have been working closely with these topics during the past year. This further affects my understanding of wellbeing as well as the wellbeing management in the case organization. The pre-understanding of wellbeing and the case organization is valuable in the sense that it increases my ability to understand the researched topic as well as the surrounding context of the case organization. This understanding enables a deeper analysis of how the managers perceive wellbeing and how their perceptions might be affected by the context. While, the pre-understanding and familiarity with the case organization might be helpful in many ways, it also affects my ability to stay objective.

During the research process I was very aware of my preconceived ideas of the organization and possible biases were considered during each step of the research. As suggested by Saunders et al. (2012), preconceived ideas might influence the data collection in interviews. The personal understanding of the organization might lead to not asking questions you believe you already know the answer to (Saunders et al. 2012). To counteract this questions about company context were intentionally added in order to get a more comprehensive picture of the case organization.

Having already established familiarity with the interviewees might have affected the interviews in both a positive and negative sense. The Finnish branch organization is not very hierarchical and employees have quite friendly and familiar relationships with each other. This familiarity might have resulted in a more relaxed atmosphere in the interviews and having pre-established trust between the interviewer and interviewee could have resulted in more valuable information being shared. However, the existing relationship and my knowledge about wellbeing management may also have affected
how willing the managers were to share their opinions and information regarding wellbeing. In order to address this issue, we discussed the purpose of the research before each interview. I mentioned that my interest is to understand the managers’ perceptions on wellbeing and learn from them and not to test their knowledge of wellbeing in any sense.

My personal perceptions of the organization as well as the interviewees might have affected the analysis of data. During the analysis I was aware of my possible biases and took precautions in order to counteract the effects of my biases in order to increase the trustworthiness of the results. One way of considering the biases in the phase of analysis is to very carefully consider the results that contradict with your personal beliefs (Saunders et al. 2012). The results that were surprising or contradictory to existing theory were analysed with particular caution.
4 RESULTS AND ANALYSIS

In this chapter the results of the study will be presented. The chapter begins with an introduction to the case organization, providing background information of the research context. After the case introduction the results of the observations and the semi-structured interviews will be presented.

The background of the case organization will be introduced at the beginning, after which the results of the observations and the semi-structured interviews will be

4.1 Case organization

The case organization studied in this research is a Finnish branch of a global corporation present in the energy industry. The organization is one of the market leaders with an annual revenue of 2,4 billion. The organization is governed form the headquarters abroad and employs over 4 500 employees globally.

The Finnish branch is a relatively new part of the global matrix organization and has experienced rapid growth since its establishment. The branch can be compared to a smaller middle-sized company and operates on several locations in the country. The branch is governed from the organizations headquarters abroad and the employees in Finland are either reporting to the Country Manager of Finland or the department heads situated abroad.

The company recently merged with another large company in the industry, leading to organizational restructurings and the change of senior management. The political and economic environment has also caused turmoil in the industry resulting in cost saving pressures and the company having to downsize. Prior and post downsizing the company has undergone further restructurings also affecting the Finnish branch. The main structural changes in the company are related to a shift to a functionally driven organization, resulting in new reporting structures in Finland.

The Finnish branch is governed by the country manager responsible of the strategy, operations and compliance of the subsidiary, along with the management team consisting of the department heads of the functions present in the country. Nearly half of the members of the management team are reporting to functional managers on a corporate level while the remaining managers are reporting to straight to the country manager.
Like other companies present in the same industry the case organization has a strong health and safety culture, striving to prohibit accidents and lost time incidents. The health and safety efforts mainly target working safely in production and sites, focusing a lot on the physical health and working environment. Despite health and safety being the main focus in the organization, wellbeing topics have not been globally addressed until 2015 when the company launched its first employee survey.

The survey was created in order to make a global assessment of the current situation and included topics related to wellbeing, such as experienced workload and employee satisfaction. The main development areas found in the survey were internal communication, employee workloads and feedback. The results of the survey led to the development of three different programs aiming to improve the employee satisfaction in these areas.

The survey was intended to be conducted every two years in order to follow up on progress and identifying needs for further improvement. However, the project was laid on ice due to the economic restraints leading to the decentralization of wellbeing management to the local country units.

Although a comprehensive and global approach to wellbeing management is yet to be developed the organization has some processes in use, which can be considered closely connected to wellbeing. During the past decade the company has introduced a global process for performance appraisal, which emphasizes the personal development of the individual employees. The purpose of this tool is to monitor the professional development of each employee, identify possible growth opportunities and support the employee in their efforts to learn and develop their skills. The company also offers a development program for high potential employees in order to advance in their professional career.

The leadership culture is also emphasized in the organization with all managers being offered outsourced leadership training. The leadership principles in the company have been set in close co-operation with the employees focusing on the relationship development between the manager and the employee.

The corporate approach to wellbeing is reflected on a local level in Finland as most of the attention is given to health and safety topics, focusing on minimizing risks and accidents on work sites. The limited resources connected to the rapid growth of the
subsidiary has created challenges for developing a comprehensive approach to wellbeing management. In Finland the main responsibility for wellbeing management is shared by the health and safety and HR department, who are working together with improving the working conditions as well as employee health and satisfaction.

4.2 Observation results

In this section the results of the observations will be presented, starting with general observations and then proceeding with observations from the wellbeing workshop for managers held in October, 2017. The general observations are mainly from the end of 2016 to the beginning of 2018.

4.2.1 General observations

The general observations of the organization during the research project were that wellbeing management was quite a new topic raised in the whole organization. This observation related to the fact that most of the global processes associated with wellbeing were developed quite recently. The health and safety culture in the organization is very strong and is accepted and enforced by all employees at all levels, examples being that all company presentations begin with a safety notice and the general encouragement to make safety observations. Although a lot of attention is given to health and safety, wellbeing is often not included in this discussion.

While health and safety issues are considered and developed by specific departments it is unclear to whom the responsibility of wellbeing management belongs. Some of the wellbeing efforts in the organization, such as the employee survey and the leadership and development programs have been developed by the HR departments, but the organization seems to lack a strategic and comprehensive approach to wellbeing management.

An interest towards developing a more strategic approach is illustrated by the employee survey developed in 2015 and the improvement efforts made over the following years based on the survey results. The decision to put the project on hold shows that although wellbeing management is an interest of the organization it is not a top priority. The perceived value of the project might have been affected by the change in senior management, roughly a year before the suspension was announced.

The cultural and regulatory differences between Finland and the country of the Head quarters seem to provide a set of challenges in regards to the local wellbeing
management. The Finnish culture and regulation emphasizes the need for wellbeing management and requires Finnish organizations to create processes and policies ensuring the quality of it. The challenge in the Finnish subsidiary is to comply with the local regulation while adhering to corporate policies, which are created based on foreign legislation.

The distance between the Finnish branch and the headquarters contributes to communicational challenges. The organization as a whole has inefficient communicational channels resulting in information loss as a lot of useful information and tools regarding wellbeing management never reach the Finnish organization. An example of this was the fact that employees in the Finnish branch remember answering the global employee survey but are unaware how the results were used to improve the employee satisfaction. This information loss leads to the inefficient use of resources as the subsidiaries have to “reinvent the wheel” locally.

Since the Finnish branch has grown quite quickly in the past years, the processes are still in many ways being formed. Having restricted resources, other processes and policies have previously been prioritized. The wellbeing management in the organization has been quite reactive, mainly utilizing working hour reports and sick leaves as information and not having any systematic ways of monitoring the overall wellbeing in the organization. Albeit wellbeing is considered to be an important topic, the Finnish branch is also lacking a strategic approach to wellbeing management.

Currently the branch is complying with Finnish regulation, utilizing the services provided by the occupational health care and pension insurance company. A shared operating plan has been developed with the occupational health care, including preventive health care and treatment, work environment check ups and specialist support. In addition to this and other regulatory requirements, wellbeing management has not been a main focus in the organization.

The Finnish organization also has a local Health and safety department mostly focusing on the physical aspect of health, minimizing the risks for injuries and accidents on the work sites. The HR department is working with other aspects of wellbeing monitoring the working hours and sick leaves of employees. Wellbeing management seems to be the shared responsibility of these two departments, each focusing on slightly different aspects of wellbeing. These two departments do work in close connection to each other,
but seem to be lacking a common strategy for improving the overall wellbeing in the organization.

In conclusion wellbeing and wellbeing management seems to be a larger focus in the Finnish branch than on a corporate level, mainly due to cultural and regulatory differences. These differences in focus seem to create some challenges in the Finnish organization in the form of available resources and contradictory policies and regulations. Strategic guidelines for wellbeing management are limited on a corporate level and are not communicated efficiently to the branches/subsidiaries. Therefore, the local organizations have responsibility over their own strategic wellbeing management. The wellbeing management in the Finnish branch is still in its infancy starting with whom the overall responsibility lies.

4.2.2 Wellbeing workshop

In the spring of 2017 wellbeing management was given more attention through the creation of the Model of Early support and the plans to organize a workshop for managers. The model was created by HR, with the support of the health and safety department. The six-page model described the responsibilities of employees and managers, along with concrete tips and guidelines on how to recognize the loss of working ability and how to act in those situations.

The mandatory workshop was held in October, 2017 for all managers in the Finnish branch and the HR manager representing another country. The workshop was organized together by the HR- and health and safety department and lasted the whole day. The managers’ expectations of the workshop were learning about wellbeing management, managers’ responsibilities and company procedures as well as receiving concrete tools for wellbeing management and how to improve own wellbeing and work-life balance.

The workshop started with an introduction, including a definition of the concept and factors affecting wellbeing. The definition and antecedents presented were in line with the theory presented in chapter 2. After the general introduction the Model of Early support was presented and the responsibilities employees and managers was explained. The presentation included guidelines on where to find the model and how managers can identify the decrease in working ability and intervene early on to minimize the effects. The managers expressed a need for an evaluation of the current level of wellbeing in the organization. They showed great interest in a possible wellbeing
survey, and considered that this information would help them with managing the wellbeing in their teams.

After a break the managers were involved in an exercise, where they reflected in groups over the wellbeing responsibilities of different roles in the organization, such as the country manager, HR and health and safety department, managers, team leaders etc. (table 1). The responsibilities the managers assigned to each role show that wellbeing is not seen as a very strategic issue and the focus of wellbeing management seems to either be on safety or the social aspect of wellbeing. The need for wellbeing to be discussed and given more attention in the organization was emphasized through the managers assigning all roles, except HR, with this responsibility.

The managers assigned most of the operational wellbeing management responsibility onto themselves. According to them the role of the manager is to keep wellbeing on the agenda and incorporate wellbeing into their daily work. In order to successfully do this they need support from the country manager, HR and the health and safety department. The country manager should be responsible over prioritizing the topic and granting resources for wellbeing management, while the health and safety department together with HR are expected to provide information and tools for the managers to succeed in their roles. In addition, the HR department was also expected to regularly monitor the manager and employee relationships.

The managers seemed to strongly associate wellbeing with social events, mentioning the need for supporting and organizing get-togethers and other after work activities. During the exercise focus regarding wellbeing management was predominantly given to the importance of communication.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country Manager</th>
<th>Manager</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>- Prioritizing wellbeing and communicating the focus on this topic, similarly to safety topics in the organization</td>
<td>- Discussing and regularly bringing the topic to the attention of the team and other partners working in close connection with the company</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Providing resources for wellbeing</td>
<td>- Integrating the wellbeing topic into the daily activities e.g. meetings and inductions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Supporting wellbeing events e.g. get-togethers</td>
<td>- Considering wellbeing in work and resource planning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Leading by example</td>
<td>- Being aware of early signs indicating loss of working ability</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Ensuring efficient communication within the organization</td>
<td>- Being aware of personal influence on the wellbeing of the team</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Adjusting communication methods to the needs of the recipient i.e. calling, emailing</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>HR department</th>
<th>Health and Safety department</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>- Visiting all work locations and meeting the employees</td>
<td>- Informing managers and employees of wellbeing together with HR</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Arranging after work activities</td>
<td>- Challenging the health care provider to decrease lead-times for doctor’s appointments</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Arranging introductions of the local work environment to international employees e.g. city tour and cultural trainings</td>
<td>- Highlighting the security risk of conducting dangerous work while not feeling well.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Checking regularly if manager employee relationships are healthy</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Understanding the core business and adjusting the internal guidelines to support the organizational requirements</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Keeping managers and employees informed</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Providing materials and tools for all levels</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1 Wellbeing responsibilities of different roles in the organization, defined by the managers during the wellbeing workshop
Following the exercise, the legal responsibilities of the managers concerning wellbeing were presented. In this section of the wellbeing workshop the managers accentuated the need for clear processes and concrete tools in order to be able to meet the expectations. They also expressed lack of resources, such as time, to be able to fully focus on wellbeing matters.

At the end of the wellbeing workshop real life cases were presented in order to give a more concrete idea of what wellbeing management is and how it affects the individual and work community. The workshop ended with a self-reflection over the managers’ personal wellbeing and information on how personal wellbeing can be maintained and improved. This section of the workshop raised a lot of discussion, especially concerning the fact of limited resources. The managers experienced that it is very difficult to maintain their personal wellbeing, as they do not have sufficient resources to battle the increasing workload. The managers shared their frustration with inefficient meetings and amount of emails coming in, suggesting a need for communication guidelines related to the email and meeting culture both locally and globally.

In conclusion the managers expressed the need for information about the current wellbeing in the organization, asking for a survey to be sent to all employees. They communicated a need for clear definitions of manager roles and expectations regarding wellbeing management and wished for concrete tools that will support them in their role. Although managers expressed the need to understand the current situation and called for clear responsibilities and expectations, they seemed to have a hard time grasping the idea of wellbeing as a strategic question.

Since the managers who are in quite a central role of strategic wellbeing management seemed to have difficulty grasping the concept according to the observations, the decision was made to focus the research on the topic of middle managers and strategic wellbeing management. During the observations it was also evident that most discussion emerged around the topic of personal wellbeing and lack of resources, such as time, skills and knowledge in wellbeing management, thus the thesis also aims to research the experience of middle managers and their role in wellbeing strategy. These topics were further researched through individual interviews with the managers.
4.3 Interview results

The interviews were designed based on the findings from the observations and structured using relevant theory. The interviews represent the most detailed data in this thesis and the results will be presented in this section.

The results are presented in three sections corresponding to the themes present in the interviews. At first the manager’s perceptions of wellbeing will be described, then the perceptions of strategic wellbeing and lastly the perception of and challenges connected to manager roles in strategic wellbeing management.

4.3.1 Wellbeing

The results of the interviews suggest that the managers overall had quite similar views on wellbeing and its antecedents. When asked to describe wellbeing the managers emphasized the subjectivity of wellbeing and that everyone has different meaning attached to the word.

Regardless of the subjectivity common themes and consensus could be observed in the answers of the managers. In general they expressed having a holistic view on wellbeing, considering that there is no division between a “work-self” and “personal-self”. Although the managers expressed having a holistic view on wellbeing, they proceeded by describing wellbeing at work and at home separately, emphasizing the need for balance between them. The managers seemed to often mention wellbeing in connection with the personal life, giving an impression that the personal life would be the main source of wellbeing.

“Both [general wellbeing and wellbeing at work] reflect on each other of course, so what you do on your spare time reflects on your work and vice versa... They reflect on each other, but there needs to be a sort of balance between work and your spare time” [Manager 4]

“Wellbeing for me is a balance between professional life and whatever you do in your personal life. You have to take time outside of your work to do things that you like, that are more relaxing or more interesting to do. Because we are working half of our life in our jobs, you also need to do things that are really adding value and also give you the energy in your personal life to continue working or be more effective” [Manager 1]

When describing personal wellbeing and wellbeing at work, the managers did consider physical, psychological and social aspects as affecting the overall wellbeing. Despite all aspects being mentioned more emphasis was set on the social aspect in both categories.

Since the focus of the thesis is on wellbeing at work, and the questions were specifically designed to target this area, more focus was given to the antecedents and outcomes of
occupational wellbeing in the conceptualization of wellbeing. Wellbeing at work was generally described as enjoying or not hating coming to work in the morning.

“Let’s say if just waking up in the morning and coming to work feels okay, then it’s a good step. [Laughs] ... I believe if you enjoy your work, of course there are good and bad days, but if it feels bad every morning you wake up, then you are not wellbeing” [Manager 4]

“Well I suppose it [wellbeing at work] is when it’s nice to come to work and your experience that you’re able to perform at work and you get a sort of good feeling and a mental reward from working...” [Manager 8]

In the managers’ descriptions of wellbeing at work, most attention was given to the psychological and social aspects of wellbeing. The most commonly mentioned psychological factors contributing to wellbeing were liking and enjoying the work, motivation, role clarity, skills, flexibility, and work-life balance.

According to the managers, employees need to feel that their work is meaningful and interesting. Employees need to have attainable goals tailored to their skills and needs in order for them to be able to feel a sense of achievement. The possibility to have an influence and feel as the work is contributing to the greater picture was also important factors contributing to feeling motivated in the job.

“In a certain way it [wellbeing] is grounded in the expectations which are set on different positions and that these expectations are in a way in line with what people are able to perform. Wellbeing challenges arise when the requirements set on the employee do not match the skills and training, or the workload is too large or small. In a way I experience that wellbeing challenges come from the conflicts between expectations and reality, which lead to many symptoms then. If too much [work] is done, you might have less spare time which leads to neglecting the other areas of life, such as family, hobbies and your personal wellbeing and more comprehensively sleep, nutrition and these kinds of things” [Manager 3]

Clear roles and expectations which are in line with the skills of the employee, providing with sufficient yet not too much challenge, were mentioned as important factors of wellbeing. Expectations and workloads matching with the personal skills and abilities contribute to not being overly stressed or feeling too much pressure. All managers emphasized the need for work-life balance as one of the main contributors to wellbeing, mentioning manageable workloads and decent working hours as central factors in maintaining wellbeing.

“.Okay that they [managers] can lead their teams well and the individuals in their teams in a way that everyone would feel that they have clear responsibilities, clear roles, clear job description and expectations, which are from a company perspective the easy ways to influence a persons satisfaction and wellbeing, because you know what is expected of you, you know what you should do and your manager trusts you and vice versa.” [Manager 3]
“I think it’s a lot about a reasonable balance between work-life and everything else that you want to do in your life. I believe when you don’t have that balance, regardless which way it goes, that you have lost this wellbeing” [Manager 9]

Flexibility refers to the extent to which employees are able to influence their personal working life and wellbeing. The ability to choose working hours and possibility to work from a distance, were mentioned as meaningful antecedents of wellbeing.

“Everybody gets stressed and high workloads at times, but it’s trying to then balance that out over a longer period, giving people the flexibility to work from home, work remotely and take some time off when they need to.” [Manager 6]

“Well, flexibility for example that you have possibilities to be flexible with your working hours, amount of work, opportunities of course that are all these leaves, like family leaves and child care leave and if there for example is some errands you have to run I think... I don’t believe in this eight to four fixed concept, but there’s a need for flexibility in both ways. Working on distance has always made sense, a pretty efficient way, so yeah, different solutions” [Manager 10]

The social factors affecting wellbeing was the category highlighted the most by the managers. The social factors related to wellbeing at work can be divided into four subgroups: culture and environment, community, leadership and reassurance. Managers considered the organizational culture playing a large role in employee wellbeing, mentioning factors like atmosphere and social environment. From the employee perspective this means a supportive culture that suits their needs. Form a more organizational perspective the culture referred to an atmosphere of caring and having a leadership culture where managers are interested and expected to show care for their team members.

“I believe that the company needs to put this, make sure that this culture exists, make sure that the questions are addressed and that it [wellbeing] is on the agenda in a way that saturates the organization and reminds employees that this is a priority, a focus and if you have any questions or you don’t feel well there is someone to contact” [Manager 9]

All of the managers mentioned the community as a crucial aspect of wellbeing. Having nice colleagues, getting along with the team and having a sense of community were considered extremely important. To create and maintain good relationships and trust in the team the importance of communication and above all informal communication was emphasized. Most managers mentioned the need to have informal encounters with colleagues, discussing topics unrelated to work e.g. asking about their day or family. Most managers also pointed out the importance of meeting colleagues outside of work engaging in non-work related activities, such as after work, bowling, climbing etc.

“There are so many factors, factors like colleagues and these like, this sense of community, the team spirit in the closest team you’re working with is probably, it’s one of the most important,
that you thrive in the community and get along with the team and that you feel that you get support from the organization and you feel, let’s say, accepted, or like an important piece to the puzzle in the company. [Manager 5]

“We should hold on to what we have now [benefits]. With them you’re able to encourage employees quite well and then try in a group make these dinners or karaoke nights so you get a little team spirit in there, that colleagues are actually friends that you can see outside of work as well. I really support this.” [Manager 2]

In addition to the social environment the relationship with the manager was mentioned. The most prominent topics raised were the quality and trust in the relationship and the support provided by the manager. The feeling of being important, accepted and understood adds to the feeling of wellbeing.

“Maybe that when you spend time with your team you get this closeness, the better you know someone, the easier it is to talk about things. You may share things with someone that you wouldn’t share with others. From there you might get hold of something, that this is something that needs to be improved and this is the way to improve it” [Manager 2]

“You know it’s chemistry as well, there’s different people and you just need to find people that work well together [with you], like partners” [Manager 7]

The physical aspect of wellbeing at work was given least attention, only three of the managers mentioning the need for a good healthy environment along with proper facilities and utilities. All the managers mentioning the physical environment were more involved with work on site. The physical aspect was considered to a greater extent by managers while discussing personal wellbeing and work-life balance. They often mentioned work-life balance as an important factor enabling the employee to properly take care of their physical health i.e. eat and sleep well as well as exercise. Very little to almost no attention was given to physical health in regards to injuries, illness and disease.

“We do have the culture and exercise benefits, which you can use to improve your own wellbeing. I would say, if you think about our departments, we have tried to think about everyone having their own work stations and these basic prerequisites like toilets, a fridge and microwave.” [Manager 4]

“Environment, it needs to be a nice place to come to work, the facilities are there for everybody to be able to, you know, have a drink, sit down, eat, talk, and the atmosphere.” [Manager 6]

The psychological and social aspects of personal wellbeing were also mentioned in connection to work-life balance, emphasizing the time needed for hobbies and the maintaining of social relationships with family, friends as well as colleagues.

“I think we will go to the theory of how life is. Life is about the moments and to do things you like. Of course if you like your work it’s good, but the work is not... you don’t live to work, you work to live. If you only work, you don’t live at the end or you don’t have your moments and time outside with friends doing other things, more interesting to you in your personal life.” [Manager 1]
As a conclusion of the results found regarding the managers’ perceptions of wellbeing, most emphasis was set on work-life balance and the social antecedents. Workload and working hours were mentioned as one of the main causes of lack of wellbeing while open and informal communication was referred to as one of the main enablers.

4.3.2 Strategic wellbeing management

The managers expressed quite similar ideas about strategic wellbeing management, approaching the question mainly from an individualistic perspective. The main outcomes of occupational wellbeing considered were individual productivity, individual contribution to social environment and commitment to the organization. Almost no connections were made to organizational outcomes.

Wellbeing and happy employees were considered to be more productive and able to produce better results. Wellbeing was also seen as a factor affecting the behavior of the employee and the quality of communication, ultimately leading to the sense of wellbeing, or lack thereof, spreading in the organization.

Probable it’s [effects of wellbeing] pretty much what you can see on people’s faces. Something might not be great at home at the time. It’s visible on the surface and affects the interaction with others and the working efficiency. [Manager 2]

I think, when you’re stressed and you don’t feel well, you’re not productive. So from a productive viewpoint it’s detrimental to the environment or to the company. For the individuals, if everything is not alright with them, if the workplace is not a good place to come to work and they’re not comfortable there, it restricts them from doing their best. That can then add more pressure on them, you know, it’s a vicious circle. [Manager 6]

Lastly, satisfied employees were considered to be more committed to the organization and less likely to quit. While the managers considered that wellbeing had a substantial effect in the organizations, they tended to focus on the individual aspect and did not express a clear connection between wellbeing management and organizational outcomes. Their answers suggest that the main motivation of wellbeing management is to increase employee happiness and improve the experience of the team members at work.

“The wellbeing is something that I’m expected to do to keep the team productive and happy and keep people in the organization.” [Manager 6]

“Top management needs to understand, okay we need to fix the course because we need to keep the balance in our employees, keep them happy and motivated.” [Manager 1]

The majority of the managers considered that the initiative to wellbeing management should come from the top, some managers referring to the top management in the
Finnish branch while others referred to the top of the whole organization. They considered that the responsibility of the management is to provide direction, guidelines and clear expectations on how wellbeing should be managed in the organization.

And then again it comes from the top, right? It comes down from the senior management that, you know, this is what we want you to do, we want you to care for the employees. But in the region that we’re in, I think our country manager and management is very behind it, so it might not be a company wide strategic target, but I think it’s a target we got here. [Manager 6]

For me it’s the Country Manager of course, this is the person that has to care, if we’re talking about country level. If we talk about regional level it’s the manager, if we’re talking about division it’s the CEO of Europe for example, this goes also for the CEO of the whole group. Again I’m saying that this must come from higher level to the lower level. [Manager 1]

The managers thought of themselves as being in key roles in wellbeing management, overseeing the wellbeing of their own team members. The overall consensus was that everyone in the organization is responsible for wellbeing and contributing to the culture of caring. The managers also emphasized the individual responsibility of the employees on taking care of their own wellbeing and expressing if they are experiencing challenges.

Well it [the manager role] is central, especially here where the organization is this scattered. It might be that our technicians, they only have their own manager who they see from the management. In that case it cannot be anyone else than the own manager who is responsible for the wellbeing in the team. Similarly, when you think about the other departments, it has to be the team leader, the manager who knows how burdened the employees are, what their tasks are and if their resources are sufficient and how the employees are feeling. [Manager 8]

I don’t think there is a specific key actor at all, it’s everyone’s responsibility. I also believe that it’s all team members’ responsibility to set requirements for their manager to address these type of issues. Then I understand that it might be sensitive and difficult. If the responsibility is divided it should be rather be on the manager than the team, but I believe that it’s a part of everyone’s responsibility and that everyone should take initiative to improve wellbeing for all, but always look after their personal wellbeing first of course. [Manager 9]

All managers were unanimous about the fact that wellbeing affects the individual and the organization. In their answers the managers tended to focus on individual and social affects such as individual productivity, communication and collaboration. Many of the managers mentioned that the lack of wellbeing tends to spread in the organization and used metaphors like cancer and the snowball effect to describe how the lack of wellbeing rubs off from one employee to another, ultimately leading to the whole workforce feeling unwell.

Maybe it’s like that small streams make a large river and a lake and an ocean and when someone is not feeling well, some small thing is left undone and the small thing is part of a larger picture and when it’s left undone the snowball grows. [Manager 2]

I believe that it affects quite a lot, it’s like a rotten apple in a fruit basket, it spreads, so it has to be stopped before it spreads. [Manager 9]
While all managers mentioned the connection between wellbeing, efficiency and productivity. Only a few considered the effects of wellbeing on an organizational level, mentioning that the efficiency and productivity of the employees affects the overall productivity of the company. The majority of the managers also touched upon the fact that lack of wellbeing in an organization will likely lead to employees leaving, costing the company at the end.

The hardest aspect to grasp regarding strategic wellbeing management seemed to be understanding the need for measures and how wellbeing could be measured. The majority of the managers made no references or very vague references to the need to measure wellbeing in the organizations in some way. While a few managers expressed that wellbeing cannot be measured at all, the majority of the managers mentioned day-to-day informal communication as the way to monitor the wellbeing of their teams.

“Wellbeing I think is like cancer, you just see the results when you’re dying, so for me wellbeing is almost like the same. It’s very difficult to have KPI’s. You cannot check how many times someone goes to the gym, how many times they for a beer, how many times they going to the hairdresser and manicure or pedicure or spa or whatever, you cannot check that. It’s personal information, but sometimes it’s very important, that is why I said communication is a key factor in order to keep the wellbeing of your team members high and understand what is happening.

[Manager 1]

4.3.3 Manager roles in wellbeing management

The managers shared an understanding of how the role of the manager has changed. Most focus was given to four topics: being closer/part of the team, increased focus on people, focus on leadership and coaching and wider scope of responsibilities. The managers are nowadays expected to be closer to their team members acting more as a part of the team. They’re expected to appear more vulnerable and humane, acting more as a regular colleague but being responsible over the coordination of work and support of the team members. Although some technical knowledge is still needed, the focus is more on knowing the strengths and weaknesses of the team members and being able to make the team work together like a “well oiled machine”. The managers felt that their role is more leading and coaching the team, rather than managing them. Emphasis was also given to understanding the needs of the team, the strengths and weaknesses of the members and supporting them in efforts to grow and succeed. Many of the managers also emphasized the grown variety of tasks managers are faced with, being responsible over technical tasks, health and safety and HR tasks, reporting, people coordination etc.
It’s coaching, it’s spurring, it’s genuinely and actively wanting to develop the subordinates and team members. Subordinate is also kind of an old fashioned word, develop the career of the team members and skills, so like wellbeing, mental wellbeing and all of these elements have sort of become part of the manager’s responsibility and it’s expected that they understand, the manager needs to have skills and an interest for discussing things that can be quite difficult. [Manager 3]

Maybe you need to be not just professional in your area, but you need to be, have much wider leadership skills. Not just be a good specialist in your area, to lead the team. A brighter person than you might be part of the team and you need to ensure that the machine works, just to create smooth processes and establish that people feel well so they can deliver their best. [Manager 5]

All managers recognized that they have a central role in the wellbeing management and expressed that it should be part of the managers’ responsibilities. According to the answers the manager roles in wellbeing management could be divided into four different themes, communication, trust and care, managing tasks and workload and leadership.

The most prominent responsibility that can be detected from the answers is communication, again emphasizing the social aspect of wellbeing. Managers are expected to be present, listen and communicate with their team members, getting to know them on a more personal level. The managers were accentuating the need for regular, informal communication, in order to create a relationship and know if someone is starting to lose their working ability.

Through the daily informal communication managers are able to create trust between them and their team allowing for more open communication. The managers pointed out the need for regular face-to-face interaction and their responsibility to show interest and care in their team members. The manager needs to support and show that they are looking out for the interests of their team members.

“It’s not something you choose, it’s something you must have. Maybe sometimes to be honest you don’t spend the time that is needed with your team members to discuss this, but I feel with the daily communication if you meet them say good morning, good evening and good afternoon”[Manager 1]

“It’s about having that, taking contact, maybe making that call, it might take a minute, two minutes and you might hear from the voice already how that person is doing, asking them if they had a good week and what next week looks like. I think it’s just about taking a little time and making that little effort. [Manager 9]

One manager specifically emphasized the need for managers also to take action, that the role of the manager is not only hearing the needs of their team, but actively listening and making improvements. All managers underlined the importance of managing the tasks and workloads of their team members enabling the ability for work-life balance. In managing the tasks the managers need to take the skills, interests and preferences of the individual team members into account, creating a set of tasks that
will be motivating for the employee. It is also the manager’s responsibility to create clear guidelines, targets and expectations for the employee and support them along the way.

“I think it’s just to trying to manage their work load, to give them support, to take things off them, which is what I try to do. I mean, a lot of the stuff I do you could argue is not part of my tasks, but if I don’t do it, it will only get back to someone else who is struggling as it is. So, it’s to try and make sure that it, a) the work’s interesting for them, so they get that personal satisfaction and you know learning something new and delivering, but also just being aware of making sure that they’re not overloaded with work and trying to give them some clear guidelines to what they can expect from me with regards to their performance, which will then hopefully give them clear guidelines where they can come to work and know they feel that they are doing a good job, cause I think, wellbeing, a lot of it it’s self perception as well, you know. If they think they’re doing a good job” [Manager 6]

As leaders and coaches the manager role is to focus on the people, inspiring and supporting them. The managers are expected to motivate the team and create the prerequisites for the team members to function well together and succeed.

I need to be near my team members, because for me I want to discuss all the time, you have to inspire people. If you cannot reach that, then you cannot really help them to have wellbeing, I think. [Manager 1]

While discussing the roles the majority of the manager also suggested a limitation to the scope of their role. In their answers they pointed out the individual responsibility of the employees, mentioning that the manager cannot affect what is happening in the team members’ private life. The managers’ responsibility is to create the best possible environment and enablers for wellbeing at work, while the ultimate responsibility lies on the individual. They expressed the inability to affect team members’ personal lives and the boundaries existing between the personal life and work-life, which managers are expected not to break. Although it is helpful for managers to know their team members on a personal level, and be aware if their team members are experiencing challenges in their personal lives, the manager can only affect work related factors.

Then of course the employees themselves need to contribute. It’s not possible to expect that the company will address the issue completely, but we are all grown-ups working and we need to take personal responsibility as well. You need to remember that the manager is there only to a limited extent to address the issues, but you’re responsible for your own health or lack of health, and you cannot move that responsibility over to the employer. [Manager 9]

That is in a way a difficult questions, since it addresses what we should do, if we should do more. Then this leads to the perspective of what is on the employer’s responsibility and what is the individual’s responsibility? In a way the company provides a possibility to dedicate yourself to the business 110%, if you want, but in a way I consider that it is sort of on your own responsibility if the boundaries are missing, to set those boundaries on like a personal level, to define yourself how big of a part you want to give to the employer, the company. [Manager 4]

The overall attitude towards their role in wellbeing management was positive. Managers felt that it was natural that they would be responsible of the wellbeing of
their team. Since managers are working closely with them, they experienced an increased ability to manage wellbeing and react to situations needing more attention. The managers interpreted wellbeing management as a part of leadership and daily interaction, therefore they did not feel that it would require much effort.

“Of course you have to allocate some of your time to your team and I don’t think it’s a very big effort, just care, ask questions, take information and try to solve whatever is possible.” [Manager 1]

“So, if you’re a manager and you care about your team, that’s something that you will do naturally anyway, I don’t think it should take that much effort... to be able to do it.” [Manager 6]

The attitudes towards the role was also linked to the size of the team. Managers with small teams though that wellbeing management was a non-burdening task and quite effortless while managers of larger teams, though the wellbeing management was important and part of their role but saw it as a slightly more time consuming and strenuous task.

The challenges experienced by managers in the roles were lack of communication, distance, size of the team and lack of influence and resources. Lack of communication was experienced as a challenge in all team sizes, referring to the Finnish context and culture of being quiet and not communicative. The managers mentioned the difficulty and uncertainty of really knowing the needs and struggles of team members.

“I think it’s succeeding with getting to know what’s going on in the persons private life and how it might affect the work situation, I think that’s the most challenging.” [Manager 9]

Distance was experienced as one big challenge in managing wellbeing. Managers with team members across the country found it difficult to create trust and open communication. They mentioned the difficulty of knowing what is going on with people in the different locations, the challenge of having to trust the information provided by others and creating your own perception based on it and lastly being able to react in a timely manner in case problems occurred.

“Well, if you are in the same location then it’s then probably easier to observe some external signs and it’s maybe possible to detect some things earlier. Also it’s more of that presence which is just occasionally exchanging some words or something like that” [Manager 10]

The size of the team has seemingly a big impact on the managerial challenges. In small teams the communication is easy and effortless and not much though has to be specifically allocated to the creation and maintenance of relationships as well as wellbeing management. In larger teams it is more difficult to find time to listen to and
discuss with all employees. The manager articulated the challenge of combining “people management” and “the real tasks” and having to balance between the two.

“I don’t see a big problem in the managerial role being emphasized in wellbeing management. In a way the manager should be the closest to the employees and it’s natural in a way. Maybe one think concerning me is what is considered to be a sensible number of team members for a manager, is 5 good, or 10, how about 20, could already be on the edge, how about 30, 40, what if you had 50? How big can the team be in order for the manager to actually have a chance to be present, listen and discuss with the team members, create a relationship also on a personal level which in a way is a prerequisite for those people to be willing to share, talk about things, do these encounters happen over phone or face-to-face? That is probably one of the challenges there, but the fact that the manager plays a larger role is not a concern, it’s natural. [Manager 4]

Lack of sufficient influence and resources was to some extent experienced by all managers. In this context resources mainly refer to time and people. Many of the managers identified the need for more time to focus on wellbeing topics. More time was requested by managers in larger teams to focus on communication with the team members, creating relationships and building trust. They also expressed their frustration with identifying problems but not having the time to solve them.

“But actually it can be quite stressful in the situation when you have too little, or it feels like you have too little time. Maybe it’s the combining of tasks that is the biggest challenge, if you have these mandatory tasks, based on which your performance is evaluated, it affects to what extent different tasks are valued in different roles, so when you do [wellbeing management] like a hobby on your spare time it might sometimes bother you, but I believe it’s a thing that will lash back at you if you don’t take care of it. [Manager 10]

Lack of influence seemed to be one of the most discouraging challenges. The lack of influence was closely related to workloads, and the needs of the team. Managers felt that the system is bureaucratic, that they had to fight and put pressure on decision-makers to be able to support the needs of their team. This was emphasized in discussion regarding workloads, many of managers mentioning that they dislike seeing their teams overworked and not being able to do anything about it.

“As a manager, seeing your team over worked, over stressed and no resources to do anything about it and you have to step in. So you then start taking some of the work, but there is only so much that you can do. So that’s probably the most challenging thing, that and specifically where we are, we are in a business where we have to do more with less.” [Manager 6]
5 DISCUSSION

In this chapter the results of the observations and interviews will be discussed connecting the results to the organizational context. This section will also aim to answer the two research questions mentioned in the introduction. The chapter will begin with an analysis of the way managers conceptualize wellbeing and strategic wellbeing management and will continue with a description of how managers experience their own role in strategic wellbeing management.

5.1 Manager’s perceptions of wellbeing and wellbeing management from a strategic perspective

The managers’ conceptualization of wellbeing and wellbeing management is quite distant from the strategic approach presented in the theory. In general managers perceived wellbeing to be experienced by the individual rather than a group, department or organization. The effects of wellbeing were also described on an individual level instead of organizational outcomes. The managers generally described employee happiness and satisfaction as the main goals of wellbeing management, suggesting that wellbeing management is not perceived as a very strategic topic. Wellbeing management was described more as a way to gain information, rather than a tool to improve individual or organizational outcomes, supporting the notion of wellbeing as a non-strategic issue. Although outcomes such as individual productivity, contribution and commitment were mentioned, they were described more as byproducts of employee happiness than the ultimate goal of wellbeing management.

In general wellbeing management is perceived as a social and cultural phenomenon, which is maintained by informal internal communication. From a strategic view this perception creates many challenges as well as unnecessary tensions experienced by the middle management. The manager’s perceptions identified in this research can be divided into three views: the individualistic happiness oriented view, socially oriented view and the cultural view with focus on communication, each creating their challenges for strategic wellbeing management.

Understanding the these views of wellbeing and wellbeing management enables pinpointing the current problem areas helps with creating more efficient strategy for wellbeing management in the future.
5.1.1 Individualistic happiness oriented view

The managers have an individualistic view on wellbeing management and tend to see wellbeing as closely linked to the personal life of the individual. They suggest that wellbeing is something that is attained outside of work and consider work more as an enabler and a necessity for experiencing wellbeing in the private life. This view on wellbeing is problematic from a wellbeing management perspective since it over accentuates the individual responsibility and undermines the effect of work on wellbeing, as well as downplays the manager responsibility in wellbeing management.

The physical and psychosocial work environment greatly influences a person’s wellbeing and the organization and from a strategic point of view the managers have a responsibility to make sure that these aspects support the overall wellbeing of the individual. Although the individual is responsible over their personal wellbeing in the end, the organization has undoubtedly an obligation to provide the employee with the means complete their job successfully, not forgetting the possibilities for cost savings and productivity increases. As long as wellbeing is considered as something attained during one’s spare time, the organization and managers risk on focusing too much only on providing the employees with a possibility for work-life balance. Having a more holistic understanding of wellbeing would increase the perceived responsibility of the organization and manager and might help with understanding wellbeing as a strategic topic on an organizational level.

The ability to interpret wellbeing as a strategic topic is also hindered by the managers’ individualistic view of the concept. Although wellbeing by definition is something that can be attained by an individual or group (WHO, 2017), the managers view wellbeing predominantly on an individual level. The individualistic view is influenced by the manager’s personal values as suggested by the model of McConville (2006). Individual happiness and satisfaction are the underlying values of the managers, which are also reflected in the considered goals of wellbeing management. The individualistic and happiness oriented view, constricts from seeing the organizational effects of wellbeing management and the way in which managers could use it as a tool to meet other organizational goals. The individualistic view also provides challenges once the teams grow. The wellbeing of each team member is expected to be managed individually, ultimately requiring a lot of resources. This approach provides difficulties when applied in larger teams, risking to result in more reactive than proactive wellbeing management. According to Dagenais-Desmarais and Savoie (2015) happiness focused
wellbeing programs are far less effective, making the individualistic happiness oriented approach to wellbeing management a poor investment from an organizational perspective.

5.1.2 Socially oriented view

The managers are aware of all aspects of wellbeing: physical, mental and social health, satisfaction and happiness. However, they seem to associate the physical wellbeing with health and safety management, psychological wellbeing and satisfaction with leadership and only the social aspect and happiness with the term wellbeing management. Although these three concepts are mentioned in close connection to each other, a distinction between the concepts is still observable.

The organizational culture and structure might be one of the reasons behind the managers viewing wellbeing management as separate from health and safety management. The organization has quite a strong health and safety culture, which focuses more on the physical aspect of health and the environment as well as minimizing safety hazards. Having a separate health and safety department might influence the way in which the physical aspect of wellbeing is seen as a stand-alone part, instead of a component of wellbeing.

The managers have a difficulty distinguishing between leadership and wellbeing management, often considering wellbeing management as a part of leadership. However, when describing leadership the managers focus on the psychological aspect of wellbeing management, mentioning e.g. clear definitions of roles and expectations, workload and motivation. Whereas speaking specifically of wellbeing management the managers focus on the social aspect of wellbeing and the happiness and satisfaction of the employees. This distinction proves that while the two concepts are interrelated, they are still seen somewhat separate from each other.

This separation between the physical, psychological and social aspects not only influence the managers ability to see wellbeing as a strategic question, but also affects how wellbeing management is operationalized in reality. Seeing these aspects as separate from each other risks over emphasizing one over the other and in the worst case neglecting certain aspects of wellbeing all together. Since the physical, psychological and social aspects together constitute wellbeing, giving one aspect more focus than the other is not expedient. The strong health and safety culture in the case organization risks overemphasizing the importance of physical wellbeing in regards to
the psychological and social wellbeing aspects, resulting in the latter two getting less attention and resources. Considering that mental health problems accounted for the majority of workday losses in Finland 2017 (Terveystalo, 2018), the case organization would most likely benefit from creating a more holistic approach to wellbeing management e.g. by including more psychological and social aspects to the health and safety management. Seeing all of the wellbeing aspects more evenly represented in the organization, might also influence managers' perceptions of wellbeing, ultimately influencing their personal wellbeing management.

The extent to which the managers view wellbeing as separate from health and safety management and leadership might be specific to the case organization and the industry. The industry is known for having strong focus on health and safety questions, and it is unsure on the basis of this research to which extent the organizational context affects the managers perception on this front. In other industries and organizations with less focus on the physical environment and safety issues, the managers' might have more focus on other aspects of wellbeing or a more holistic view on wellbeing.

5.1.3 Cultural view with focus on communication

The managers' understanding of wellbeing strongly influences their perception of wellbeing management. The social aspect is emphasized, as organizational culture and employee mentality is considered more important for wellbeing management than strategy and guidelines.

The underlying strategic values and strategic goals of wellbeing management, appearing in this research, are related to increasing employee happiness and satisfaction, reflecting the managers' personal values. According to the managers the way to reach these goals is through the creation of a wellbeing culture, which is maintained by efficient internal communication and people selection.

Managers' perceive effective wellbeing management as the creation of wellbeing culture that is present on all levels of the organization. The initiative for a wellbeing culture is expected to come from the top of the organization. The culture is initiated through placing wellbeing on the agenda and discussing the issue in the whole organization starting from the senior management. The wellbeing culture is maintained through frequent communication regarding wellbeing topics and leading by example.
On other levels of the organization the culture is maintained through recruiting managers who value wellbeing and care about people aspect of the managerial role. The managers are expected to have the appropriate personality, interest and motivation needed for wellbeing management, which stems from the managers’ personal values.

Managing an already ambiguous phenomenon like wellbeing exclusively through culture makes the whole process very abstract and difficult to grasp. This perception of wellbeing management explains why seeing wellbeing management as a strategic question is considered so challenging. While strategy requires goals, measures and monitoring, wellbeing and culture lack the concreteness needed to clearly understand how they can be measured, as presented in the managers critique and distrust towards wellbeing measures and KPI’s. While culture plays an important role in wellbeing management a more strategic approach is required in order create better results and more value.

The cultural view emphasizes the manager’s personality and innate motivation and interest for wellbeing management. This view highlights the need to consider wellbeing topics already in the recruitment phase. Relying on the managers’ personal interest on wellbeing means that the manager is given quite a lot of responsibility, but also freedom in deciding on how they like to manage wellbeing in their own teams. This autonomy might act as a motivating factor and could have some benefits, since the managers are able to create their own wellbeing strategies that cater to the needs of their team and their complex environment. However, providing the managers with freedom might also lead to some challenges from an organizational perspective. Decentralized wellbeing management might create inconsistencies in the quality of wellbeing management throughout the organization and provides challenges in measuring and monitoring the overall wellbeing in the organization.

Communication was mentioned as the main way of managing wellbeing. Open communication, trust and caring are all important parts of wellbeing management and contribute to a meaningful employee-manager relationship. However, primarily relying on informal communication as a tool for wellbeing management creates a risk for a more reactive approach. As many managers noted in the interviews, wellbeing tends to become something you acknowledge when it is already in decline or missing. Therefore it would be useful to implement other supporting processes to help with identifying patterns and provide the managers with information before the work ability is in decline or lost.
5.2 Middle manager’s experiences of their role in strategic wellbeing management

5.2.1 Role acceptance

The way middle managers conceptualize wellbeing and wellbeing management greatly influences the way they experience their role in strategic wellbeing management. Because the motivation for wellbeing management stems from the managers personal values and communication is perceived as part of their managerial responsibilities, wellbeing management is perceived to be quite effortless.

The managers feel that wellbeing management fits quite naturally their role and they feel comfortable with managing the wellbeing of their teams. Wellbeing management is not considered too challenging and the managers trust their abilities to manage the wellbeing of their teams efficiently, with the possibility for receiving support from HR and the health and safety department.

No resistance towards the new responsibilities could be detected from the middle managers, since they felt that they wellbeing management on some level always has been part of the managerial role. They considered the increased responsibility to be a logical development, since they are working in close connection with their team. This finding indicates that the introduction of a more comprehensive wellbeing strategy would be well received by the managers. Nonetheless, this view could be influenced by the way the managers conceptualize wellbeing. Since, they consider wellbeing management primarily to be conducted through informal communication, which they are already engaging in, their attitudes towards wellbeing management could be different if e.g. formal communication, surveys, monitoring and reporting would be introduced in the organization. While, these activities in the long run would support managers’ work, they could be seen as unnecessary, time-consuming tasks that are “dumped” upon them.

Although wellbeing management in general is considered a natural part of the managerial role, some challenges of the role as executors of wellbeing strategy were identified. Wellbeing management in itself created some challenges for the manager but also seemed to emphasize other challenges already experienced in the middle management positions. The main challenges identified are communication challenges, role dissonance and contradicting expectations. These challenges will further be
presented in more detail as they offer valuable information on what needs to be considered in order to support the successful execution of wellbeing strategy.

### 5.2.2 Communication challenges

As communication was considered the main tool for wellbeing management in the teams, many challenges experienced by the managers’ was related to this aspect. In order to manage wellbeing efficiently, managers rely on the information they receive through informal communication. The managers expressed that individual conversations, frequency of communication and trust is important for gaining meaningful information of the team members’ state of wellbeing. Individual conversations are considered important for creating a personal relationship between the manager and employee. Through individual conversations the manager is able to show care towards the employee and create trust. Trust on the other hand is considered important in sharing information about personal wellbeing or share observations of the wellbeing of colleagues and the team. Lastly, frequency of conversations is important for maintaining the trust as well as receiving up to date information about the team members’ wellbeing.

The main challenges experienced by the managers were resource restrictions and distance between the manager and the team. The resource restriction mainly refers to the time required for maintaining open communication. In small teams located in the same office, maintaining this communication is considered quite effortless. The managers are more easily able to detect shifts in mood or signs of declining working ability. However, in larger teams it is more difficult to find time for conversations with each team member. This leads to less frequent conversations and difficulty monitoring wellbeing. Ultimately this creates a more reactive approach, where the manager is only able to address the most crucial issues. Since the most urgent issues are prioritized, some employees will end up getting more attention than others, which might affect the wellbeing of overlooked employees negatively.

The second challenge mentioned by the manager was the distance between manager and the team. Some managers are working in separate locations to their teams and are unable to have frequent face-to-face conversations. This is experienced to negatively affect the ability to create and maintain trust, which leads to challenges receiving up to date information of the wellbeing of the team members. Many of the managers try to minimize this problem through visiting their teams regularly. Although frequent
traveling might support the manager-employee relationship, it is strenuous for the managers causing them additional stress.

The last communicational challenge experiences by the managers is related to the Finnish culture. They experience that open communication is sometimes difficult and time-consuming relating to the fact that Finns are known to be more quiet and introverted. This cultural aspect implies that Finnish employees are more reluctant to share information which is needed for efficient wellbeing management. Thus, more time and effort is required from the manager to gain information in a Finnish context.

Frequent informal communication might have some advantages in wellbeing management but the challenges mentioned above show that communication as a tool is difficult to apply on a larger scale. Solely relying on communication might lead to inconsistencies in wellbeing management both in teams and the whole organization. Concretely this might result in higher quality wellbeing management in smaller teams and more attention given to employees who are either demanding more attention or experiencing more severe wellbeing issues.

Larger teams and the time it would require to consider the wellbeing state of each team member emphasizes the tensions managers feel balancing with different roles. With a heavy workload and pressure to reach higher goals with fewer resources, managers are pushed to prioritize other strategic goals. This might lead to them involuntarily neglecting wellbeing management all together. This risks wellbeing becoming a topic that is only recognized when it is already missing in the team.

Communication as the primary tool for wellbeing management would require a lot of resources from an organizational perspective. Teams would have to be kept small in order to keep wellbeing management effortless, alternatively the managers would have to be granted more time to focus on their managerial tasks in stead of their technical responsibilities. A third, option would be to come up with other tools supporting the communication and solving the problems arising from team size, distance and culture.

5.2.3 Contradicting roles

The managers expressed having several different roles in their position, supporting the theory of McConville (2006). These roles create contradictions, which are experienced as tensions by the middle management. Two sets of contradictory roles emerged from the interviews; Business vs. People and Team member vs. Manager. These sets of roles
create tensions in the middle management, which are further emphasized by organizational, cultural and financial factors.

As suggested by the theories of McConville (2006) and Vakkayil et al. (2016), the managers in the case organization feel as if they have to fulfill a double role of balancing between the strategic, business related expectations and the managerial people related expectations. The personal values of the managers as well as the cultural development and context affect the manager’s willingness to accept the both roles. The managers recognized that the leadership culture is changing towards a more people oriented “coaching” role. This change requires managers to be inherently more people oriented and care about wellbeing topics. However, in this context it is notable that actively resisting wellbeing responsibilities could be considered controversial in the Finnish context, which might to some degree influence the overwhelmingly positive attitudes expressed by the managers. Although the managers in the case organization are willing to accept the double role, it does cause frustrations.

The second role conflict found in the research, but not clearly communicated by the managers themselves was the role of a team member and leader. The leadership culture in Finland is changing and the requirements of the new generations set on managers are different. Nowadays the manager is expected to work more closely with their team members, taking on technical responsibilities and acting as almost regular members of the team. However, the managers are simultaneously expected to lead and coach the team members as well as manage the wellbeing. These two roles are inherently contradicting and create a challenging situation for managers having to balance between the two.

One of the main sources of frustration experienced by the managers is the financial factor, which emphasizes the contradictions between the business and people roles. The political and economic environment has forced the organization to downsize and create a cost saving program, leading to managers having to do more with less. As suggested by the theory this situation forces the managers to choose one role over the other (McConville, 2006). The implications of this in practice have mainly been prioritizing the business over people. Managers have been forced to either cut down on their people management or allocate their spare time for this task. The resource related tensions were illustrated by stories of how the managers could see their teams being overworked, yet having no ability to lessen their workload.
Differing and contradictory expectations was the second source of major frustrations, again emphasizing the role challenges experienced by the managers. These differing expectations stem from organizational structure and hierarchy as well as cultural differences between the branch and the headquarters.

Similarly to the McConville (2006) theory, the managers experience contradicting expectations from the senior management, customers, their own teams and watchdog organizations. While the manager is from an organizational and customer perspective expected to increase value and profit, the team members are expecting the managers to consider their employee rights, health and wellbeing. These expectations emphasize the tensions experienced by the managers, while they have to balance between the needs of different stakeholders.

The expectations of the different stakeholders are affected by their underlying goals and values as well as the cultural context of the organizations. As suggested by the strategic wellbeing theory, the underlying motivation for wellbeing management is financial, either focusing on cost savings or increased productivity (Aura et al. 2016). The personal values of the managers concerning wellbeing management are people focused, mainly concerning the happiness and satisfaction of the team members. According to McConville (2006) these differing values, affected by the cultural context, would contribute to the experienced tensions of the middle management.

The culture of the headquarter influences the expectations set on managers from an organizational perspective, while the Finnish culture influences the expectations of the employees and customers. Finland is increasingly focusing on employee wellbeing setting requirements on wellbeing management (Aura et al. 2016), which is reflected in the culture and employee expectations. As some of the managers phrased it, Finnish employees feel “entitled” and expect the employer to consider their rights and wellbeing in job design. Simultaneously the corporation is perceived to have less focus on the people aspect in comparison to Finland. Since the merger of the organization the senior management became predominantly southern European, which according to some managers has created even higher tensions, since the cultures of the branch and the new management are further apart.

In addition to the cultural aspect, differing legislations create further strains. Oftentimes the Finnish labor law creates restrictions, affecting the manager’s ability to adhere to corporate strategy. A typical example is how the length and cost of projects is
affected by the restrictions caused by the working hours act and high overtime and holiday compensations. As the corporate strategy fails to consider the local context the managers are appointed difficult or even impossible expectations. The cultural and legislative differences are further accentuated by the matrix structure of the organization. Some managers working in the Finnish branch report to functional managers in the head quarters abroad, while having a local disciplinary manager in Finland. This reporting relationship might occasionally lead to the manager receiving contradictory expectations, contributing to the challenge of the double role.

5.2.4 The managers’ contradicting expectations

In a similar manner as the managers are subject to contradictory expectations by several stakeholder, they themselves have conflicting expectations towards the organization. These contradicting expectations cause additional challenges in the actualization of wellbeing strategy.

The managers consider more autonomy and involvement in the strategy process to be solutions to the contradictory expectations set on them. Having more decision-making power would create more agility in the organization and help the managers act faster to wellbeing issues. The managers want to have freedom to make their own interpretations and adaptations of strategy to fit the needs of their own teams. They enjoy the freedom they have in creating their own approach and style of wellbeing management and the freedom is considered a motivational factor contributing to the positive attitude towards the role. The Health and safety and HR departments are considered support functions, which can be consulted if needed.

While the managers seem to enjoy the freedom and desire more autonomy, they are simultaneously expressing a need for more concrete guidelines. The organizational strategies are often experienced to be abstract and vague, leaving too much room for interpretation. This means that the managers are expecting more freedom to make their own interpretations but are simultaneously unwilling to take responsibility for their own decisions. This creates a paradoxical situation where the managers are expecting more freedom without added responsibility.

From an organizational perspective would require ensuring that all key actors in the operationalization of the wellbeing strategy have the same understanding of the concept of wellbeing and the created strategy. The strategy would also need to be
concrete enough for the managers to understand what is expected of them, yet leaving some room to adapt the strategy to surrounding context.

Figure 4  The middle managers’ conceptualization of wellbeing management
6 CONCLUSIONS

This research has reviewed the perceptions of middle managers regarding wellbeing, strategic wellbeing and their personal roles in strategic wellbeing management. Wellbeing is quite an ambiguous topic and focusing on it from a strategic perspective is globally still a relatively new concept. As middle managers are in a Finnish context expected to contribute to the execution of wellbeing strategy, it is meaningful to understand how they conceptualize wellbeing and perceive their own role in wellbeing management.

The conclusions of this thesis are that middle managers tend to view wellbeing on an individual level as a socially focused phenomenon. They see culture as the driving force of wellbeing management and informal communication as the main tool for monitoring the experience of wellbeing in their teams. The personal values of the managers influence their perception of the goals of wellbeing management, as they strive to increase the happiness and satisfaction of their team members.

Interestingly the individualistic view seems to be contradicting with the social and cultural views. The managers tend to understand wellbeing as something experienced by the individual rather than the team, department or organization as a whole. Further, the individually experienced state of wellbeing is considered to be influenced by the social environment and interaction between the individuals. The social environment may in turn be affected by the employees’ personal experience of wellbeing or lack thereof. One explanation to how the managers are able to hold contradicting views on wellbeing is that the individualistic view is more connected with the experience of wellbeing at work, while the social and cultural views can be considered to be the antecedents, which affect the individual experience of wellbeing. The different views of wellbeing are connected to separate aspects of wellbeing, thus decreasing the experience of contradiction in this context.

The contradiction between the individualistic view and the social and cultural view, stem from the managers’ personal values. The managers tend to see the experienced happiness and satisfaction of individual employees as the end goal of wellbeing management. Wellbeing management is on the other hand understood as social interaction and culture. Therefore wellbeing management is essentially perceived as an organizational and collective effort to increase the level of satisfaction and happiness experienced by individual employees.
The managers are in general accepting their role as executors of wellbeing strategy, considering it to be a natural development. This finding contradicts with the research done by Vakkayil et al. (2016), who suggest that managers often are unwilling to take on this type of a double role. While the managers’ general attitude is positive, the new role is not problem-free. The main tensions are caused by contradicting roles and expectations set on the managers, which are only emphasized by other factors such as organizational structure, resources and culture.

The results of this thesis support previous the research by McConville (2006) regarding the tensions experienced by the middle managers. The managers expressed having to balance between several different roles set on them by the senior management, employees, customers and external organizations. The main role tensions stemmed from the managers having to balance between their technical responsibilities related to the organizations core business and their managerial responsibilities. The lack of sufficient resources also created additional role ambiguity, when the managers are simultaneously expected to be team members and leaders supporting the earlier findings of Holden (2000).

The managers’ experiences of their own roles can however to some extent also be seen as contradicting, since they are simultaneously expressing acceptance of the role, yet finding it difficult to combine with the other roles. This contradiction can be explained by the managers’ greater willingness to balance between several roles than make compromises in their personal values. Since wellbeing is considered an important topic, not accepting the role in wellbeing management would conflict with the manager’s personal beliefs and values. To avoid this conflict, managers are willing to accept their role in wellbeing management with the expense of having to balance this role with their other managerial responsibilities.

In line with previous theory by McConville (2006) and Vakkayil et al. (2016) the role tensions are further emphasized by organizational factors. Lack of sufficient resources e.g. financial resources and time result in the managers often having to prioritize their technical tasks over the managerial responsibilities, allocate personal time to managerial tasks and sometimes implement strategies that might influence wellbeing of their team negatively as also suggested by Holden & Roberts (2004) and Renwick (2003). The organizational structure and culture also creates additional challenges for the managers, when the cultures of the local organization and head quarters have different approaches to and requirements for wellbeing management.
Previous wellbeing has largely focused on understanding the individual employee or the senior management, thus will this research contribute to the research gap by improving the understanding of middle managers who are important actors in the actualization of wellbeing strategy.

In practice these findings will help with the process of creating successful wellbeing strategies. The findings suggest that there is a need for a more comprehensive approach to wellbeing management, educating managers on how all the wellbeing aspects, the physical, psychological and social are interrelated and need to be equally considered in the managers’ personal wellbeing management. In addition to this managers need to be involved in the creation of wellbeing strategy, in order to create realistic and reachable goals supporting other goals possessed by the managers. This study also suggests a need for agility in the organization, for the manager to be able to receive appropriate support and resources to fulfill their expectations.

Being a case study this research enables the deep analysis and understanding of surrounding context. However, while enabling a deeper understanding of factors affecting the managers’ conceptualization of wellbeing, the focus on only one organization limits the generalizability of results. The research is focused on the particular case of a Finnish branch of a global organization present in the energy industry, which affects the results of the study. Therefore any similar studies conducted in other contexts might get differing results.

As the pressure on middle management increases further research is needed in detecting more efficient tools to be used for wellbeing management alongside communication. As communication as a tool for wellbeing management lacks scalability and is challenging to adapt to wellbeing management on distance, research in this area would provide the field with valuable information.

As the positive attitude towards the wellbeing management responsibilities is affected by the way managers conceptualize wellbeing and might affected by the introduction of more structured wellbeing management, another suggestion for further research would be to study the attitudes of middle managers towards more structured wellness programs and their own roles in the implementation.
7 SVENSK SAMMANFATTNING

7.1 Inledning


Strategisk ledning av arbetsplatsvälmående med klara mål, tillräckliga resurser, systematisk uppföljning anses vara det mest effektiva sättet att skapa resultat. Det Finska samhället rör sig allt mer i den strategiska riktningen genom att kräva att företag mer proaktivt tar tag i välmåendefrågan. Förändringen i den strategiska riktningen innebär bl.a. decentralisering av arbetsplatsvälmåendeledning. För att uppnå kraven av proaktivitet förväntas cheferna ta mer ansvar för välmåendet i sina egna team.

Mellanchefer fungerar som en länk mellan ledningen och de anställda och spelar enligt forskning en oerhört viktig roll i förverkligandet av strategin. Mellanchefer har en
tydligare uppfattning om välmåendet i sina team och är därmed väsentliga i framgångsrikt förverkligande av välmåendestrategi (O’Neil, 2017).

Enligt forskning har mellanchefer en krävande roll i organisationer, då de utsätts för press både från ledningen och från de anställda. Mellanchefer får ständigt balansera mellan motstridiga förväntningar och roller, medan de förväntas verkställa strategi som kommunicerats från ledningen (McConville, 2006). Eftersom mellanchefernas insats i verkställandet av strategi är betydande och deras roll inom ledning av välmående blir allt mer omfattande, är det viktigt att förstå hur de tolkar välmående, ledning av välmående samt sin egen roll som verkställare av välmående strategi.

7.1.1 Problemområde
Välmående är ett brett utforskat ämne, men forskningen tenderar huvudsakligen närma sig frågan från ett individ–perspektiv. I organisationsstudier är välmående ofta forskat från anställdas synvinkel med fokus på faktorer som påverkar känslan av personligt välmående. (Danna & Griffin, 1991) En del forskning existerar även om ledningens uppfattning om ämnet och de utmaningar de anknyter till arbetsplatsvälmåndeledning.

Väldigt lite forskning existerar om mellanchefernas syn på arbetsplatsvälmåndeledning och deras roll som verkställare av välmående strategi. En inblick i deras tankar kring detta tema skulle underlätta skapandet av en framgångsrik välmående strategi samt öka förståelsen för de problem som mellancheferna upplever i sin roll gällande arbetsplatsvälmåndeledning.

7.1.2 Syfte
Syftet med denna forskning är att undersöka den uppfattning mellancheferna har om välmående, välmående ledning och strategisk arbetsplatsledning, samt hur de upplever sin egen roll som verkställare av arbetsplatsvälmående strategi. De forskningsfrågor denna forskning ämnar besvara är följande:

Forskningsfråga 1: Hur konceptualiserar mellanchefer välmående och välmående ledning från ett strategiskt perspektiv?

Forskningsfråga 2: Hur upplever mellanchefer sin egen roll i strategisk arbetsplatsvälmåndeledning?
7.1.3 Begränsningar

Mellanchefernas tolkning av välmående och strategisk arbetsplatsvälmåendeledning kommer att undersökas i form av en fallstudie. Forskningen fokuserar på mellanchefer i en finsk filial av ett globalt energibolag. Denna avhandling ämnar kontribuera till organisationsforskning och kommer främst att basera sig på tidigare forskning inom området. Därmed kommer denna avhandling inte att fokusera på välmåendeforskning inom andra vetenskapsgrenar.

Eftersom välmående har ett större fokus i en nordisk kontext och strategisk arbetsplatsvälmåendeledning är ett eftersträvat mål i finska organisationer kommer denna forskning att granska dessa koncept i första hand från ett finskt perspektiv.

Analysen om mellanchefernas roller kommer att granskas från ett välmående perspektiv, därmed kommer inte forskningen fokusera på generella upplevelser av mellanchefspositionen.

7.2 Teori

Välmående är ursprungligen en förgrening av hälso- och säkerhetsforskning och har idag forskats inom ett antal olika forskningsgrenar. Definitionen av välmående är inte entydig bland de olika forskningsgrenarna och även inom organisationsforskning har ämnet forskats från flera olika synvinklar. (Danna & Griffin, 1991)


Strategiskt välmående är en underkategori av välmående, som syftar till de välmående faktorer som direkt eller indirekt påverkar organisationens prestation. Medan
strategiskt välmående påverkar organisationens resultat, anses strategiskt arbetsplatsvälmåendeledning vara de processer samt aktiviteter i organisationen som påverkar det strategiska välmående. (Aura et al. 2016)

7.2.1 **Strategisk ledning av arbetsplatsvälmående**


7.2.2 **Mellanchefsroll och ansvarsfördelning**


Mellanchefspositionens hierarkiska läge skapar en hel del utmaningar. Mellanchefer förväntas representera både ledningen och de anställda. De får ofta fungera som medlare mellan dessa genom att tolka strategin för de anställda samt uttrycka anställdas vilja till ledningen. I positionen får mellancheferna ofta hantera motstridiga förväntningar och försöka balansera mellan kraven från ledningen, de anställda och externa parter. De olika motstridiga roller som mellancheferna förväntas ta, även
kallad roll dissonans, skapar spänningar. Dessa spänningar betonas ytterligare av faktorer som den ekonomiska och politiska miljön. Den ekonomiska miljön har lett till press på att sänka kostnader i organisationen, vilket i sin tur har bl.a. lett till uppsägningar och större arbetsbördor för många. För mellanchefer har detta inneburit bl.a. behovet att ta på sig fler roller och arbetsuppgifter, exempelvis HR ansvar, samtidigt som de tilldelats mindre resurser att utföra dessa uppgifter. (McConville, 2006)


7.3 Metod

7.3.1 Forskningsfilosofi, inriktning och design

Denna forskning ämnar skapa ny kunskap inom organisationsteorin och förklara hur mellanchefer tolkar välmående och sin egen roll. Eftersom syftet med forskningen är att ta reda på ”vad som är” i en social kontext kommer forskningen att utgå ifrån en ontologisk subjektiv filosofi. Eventuella ställningstaganden till kvaliteten av kunskap görs utifrån en epistemologiskt tolkande filosofi.

Forskningen baserar sig på förkunskap inom välmående men forskningens slutgiltiga syfte formas genom de data som samlas in, därmed är forskningsinriktningen i denna studie abduktiv.


Fallorganisationen valdes utifrån förkunskaper om organisationens växande välmående intresse samt p.g.a. tillgången till intressanta data. Fallorganisationen var
samt de mellanchefer som intervjuades var bekanta till mig från tidigare. Redan existerande förtroende med intervjuobjekten samt bakgrundsinformation om organisationen bidrog mer till kvaliteten av data samt förståelsen av kontexten. Möjliga förutbestämda uppfattningar kan påverka insamlingen av data samt analysen (Saunders et al. 2007). Medvetenhet om denna risk samt korrigering av förutbestämda uppfattningar användes för att motverka möjliga nackdelar.

7.3.2 Forskningsmetod


För att svara på forskningsfrågorna intervjuades fallorganisationens mellanchefer i semi-strukturerade intervjuer. Alla mellanchefer i fallorganisationen kontaktades via e-post och intervjuades huvudsakligen i organisationens huvudkontor. Två intervjuer gjordes via Skype.

En intervjuguide (bilaga 1) med fyra olika teman användes för att skapa struktur i data och möjlighet till jämförelser mellan olika intervjuer. De fyra temana var: välstående—, välståendeledning, strategisk välståendeledning och mellanchefsroller. Alla intervjuer bandades in och transkriberades för att underlätta analysprocessen. I både e-posten och intervjun påmindes alla deltagare om processens anonymitet samt konfidentialitet.

7.4 Resultat och analys

7.4.1 Fallorganisation

Fallorganisationen i denna forskning är en finsk filial av ett globalt energibolag. Bolaget är en av marknadsledarna i sin industri med en årsomsättning på 2,4 md euro. Bolaget styrs från huvudkontoret utomlands och har globalt kring 4 500 anställda.

Det globala bolaget slogs nyligen ihop med en annan stor aktör i branschen. Sammanfogningen samt förändringar i den ekonomiska och politiska miljön ledde till ett antal omstrukturerings- och nedskärningar i organisationen som även till en viss mån påverkade den finska filialen.

Trots väldigt stark hälso- och säkerhetskultur har välmående inte varit i ett stort fokus. År 2015 startades ett projekt med syfte att kartlägga och förbättra välmående i organisationen. Nedskärningarna i organisationen ledde dock till att detta projekt lades på is och välmående ledningen decentraliserades till filialerna och dotterbolagen.

I den finska filialen var lagstiftningen en drivande orsak till att öka fokus på välmående. Under våren 2017 skapades en modell för tidigt stöd, vars mål är att förse de anställda med klara riktlinjer om hur man kan gå tillväga om man upplever att en kollega eller man själv är nära att mista arbetsförmågan.

### 7.4.2 Observationsresultat

Alla mellanchefer deltog i en obligatorisk välmående workshop i oktober 2017. Under dagen presenterades och diskuterades välmående ledning samt mellanchefernas ansvar gällande välmående i sina egna team. Under dagen var det tydligt att välmående är ett tvetydigt koncept och svårigheter att förstå konceptet med välmåendeledning kunde observeras.

Välmående ansågs vara ett mycket abstrakt koncept och mer konkreta verktyg för välmående ledning efterfrågades. Utifrån denna observation samt mellanchefernas viktiga roll inom verkställande av välmåendeledning, valdes mellanchefernas tolkning av strategiskt välmående och sin egen roll till fokusområden för denna studie.

### 7.4.3 Välmående konceptualisering

Tre olika synvinklar på välmående och välmående ledning identifierades utifrån intervjuerna. Dessa synvinklar är: individualistisk lycko-orientering, social orientering och kulturell orientering med fokus på kommunikation.

Den individualistiska lycko-orienterade synen syftar till mellanchefernas tendens att fokusera på anställdas personliga känsla av välmående istället för den generella nivån av välmående i organisationen. De förknippar välmående med det personliga livet och fritiden och betonade vikten av balans mellan arbete och fritid. Målet med
välmåendeledning ansågs vara att öka känslan av lycka bland gruppmedlemmarna, vilket strider emot den strategiska synen av välmåendeledning.

Denna syn på välmående kan på många sätt vara problematisk från ett strategiskt perspektiv, eftersom den betonar individens eget ansvar och försvagar arbetets effekt på välmående så väl som tonar ner chefens ansvar i välmåendeledning. Även om individen i slutändan har ansvar för sitt eget välmående, har organisationen skyldighet att förse anställda med möjligheter att framgångsrikt fullfölja sina arbetsuppgifter.

Den socialt orienterade synen syftar till mellanchefernas benägenhet att endast koppla välmående ledning till den sociala aspekten av välmående. Välmående ledning anses delvis vara skilt från hälso- och säkerhetsledning samt ledarskap. Medan hälso- och säkerhetsledning handlar om att hantera den fysiska arbetsmiljön och dess risker, handlar ledarskap om att hantera de psykiska aspekterna av arbetet. Även om fysiska, psykiska och sociala faktorer ansågs samverka, kopplades termen välmående ledning starkast till sociala välmående faktorer.

En orsak till denna separation kan vara den starka hälso- och säkerhetskulturen i organisationen. Organisationen har en skild avdelning som endast fokuserar på hälsa, säkerhet och miljö, något som kan påverka att den fysiska aspekten anses vara separat från välmåendeledning. Psykiska välmående faktorer, som arbetsbörda, arbetsuppgifter och motivation kategoriserades under ledarskap. Termen välmåendeledning kopplades starkast till den sociala aspekten av välmående, som förhållande till kolleger och chef samt gemensamma aktiviteter.

Denna fördelning mellan de olika aspekterna av välmående riskerar att vissa välmående faktorer betonas mer än andra och leder i värsta fall till att någon välmående aspekt försummas. En mer holistisk förståelse av välmående och mer jämn representation av de olika aspekterna i organisationen kunde även utveckla mellanchefernas personliga välmående ledning.

Sista identifierade synen, kulturella synen med fokus på kommunikation innebär att kultur anses vara den mest ändamålsenliga metoden att upprätthålla välmående i organisationen. Mellancheferna anser effektiv välmåendeledning vara att skapa en kultur som genomsyrar hela organisationen. Denna kultur skapas genom att lägga välmående på agendan och inleda diskussion om välmående på ledningsnivå. Därefter upprätthålls välmåendeledningen av frekvent informell kommunikation gällande
välmående samt genom att föregå med gott exempel. Rekrytering anses vara en nyckelprocess i skapandet och upprätthållandet av kulturen, då man i organisationen skall prioritera chefer som har ett intresse för välmående.

Denna kulturella syn betonar mellanchefernas personligheter och intresse för välmående. Således torde man i rekryterings fasen redan ta hänsyn till välmående. Att förlita sig på mellanchefernas personliga intresse ger mer utrymme för dem att själva skapa sin egen stil av välmåendeledning. Trots att detta kan utgöra en motiverande faktor för mellancheferna, kan detta leda till utmaningar från ett organisationsperspektiv. Decentralisering kan innebära inkonsekvent välmåendeledning i organisationen och skapa utmaningar i att mäta och uppfölja generellt välmående i organisationen.

7.4.4 Rollattityd och uppfattning


Även om mellancheferna har en positiv attityd mot välmående ledning uppkom en del utmaningar som rollen innebär. Dessa utmaningar kan delas in i tre kategorier: kommunikationsutmaningar, rolldissonans och motstridiga förväntningar.

Mellancheferna ansåg att välmående ledning huvudsakligen innefattar upprätthållande av välmående kultur genom frekvent informell kommunikation. Denna kommunikation ansågs vara naturlig och enkel då teamet är litet och befinner sig på kontor. Då teamet blir större ansågs den informella kommunikationen ta mer tid och kräva mer planering från chefsens sida. Detta krav betonade bl.a. rolldissonansen som upplevs i mellanchefspositionen, då chefen måste balansera mellan tekniska och människorelaterade ledningsuppgifter. Distans ansågs också vara en utmaning, då kommunikationen med team medlemmar på andra orter kräver mer ansträngning och koordinering. Kultur identifierades som en tredje utmaning till kommunikation, då
finska anställda anses vara mer introverta och tysta, vilket kräver högre proaktivitet från chefens håll.

Mellancheferna anser sig ha flera olika roller och tvingas ofta balansera mellan ansvar över företagsverksamheten och människorelaterat ledarskapsansvar. Utmaningarna med denna balans betonas av resurbrist, motstridiga förväntningar från ledningen, anställda och kunder, företagsstruktur och kulturskillnader mellan det globala bolaget och den finländska filialen.

Mellancheferna känner ofta att de inte har möjlighet att satsa på välmående ledning i den utsträckning de skulle önska och beskrev situationer då de identifierat problem i välmående men inte haft möjlighet att påverka situationen. Cheferna tvingas välja mellan de två rollerna och är i vissa fall tvungna att minska på tiden de lägger på välmående ledning eller använda sin fritid till att hantera välmående i sina team.

Motstridiga förväntningar från organisationen, anställda och kunder skapar spänningar i mellanchefspositionen då cheferna försöker tillfredsställa alla parter. Denna situation försvåras ytterligare av krav som ställs bl.a. av arbetslagstiftningen, kollektivavtalen och de lokala avtalena.

Organisationsstrukturen och kulturen påverkar de krav som ställs på mellancheferna likväl som de resurser som tilldelas från den globala organisationen. En del mellanchefer har en funktionell chef utomlands och disciplinär chef i Finland, vilket tidvis leder till känslan av motstridiga förväntningar och bidrar till utmaningen att balansera mellan de olika rollerna.

Mellancheferna visar sig även själva ha motstridiga förväntningar. De anser att lösningen på de utmaningar som positionen innefattar är att tilldela mellanchefer mer besluts frihet. De önskar möjlighet till att själva tolka strategin och tillämpa den fritt i sina egna team. Dock önskar de samtidigt mer konkreta riktlinjer och verktyg för att verkställa strategin. Detta tyder på motstridiga förväntningar där mellancheferna önskar mer frihet utan att själva behöva ansvara för de beslut de tar.

7.5 **Slutsatser**

Denna studie ämnade svara på frågorna om hur mellanchefer konceptualiserar välmående och välmående ledning från ett strategiskt perspektiv samt hur de upplever sin roll som verkställare av arbetsplatsvälmående-strategi.
Mellancheferna betonade den sociala aspekten av välmående och tolkade välmående ledning som upprätthållande av välmående kultur genom informell kommunikation.

Cheferna var positivt inriktade till sin roll som verkställare av strategin och såg den som en naturlig del av sina arbetsuppgifter. Dock ansågs ansvaret ha en del utmaningar som har sin grund i motsägelsefulla förväntningar. Dessa utmaningar betonas ytterligare av faktorer som organisationsstruktur, resurser och kultur.

Tidigare forskning har lagt mycket tyngd på att undersöka enskilda anställda och högsta ledningen, därav bidrar denna avhandling till forskningen genom att ge en inblick i mellanchefers tolkning om välmående och välmåendeledning. Denna inblick är värdefull eftersom mellanchefer spelar en oerhört viktig roll i skapandet av en framgångsrik välmåendeledning. Denna inblick är värdefull eftersom mellanchefer spelar en oerhört viktig roll i skapandet av en framgångsrik välmåendeledning. Denna inblick är värdefull eftersom mellanchefer spelar en oerhört viktig roll i skapandet av en framgångsrik välmåendeledning. Denna inblick är värdefull eftersom mellanchefer spelar en oerhört viktig roll i skapandet av en framgångsrik välmåendeledning.

I praktiken hjälper denna forskning i processen att skapa en fungerande välmående strategi. Utifrån denna analyser kunde organisationer ha nytt av att skapa mer omfattande välmående ledning som beaktar alla aspekter av välmående. Mellanchefer borde inkluderas i processen för strategiskapandet för att se till att de mål som sätts är realistiska och i linje med verksamhetens övriga mål. Organisationen borde även sträva efter flexibilitet för att motverka de spänningar som upplevs i mellanchefspositioner.

Framtida forskning kunde fokusera på skapandet av fungerande verktyg som kunde stöda välmåendeledning i mer krävande situationer som i stora team samt välmåendeledning på distans.
REFERENCES


APPENDIX 1 INTERVIEW GUIDE

Information on interview length, audio recording, transcription, data handling, anonymity and confidentiality.

General

- What is your career background and how did you end up in your current position?
- What do you do in your current position?

Wellbeing

- How would you describe wellbeing?
  - Wellbeing at work?
- How do you believe that wellbeing/lack of wellbeing affects the organization?

Strategic Wellbeing

- How is wellbeing considered in your organization?
  - What are the main goals?
  - What is done to reach these goals?
- Who do you believe the key actors are in the management of wellbeing? Why?

Manager role

- Tell me about your role regarding the management of wellbeing?
  - Has the role of a manager changed over time? How?
  - How has the change affected you?
- What do others expect from you regarding wellbeing? What do you expect from them?
- What is the most challenging part of managing wellbeing?
  - Most challenging in looking after wellbeing of your team?
  - Do you consider you get enough support for managing wellbeing?
- What is the best part of managing wellbeing?

Development

- How could wellbeing be managed better in your organization?
- How could your role in wellbeing management be supported?

Is there anything else you would like to tell regarding wellbeing?

How did you experience the interview?
How did you experience the questions?
**Haastattelupohja**

Tietoa haastattelun rakenteesta, kesto, äänittäminen, litterointi, tiedon käsitteley, anonymiteetti ja luottamuksellisuus.

**Yleiset**

- Mikä on ura taustasi, ja miten päädyit nykyiseen tehtävääsi?
- Mitä teet nykyisessä tehtävässä?

**Wellbeing**

- Miten kuvaisit hyvinvointia?
- Miten uskot hyvinvoinnin tai hyvinvoinnin puutteen vaikuttavan organisaatioon?

**Strateginen hyvinvointi**

- Miten hyvinvointi huomioidaan sinun organisaatiossa?
  - Mitkä ovat tärkeimmät tavoitteet?
  - Mitä tehdään tavoitteiden saavuttamiseksi?
- Ketkä ovat mielestäsi päätoimijat hyvinvoinnin johtamisessa? Miksi?

**Esimiesrooli**

- Kerro omasta roolistasi työhyvinvoinnin johtamisessa
  - Onko rooli muuttunut ajan myötä? Miten?
  - Miten muutos on vaikuttanut sinuun?
- Mitä muut odottavat sinulta työhyvinvointiin liittyen? Mitä odotat heiltä?
- Mikä on vaativiinta työhyvinvoinnin johtamiseen liittyen?
- Mikä on parasta työhyvinvoinnin johtamiseen liittyen?

**Kehitys**

- Miten hyvinvointia voitaisiin johtaa paremmin organisaatiossa?
- Miten rooliasi työhyvinvoinnin johtamisessa voitaisiin tukea?

Onko sinulla muuta kerrottavaa/ kommentoitavaa työhyvinvoinnin johtamiseen liittyen?

Miten koit haastattelun?
Miten koit kysymykset?
**Intervjuguide**

Information om intervjun, längd, inspelning, transkribering, data behandling, anonymitet och konfidentialitet.

**Generellt**

- Vad är din yrkesbakgrund och hur hamnade du i din nuvarande position?
- Vad gör du i din nuvarande position?

**Välmående**

- Hur skulle du beskriva välmående?
- Hur tror du att välmående/ brist på välmående påverkar organisationen?

**Strategiskt välmående**

- Hur beaktas välmående i din organisation?
  - Vilka är viktigaste målen?
  - Vad görs för att nå dessa mål?
- Vem tycker du är nyckelaktörerna gällande förvaltning av välmående (Wellbeing management / Työhyvinvoinnin johtaminen) Varför?

**Förmansroller**

- Berätta om din roll gällande förvaltning av välmående (wellbeing management, työhyvinvoinnin johtaminen)
  - Har rollen ändrats over tiden? Hur?
  - Hur har förändringen påverkat dig?
- Vad förväntar andra av dig gällande förvaltning av välmående? Vad förväntar du av dem?
- Vad är det mest krävande gällande förvaltning av välmående?
- Vad är det bästa med förvaltning av välmående?

**Utveckling**

- Hur kunde välmående ledas/förvaltas bättre i din organisation?
- Hur kunde din roll gällande förvaltning/ledning av välmående stödas?

Har du något mer gällande ämnet som du ville berätta om?

Hur upplevde du intervjun?
Hur upplevde du frågorna?