

Fiercely Independent? How Autonomy Affects the Experience of Engagement in Manual Labor

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FIERCELY INDEPENDENT?

How Autonomy Affects the Experience of Engagement in Manual Labor

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| <p>Abstract</p> <p>Work engagement is a concept that has been under inspection from various different points of view over the last two decades. The approaches range from personal, employee-centric views to managerial approaches. As engagement has been proven to have many benefits for both the individual and the organization, there has been much interest towards finding out the antecedents of engagement. However, most studies have been concentrated on people who can be defined as knowledge workers, with manual laborers receiving less interest.</p> <p>This study focused on the personal experiences of engagement felt by manual laborers, and was conducted by means of ethnographic participant observation in the context of maintenance workers at Lassila & Tikanoja, a large Finnish property maintenance company. There were seven informants altogether, which were observed during six separate sessions. Additional information was obtained through discussions with Lassila & Tikanoja management and by studying the company's management principles. In the initial phase of the study, the objective was to identify factors which affect engagement in the context. As a result, autonomy emerged as the most prominent antecedent. After this discovery, further analysis of the data was focused on identifying the psychological pathways autonomy affects engagement. The path framework of engagement introduced by Kahn (1990) and further developed by May et al. (2004) was used as a guide in sorting and analyzing the data.</p> <p>The primary finding of the study was the strong relationship between autonomy and engagement in the research context. Furthermore, psychological meaningfulness was identified as the most prominent psychological pathway autonomy affects engagement through. Additional findings include the identification of maintenance work as complex and knowledge-intensive work, the observation of the maintenance worker's culture as strong yet potentially vulnerable, the discovery of the homogeneity of the maintenance teams and the observation of Lassila & Tikanoja's style of managing autonomy as a very hands-off approach.</p> | |
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Table of contents

| | |
|--|-----------|
| 1. Introduction | 5 |
| 1.1 Significance of work engagement | 6 |
| 1.2 Research questions and objectives | 9 |
| 1.3 Structure of the thesis | 10 |
| 2. Theory | 11 |
| 2.1 Engagement | 11 |
| 2.1.1 Origins and definitions of engagement | 11 |
| 2.1.2 Conceptual issues | 15 |
| 2.2 Autonomy | 18 |
| 2.3 Frameworks used in this study | 21 |
| 3. Methodology | 28 |
| 3.1 Ethnography | 28 |
| 3.2 Including Elements of Grounded theory | 32 |
| 3.3 The sample | 34 |
| 3.3.1 Lassila & Tikanoja | 36 |
| 3.3.2 Informants | 39 |
| 3.4 The research process | 42 |
| 4. Linking autonomy and work engagement in the empirical data | 45 |
| 4.1 Factors affecting psychological meaningfulness | 45 |
| 4.1.1 Job enrichment | 45 |
| 4.1.2 Work role fit | 53 |
| 4.1.3 Client relations | 57 |
| 4.2 Factors affecting psychological safety | 63 |
| 4.2.1 Coworker relations | 63 |
| 4.2.2 Supervisor relations | 65 |
| 4.2.3 Coworker norms | 67 |
| 4.2.4 Self-consciousness | 70 |
| 4.3 Factors affecting psychological availability | 70 |
| 4.3.1 Resources | 70 |
| 4.3.2 Outside activities | 72 |
| 5. Conclusions | 73 |

| | | |
|-------|--|----|
| 5.1 | Findings | 73 |
| 5.1.1 | Significance of autonomy to work engagement | 73 |
| 5.1.2 | Maintenance as knowledge-intensive work | 75 |
| 5.1.3 | Fierce independence – a sign of vulnerability? | 76 |
| 5.1.4 | Homogenous teams | 77 |
| 5.1.5 | Hands-off management | 79 |
| 5.2 | Limitations | 81 |
| 5.3 | Implications for further research | 82 |

1. Introduction

The first seeds for what would become my study concerning autonomy and personal engagement in the context of manual labor were planted late in the summer of 2009, when I contacted professor Liisa Välikangas from Aalto University department of management to inquire whether she was aware of any cross-disciplinary research projects that would benefit from the contribution of a management student in the form a master's thesis study. Luckily, professor Välikangas herself was involved in such a project, TransAct (funded by TEKES and initiated in 2007), which studied transformative action and CEO leadership in global companies. I would learn that one central concept the project was involved in studying was, along with commitment creep, strategic resilience and leadership levers, that of work engagement.

After brief initial discussions it became evident that this was indeed exactly what I had been looking for. In fact, matters related to personal engagement had been a conscious or unconscious preoccupation of mine for the majority of my adult life as I tried to grasp and understand the intricate and complex reality of working life - whether in the context of office work, children's summer camps or the military. Most significantly, when I've been either extremely excited about my work, doubling my efforts, or conversely felt like an outsider in a work community, I've often tried to reflect on what in the work environment caused these psychological reactions. I found it especially bothersome that certain working environments left me feeling like an outsider and indifferent to the results of my work. I had simply never heard of the concepts of work engagement or disengagement until getting involved in this research project; as a result, I could not put a finger on some of the psychological states I experienced in previous work environments. When the concept was briefly explained to me, I knew that this was what I had been looking for.

1.1 Significance of work engagement

Despite work engagement being already a twenty-year-old construct, it is still an extremely relevant and contemporary topic. While there is abundant practitioner literature - albeit of mixed quality - on various aspects of the concept, but solid academic articles are not exactly plentiful. For example, the construct of work engagement did not even have a Finnish-language equivalent until 2004, when Jari Hakanen introduced the concept as *työn imu*. Hence, there are various good reasons, both academic and practical, to further study work engagement.

Academically significant reasons to study work engagement

Academic studies of work engagement seem to be sparse and slightly isolated, with many visible research gaps. The few scholars devoted to researching work engagement are only human and thus have covered only some specific aspects of the construct and its mechanisms. In reference to the topics of this study, there have been a few mentions of autonomy's link to work engagement (notably Bakker & Demerouti, 2008), but little elaboration on the subject. Furthermore, most of the engagement literature deals with work engagement in academic professions, such as architecture, teaching, medicine, management or research. These professions are stereotypically those that are seen as knowledge work. Manual labor has received less attention, perhaps due to lack of appreciation or erroneous suppositions regarding the content of many traditional professions. Contributing to filling these research gaps is an important objective of this study.

Similarly, it must not be forgotten, that despite the best efforts of many scholars, engagement is still not a uniformly defined construct. There is general inconsistency in both the definition and measurement of the construct. Mention the word engagement in conversation, and ten people will have ten different interpretations of what it means. In short, the definition of work engagement still needs clarification. Additionally, and as a direct result of the unfinished defining

of work engagement, there are measuring needs that must be answered. A number of different ways to measure work engagement exist, and many of them contradict each other.

Practically significant reasons to study work engagement

To me, the most obvious reasons for studying engagement at work are the dramatic changes that are revolutionizing the way we view working life. The transformation of work has been discussed widely in both public and academic spheres. The global economy has been transformed through the rejuvenation of market liberalism, and great changes are still under way as the latest financial crisis keeps shattering existing structures. Along with prosperity and development, the changes have brought forth extremely hard competition and the growth of income disparities. Additionally, the workforce of especially western nations is aging, and hence placing further strain on national economies. The depression has done nothing to change these developments.

The structural changes and efficiency trends evident in the modern business environment have also had an effect on how people view their work environment and working life in general. While it used to be common that companies took care of their employees, who in return remained loyal to their employer for the duration of their working life, the contemporary relationship between employer and employee is far less trustful and codependent (Sennet, 1998). As the so called atypical working arrangements such as part-time work and temporary contracts become more and more commonplace, work places are losing their sense of community as uncertainty of the future grows (ibid). The changes in the structure of the economy have lead to changes in the nature of working life. These phenomena are claimed to affect the social aspect of work; trust, social capital and communal ties (Putnam, 1995). Small wonder, then, that in an environment where the employer does not commit to its employees, the employee is not likely to be motivated or to offer any kind of commitment in return. How and why would an employee commit to his work? What could make him feel engaged in his occupation? Even prior to the latest depression, certain scholars, such as Seijts & Crim (2006) cried out that there is a crisis in employee engagement.

Second, engagement literature attributes myriad organizational and business benefits to engagement. Engagement is claimed to increase productivity (Seijts & Crim, 2006) in addition to turnover, profitability and customer satisfaction (Harter et al., 2002), as well as generate organizational commitment and organizational citizenship behavior (Saks, 2006). Bhatnagar (2007) proved that high engagement can result in high employee retention levels at least for a limited time in the ITES (Information Technology Enabled Service) sector. There have even been claims that high engagement at work reduces the cost of goods sold by a company (Towers Perrin, 2003). The list goes on and on, with some claims being more feasible than others.

Third, work engagement is said to be beneficial in many ways for the individual experiencing it. Saks (2006) claims, that engagement increases job satisfaction. Bakker & Demerouti (2008) add that engagement induces positive emotions such as confidence, joy, interest, contentment and optimism. They elaborate on the thought, claiming that these positive emotions can help build enduring psychological resources and generate further emotional well-being, creating a virtuous circle. Along with advantages for mental health, Crabtree (2005) claims that there are also numerous benefits for the health of the engaged individual. He states that according to a Gallup Management Journal survey conducted during the time period of 2000 – 2004, a majority of engaged employees (62%) feel their work lives have a positive effect on their physical health, while most (54%) of disengaged employees felt their work is having a negative impact on their physical health. This is of course only a measure of the employees' own perception of their health and it is hard to say which factor, the degree of engagement or physical health, is the cause and which is the effect.

1.2 Research questions and objectives

The research belongs to the discipline of *organizations and management*, and to the sub-fields of *psychology of work* and *human resource management*. The present paper seeks to describe aspects of the concept of *work engagement* (In Finnish most often referred to as *työn imu*) in the context of manual labor. Special attention is given to how the experience of autonomy affects the degree of work engagement experienced by an employee. My objective is to provide a rich description, based on ethnographic observation, of how maintenance workers at Lassila & Tikanoja experience autonomy in their work, and through which psychological paths this experienced autonomy affects work engagement. There is a research gap in engagement literature, since manual labor and the link between autonomy and work engagement have not received much attention.

The initial principal research question before entering the ethnographic data gathering phase of the study was “*What factors contribute to work engagement in manual laborers?*” I followed an inductive research philosophy, trusting that the data gathering phase of the study would provide me with both deeper understanding of the subject matter and revised research questions. Antecedents for work engagement emerging from the data included team cohesion, homogeneity and social interaction with stakeholders. However, the importance of autonomy for the emergence of work engagement was so prevalent in the data that I decided to focus my efforts on exploring the link between work engagement and autonomy.

After my first analysis of the data, I modified my principal research question to “*How does the experience of autonomy affect work engagement in maintenance workers?*” Additionally, I will spend some time exploring the following sub-questions:

1. How can management support engagement-inducing autonomy in the workplace?
2. What kind of advantages and challenges are related to homogeneous teams in the research context?

1.3 Structure of the thesis

The thesis is divided into five chapters: 1. Introduction, 2. Theory, 3. Methodology, 4. Linking Autonomy and Work Engagement in the Empirical data and 5. Conclusions. The first chapter details the beginnings and background of this research paper, the research questions and objectives and the practical and academic reasons for studying work engagement. The second chapter reviews contextually relevant literature concerning the study of engagement and autonomy, detailing the frameworks used to mirror my research data. The third chapter discusses the methodological foundations of the paper and introduces the research sample. The fourth chapter reviews the empirical research data divided into themes according to a modified version of the engagement path frameworks by Kahn (1990) and May et al. (2004). The fifth and final chapter presents my research findings along with the limitations of the data and implications for further research.

2. Theory

2.1 Engagement

2.1.1 Origins and definitions of engagement

The research of engagement has its roots in positive work psychology, a direction of psychology that arose from resistance towards academic work psychology rhetoric revolving around negative factors such as burnout, stress, job insecurity and workplace violence (Turner et al., 2002). The negative factors of working life that affect the psyche of the worker are of course a valid and important part of the reality of work, but it is nevertheless only one side of the coin, and it would be inappropriate to overlook the effects of positive factors in work. Thus, models such as the JD-R model (Job demands and resources) have been created to take both positive and negative work life factors into account (Demerouti et al., 2001). The research focus on the positive side of working life is also an implication of the changing nature of working life. As workers have become both more individual-minded and increasingly anxious and disheartened by the insecurity, intensity and complexity of modern work, it is only logical that researchers and managers have started searching for ways improve the quality of working life by examining, for example, transformational leadership, teamwork, work role interaction and work redesign (Turner et al., 2002).

The origins of the conceptualization of engagement in working life lie in the 1990 work of William A. Kahn, *Psychological Conditions of Personal Engagement and Disengagement at Work*. In this article Kahn (1990, p. 694) defined what he called personal engagement as "...harnessing of organization member's selves to their work roles: in engagement, people employ and express themselves physically, cognitively, emotionally and mentally during role performances." Kahn also defined the opposite of personal engagement to be personal disengagement, "the simultaneous withdrawal and defense of a person's preferred self in behaviors that promote a lack of connections, physical, cognitive, and emotional absence, and passive, in-complete role

performances” (ibid, p. 701). In short, Kahn means that to be engaged is to be psychologically present while performing and occupying a role in an organization, while disengaging is the lack of psychological presence, a defense of the personal self. Along with these definitions Kahn presents a division of engagement into three dimensions: physical engagement, cognitive engagement and emotional engagement. Furthermore, the psychological conditions relevant for the experience of personal engagement are psychological meaningfulness, psychological safety and psychological availability. Kahn’s line of thought was followed by a few scholars (for example May et al., 2004), but various different schools of thought regarding engagement arose and established their own followings. Managers and consultants also picked up the sexy new idea, resulting in a myriad of how-to-books and liberal definitions of the concept. Today, engagement is a controversial concept and no consensus of its definition exists. Some authors give precise, well defined descriptions for engagement while others seem to include all that is good and beautiful under their umbrella definitions of engagement. Many authors do not even seem to agree to disagree, but simply act like no alternative views on the subject exist. These issues will be discussed in more depth in chapter 2.1.2, Conceptual issues.

At heart Kahn’s definition of personal engagement is rooted in organizational psychology, and is centered wholly on the individual’s personal experiences, aspirations, actions, thoughts and feelings. His study was focused on the worker, not the organization. Along these lines and adhering to Kahn’s original definitions are the works of May et al. (2004), who elaborated on Kahn’s framework by further exploring the determinants and mediating effects of the psychological conditions of engagement mentioned earlier in their article *The psychological conditions of meaningfulness, safety and availability and the engagement of the human spirit at work*. They too, think of engagement from a state-in-role point-of-view. The works of Kahn (1990) and May et al. (2004) are at the heart of this study, and I will later in the present study describe in detail those frameworks of theirs that I intend to utilize in my research of engagement and autonomy in a manual labor work environment.

Since its conception, the concept of personal engagement has been in various contexts called work engagement and even employee engagement, terms that well reflect the confusion regarding the

term evident especially in the practitioner literature. For example Little and Little (2006) claim that the Gallup Organization researchers failed to properly define and validate the concept, instead concentrating on questionnaires and business unit outcomes such as productivity, profitability, employee retention and customer service. Hence, Gallup researchers such as Coffman & Gonzalez-Molina (2002, p. 26) leave us with vague descriptions of engagement such as “economic force that fuels an organization’s profit growth”, and divisions of employees into categories such as the actively engaged, the non-engaged and the actively disengaged. Even researchers inside one organization cannot seem to agree on a single definition. Hailing from the very same Gallup Organization, Harter, Schmidt and Hayes (2002, p. 269) defined employee engagement as “the individual’s involvement and satisfaction with as well as enthusiasm for work”. Little and Little (2006) claim that later, Gallup researchers Harter and Coffman along with Fleming would join forces to complicate matters further by using engaged employees as a synonym for committed employees.

Another commercial researcher, Development Dimensions International (DDI) gives the definition for engagement as “The extent to which people value, enjoy and believe in what they do”, linking the concept to prerequisites such as enjoyment, belief and value (DDI, 2005, p. 4). Robinson, Perryman and Hayday (2004, p. 2) dive deeper into the employer-centric perspective, and give the following definition for engagement: “a positive attitude held by the employees towards the organization and its values. An engaged employee is aware of the business context, works with colleagues to improve performance within the job for the benefit of the organization. The organization must work to develop and nurture engagement, which requires a two-way relationship between employer and employee”.

Not all further research into work engagement has been managerial, however. Schaufeli, Salanova, Gonzalez-Roma and Bakker (2002) have conducted academic research deviating from the theories of Kahn (1990) and May et al. (2004). They use the term work engagement instead of personal engagement, and define it as a “positive, fulfilling, work-related state of mind that is characterized by *vigor*, *dedication* and *absorption*” (Schaufeli et al., 2002, p. 74)., and in more recent work (Salanova & Schaufeli, 2008, p. 118) stress that instead of a momentary state,

“engagement refers to a more persistent affective-motivational state that is not focused on any particular object, event or behavior”. In this context, *vigor* means high energy levels and mental resilience, *dedication* refers to a sense of strong psychological identification with one’s job, and *absorption* is full concentration on and engrossment in one’s work. According to the authors, of these three vigor and dedication are the core dimensions of work engagement, while absorption is more of a consequence of work engagement. The Finnish translation for the concept of work engagement is “työn imu” (literally, and quite humorously, suction of work), coined by Jari Hakanen in his 2004 doctoral dissertation “Työuupumuksesta työn imuun: työhyvinvointitutkimuksen ytimessä ja reuna-alueilla”.

Alan Saks (2006, p. 602) on the other hand, used bits and pieces of various explanations of engagement, and came up with a consensus definition, which states that engagement is a “unique construct that consists of cognitive, emotional, and behavioral components that are associated with individual role performance”. Saks was likewise not entirely satisfied with Kahn’s (1990) work, insisting that while Kahn had indicated some psychological conditions for engagement, he had failed to explain “why individuals will respond to these conditions with varying degrees of engagement” (Saks, 2006, p. 603). As a response, he created his own model depicting the antecedents and consequences of engagement. A noteworthy point about this model, depicted in Figure 1, is that Saks has divided employee engagement into two subdivisions, job engagement and organization engagement.

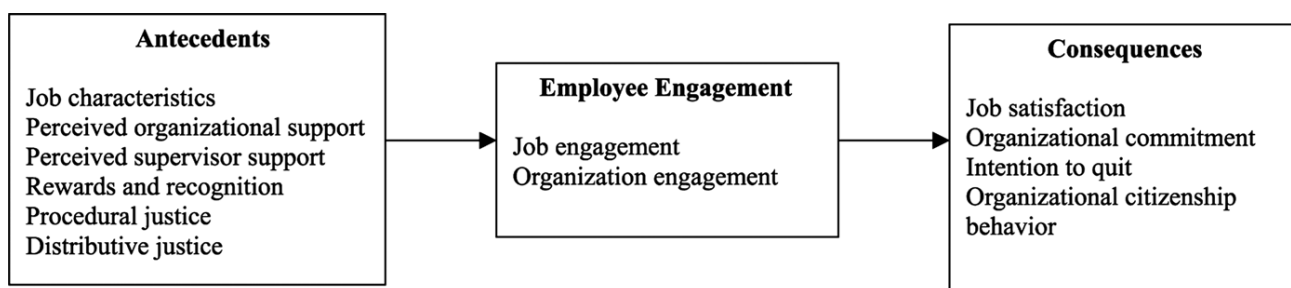


Figure 1. A model of the antecedents and consequences of employee engagement. (Saks, 2006, p. 604)

2.1.2 Conceptual issues

As the jungle of definitions presented above illustrates, there are several ongoing debates over the definition of work engagement. For reasons of clarity, I will from here on disregard the practitioner literature and focus on academic texts, which seem to have produced more coherent interpretations of the meaning of work engagement. I interpret that there are three main themes of debate; 1. What is the nature of the concept of work engagement?, 2. Is work engagement a valid, independent construct at all? and 3. How should work engagement be measured?

The first theme, the debate around the nature of the concept of work engagement is perhaps the most obvious and prevalent source of disagreement within the academic literature. Interpretations are numerous and varied: engagement can be seen as a role, a state, an attitude or a mode of behavior. It can be seen as pertaining to individuals or groups, or both. One can argue about whether work engagement is a momentary, contextual experience or something more pervasive. There is even argument over what the opposite of engagement is. Is it burnout (Maslach et al., 2001) or disengagement (Kahn 1990, May et al. 2004, Schaufeli et al., 2002)?

According to Kahn's (1990) original interpretation, personal engagement refers to an individual's *role engagement*, in other words his psychological presence in or focus on work role activities. May et. al. (2004) subscribe to Kahn's views and use this point of view concerning the nature of engagement as the basis of their studies. Also Rothbard (2001) uses the term role engagement in her studies. Notable followers of the engagement as a state –line of thought include Maslach et al. (2001) and Schaufeli et al. (2002). Maslach et al. (2001) see work engagement as a state which is characterized by three key components: energy, involvement and efficacy. Schaufeli (2002, p. 74) on the other hand states that work engagement is a "positive, fulfilling, work-related state of mind that is characterized by vigor, dedication and absorption".

Another source of confusion is whether work engagement is an attitude or actual behavior. Favorers of the view of work engagement as a behavior include Macey & Schneider (2008, p. 15),

who say work engagement is manifested as behaviors such as “innovative behaviors, demonstrations of initiative, proactively seeking opportunities to contribute, and going beyond what is, within specific frames of reference, typically expected or required”. Those who support the notion of work engagement as an attitude are mostly practically inclined, like DDI (2005) and Lucey, Bateman and Hines (2005). Presently most scholars, however, recognize that work engagement includes components of both attitude and behavior. Kahn (1990) presented three sides to engagement; physical, emotional and cognitive, while Saks (2006) noted that there are cognitive, emotional and behavioral components to engagement.

There has also been discussion on whether work engagement is a construct pertaining to individuals or groups. Kahn (1990) focused on individuals, as did May et. al. (2004) and Salanova & Schaufeli (2008). Discussing work engagement as a group level phenomenon and its effects as business unit outcomes such as the rise of productivity and commitment seems to be a characteristic typical only in some of the practitioner articles on the subject. Recent academic papers, such as that of Saks (2006) separate job engagement (individual level) from organization engagement (group level).

Other issues have arisen when scholars specializing in other topics have included work engagement in their theories. For example, burnout researchers such as Maslach et al. (2001) use engagement as an opposite for the concept of burnout. However, others such as Schaufeli et al. (2001, p. 75) believe that although it is tempting to view engagement as the opposite of burnout, the measurement and structures of these constructs differ so much that “engagement is operationalized in its own right”. Both Kahn (1990) and May et al. (2004) talk about disengagement as the opposite of engagement.

Some have questioned whether or not work engagement is at all a valid and independent construct worthy of academic study, a combination of existing constructs or, as Macey & Schneider (2008) put it, “old wine in new bottles”. There are numerous related constructs that overlap or are related to work engagement, but authors have not always made clear how they

distinguish work engagement from these related constructs and what is the relationship between them. For example, Little & Little (2006, p. 115-116) list four related constructs that are sometimes entirely or partially confused with work engagement: job satisfaction, organizational commitment, organizational citizenship behavior and job involvement. May et al. (2004) add to the list the concept of flow, familiar from the literature of the social sciences.

Despite past misunderstandings and confusions, current academic discussion seems to hold a general consensus that work engagement is indeed a valid independent construct. Saks (2006, p. 602) states that:

“...although the definition and meaning of engagement in the practitioner literature often overlaps with other construct, in the academic literature it has been defined as a distinct and unique construct that consists of cognitive, emotional, and behavioral components that are associated with individual role performance. Furthermore, engagement is distinguishable from several related constructs, most notably organizational commitment, organizational citizenship behavior, and job involvement.”

Aside from the definition and division issues evident within engagement literature, there has also been much discussion on how to measure work engagement. How can we measure who is highly engaged, non-engaged or disengaged? Little & Little (2006) point out that practitioners such as The Gallup Organization have come up with numerous surveys to measure work engagement, but have been unable to be consistent even with the names and contents of these surveys. The inconsistent measuring and reporting on the Gallup researchers behalf has been the result of wanting to please its primary audiences, companies and practitioners, by gearing surveys to reflect their customers perceived needs (ibid). Little & Little (2006, p.117) go on to add, that as a result, The Gallup Organization has “opened their concepts up for misuse by others”. Additionally, Macey & Schneider (2008, p.26) point out that many of the measurement failures in engagement studies have been the direct result of failing to properly conceptualize engagement.

A very popular and generally approved method of measuring work engagement is the Utrecht Work Engagement Scale or UWES, a standardized survey with versions featuring a varying number of items, such as the UWES-9 (9 items) and the UWES-17 (17 items) (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2003). The items include statements such as “I am enthusiastic about my job” and “I get carried away when I am working”, to which the person who takes the survey responds by stating how often they feel the way the statement describes on a scale of zero to six. There are several versions of the scale applied for different languages, including Finnish. The validity of this measurement tool was recently assessed by Seppälä et al. (2008, p.459), who concluded that UWES is a contractually valid measurement tool and work engagement itself is a highly stable indicator for assessing occupational well-being. However, they also noted that not all versions of UWES featuring a different number of items are equally valid, and some versions are more recommended than others. Seppälä et al. (2008, p.459) state that “while the structure of the UWES-17 did not remain the same across the samples and time, the structure of the UWES-9 remained relatively unchanged. Thus, the UWES-9 has good construct validity and use of the 9-item version can be recommended in future research.”

2.2 Autonomy

According to Ballou (1998), the term *autonomy* is originally derived from the Greek word “autonomos”, which has two parts; “auto”, meaning self and “nomos”, meaning law. It is also the opposite of *heteronomy*, the subjection to something else. From this idea of self-rule, autonomy has developed into the complex concept it is today, containing the following recurring themes: self governance within a system of principles, competence or capacity, decision making, critical reflection, freedom, and self control. Ballou (1998, p. 105) states, that a generally accepted definition of the core meaning of autonomy is “the capacity of an agent to determine its own actions through independent choice within a system of principles and laws to which the agent is dedicated”. Ballou (1998, p. 106) adds that there are five critical attributes that signify the true presence of autonomy:

1. The agent is able to determine his or her own actions
2. The agent is able to competently act on his or her determinations
3. Actions and decisions are based on critical reflection
4. Actions and decisions are consistent with the agent's own internally endorsed system of principles to which he or she is dedicated
5. Decisions are made independent of external control

Furthermore, Ballou (1998, p. 106) lists seven antecedents (states or events that have to occur before autonomy can occur) and six consequences of autonomy, which are illustrated in Table 1 below. I find it noteworthy, that her list of antecedents features internal, personal qualities instead of external conditions. I interpret this to mean that we should not think of autonomy in the work context as only something given to employees by superiors, but also as something that can stem from the individuals themselves and requires a set of personal attributes and abilities. Also interesting is the content of the list of consequences. As Ballou (1998, p.106) herself notes, many of these terms, such as authority and power, are often used as synonyms for autonomy. One must be careful not to confuse these concepts. After seeing this list I immediately wondered: could work engagement be listed here as a consequence of autonomy?

| Antecedents | Consequences |
|--|--|
| Inherent intellectual capacity | Individual professional status |
| Morality | Freedom |
| Exposure to systems of beliefs, laws, standards and principles | Authority and power |
| Knowledge sufficient to develop competence | Recognition by others as competent |
| Knowledge of personal values and beliefs | Personal satisfaction |
| Ability to reason | Expansion of domain of autonomous expression |
| Ability to control self | |

Table 1: Antecedents and consequences of autonomy. According to Ballou (1998, p.106)

Autonomy has been linked to work engagement in previous studies, but this link has not been thoroughly studied. For example, Bakker & Demerouti (2008) state that job resources are positively associated with work engagement. In this context, autonomy is listed as a job resource that plays an intrinsic motivational role. The authors claim autonomy to be a basic human need

that needs to be fulfilled and one that consequently acts as a motivator. However, they do not further elaborate how exactly autonomy leads to high engagement.

In my discussions with the maintenance workers who were the focus of this study, I encountered on numerous occasions their opinion of the importance of autonomy to their well-being and engagement at work. All of the partially overlapping themes of autonomy presented above seem to fit the picture, as they were each referred to in one way or another when discussing why autonomy is so important to maintenance workers. In other words, I am using a fairly wide range of interpretations of autonomy in my analysis of my research data. Furthermore, Ballou's (1998) list of critical attributes signifying the *true* presence of autonomy should be studied closely. However, I think that the true presence of autonomy is not necessarily needed for the experience of work engagement to be possible. Being seemingly autonomous may result in work engagement in a similar manner.

Interestingly, a significant portion of autonomy research has been conducted by studying members of the nursing profession (for example Blanchfield & Biordi, 1996 and Hintsala, 2005). These studies have detailed the significance of autonomy to the work of nurses. This is a relevant observation concerning my work since nurses and maintenance workers as professional groups share certain key qualities. Both are occupations in the service sector, with neither profession seen as belonging to the so called knowledge workers. However, neither occupation can be held by just anyone as their relative tasks require significant amounts of specific training, professionalism, skill and knowledge to complete adequately. Both are traditionally gender specific professions, with most nurses being female and the overwhelming majority of maintenance workers being men. Furthermore, both professions are often referred to as underappreciated due to small wages and stressful working conditions. Finally, I find it to be a compelling notion that both groups can be seen as caretakers: nurses take care of people and maintenance workers take care of buildings and machinery.

The link between autonomy and engagement has not been thoroughly examined in the context of work. However, there have been studies detailing this link in the context of education. For instance, teachers' having an impact on schoolwork engagement in their students by enhancing or suppressing autonomy is a topic studied in several articles (for example Assor et al., 2002, and Reeve et al., 2004). In the context of work, autonomy is often only mentioned as having a relationship with engagement, but this link is not elaborated on. For example Saks (2006, p. 604), lists job characteristics as one antecedent of employee engagement, stating that the five core job characteristics are "skill variety, task identity, task significance, *autonomy* and feedback".

2.3 Frameworks used in this study

For the purpose of sorting and analyzing the data collected during my ethnographic participant observation period among the maintenance workers of Lassila & Tikanoja, I will lean on the definitions and frameworks of engagement presented by Kahn (1990) and May et al. (2004). Hence, I will adhere to the engagement in role –tradition of engagement research, and concentrate on exploring the psychological conditions for engagement. I will seek to discover how autonomy affects work engagement by filtering and sorting my data by theme, using the revised engagement path framework presented by May et al. (2004) as a guideline. I will use qualitative content analysis to explore which parts of my data imply specific connections between autonomy, the psychological conditions of engagement, and work engagement itself. Defining the level of work engagement of any single informant of this study is not of relevance to my conclusions.

There are a number of different paths through which autonomy can positively affect work engagement. May et al. (2004) used Kahn's (1990) original work engagement path framework consisting of *psychological meaningfulness*, *psychological safety* and *psychological availability* as a starting point, and further explored which factors affect each of the aforementioned psychological elements. The major changes May et al. (2004) have made to Kahn's model are as follows: 1. coworker relations do not affect meaningfulness 2. Self-consciousness does not affect availability,

but safety instead. Also note that two of the factors presented in the revised model - resources and self-consciousness - also have a direct impact on work engagement in addition to the effect they have through availability and safety respectively. By closely studying all nine subdivisions, we can see that an experience of autonomy can affect work engagement through any of the three primary paths. I have used the work of May et al. (2004) as a basis for my revised version (illustrated in figure 2) of the path framework of engagement. The framework includes the factor *client relations* suggested by Kahn (1990). In the following I will present the definitions of the psychological conditions of engagement and my presumptions on how autonomy can affect these conditions.

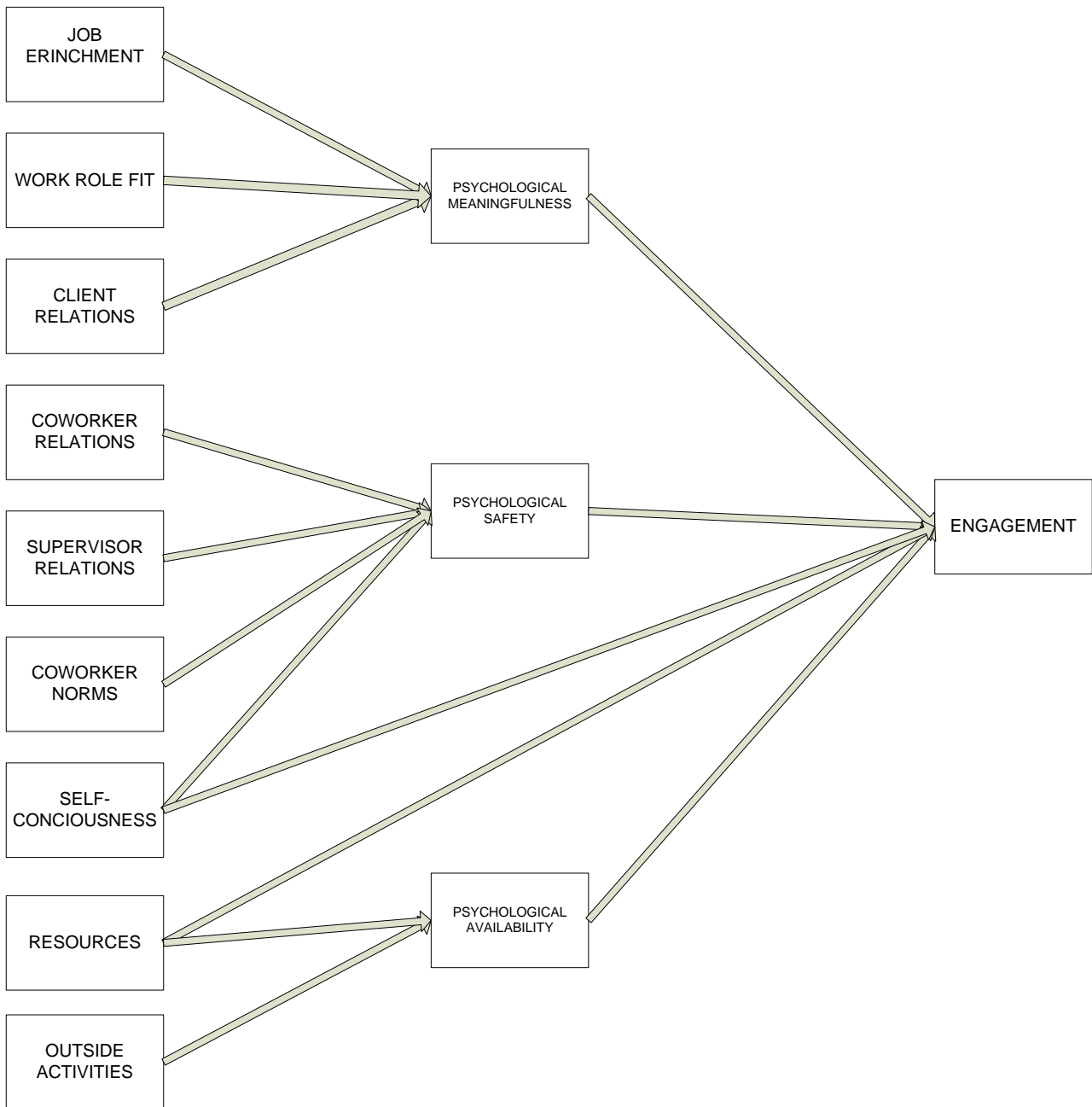


Figure 2: Path framework of engagement including client relations. According to May et al. (2004) and Kahn (1990)

Psychological meaningfulness

Psychological meaningfulness is defined by May et al. (2004, p. 14) as “the value of a work goal or purpose, judged in relation to an individual’s own ideals or standards”. They claim that the two sub-factors that directly affect the experience of psychological meaningfulness in a positive

manner are *job enrichment* (enriching characteristics of one's occupation) and *work role fit* (to what extent an individual feels he* can express his perceived true self in his work role). In addition to these two factors, Kahn (1990) has suggested that *client relations* can also play a part in affecting the experience of psychological meaningfulness in the workplace, especially in occupations characterized by significant contact with customers, such as for example camp councilors. Since the maintenance workers I studied have quite a lot of contact with clients, both inside and outside the organization, I will include this concept in my analysis. Note that May et al. (2004) did not, as seen in figure 2, include client relations in their path framework of engagement, because the employees in their study sample were insurance workers of various kinds who, according to the authors, "did not have the same depth of quality of client relations as those studied by Kahn (1990)" (May et al., 2004, p.15). Figure 3, which I formulated for the purposes of this study, is a revised version of the path framework of engagement by May et al. (2004), and includes client relations as a psychological condition affecting psychological meaningfulness.

I believe that a degree of autonomy in one's work can help the employee craft his work so that job enrichment and work role fit positively affect work engagement. Renn & Vandenberg (1995) have shown that the five core job dimensions of the Job Characteristics Model (Hackman & Oldman, 1980) may strongly influence employees' experiences of meaningfulness. Incidentally, autonomy is one of these five core job dimensions. For example, if an employee is able to use the autonomy he has to change the characteristics of his work, job enrichment can increase the meaningfulness he feels while working. Also, if employees are able to express their true or preferred self through their work role, this is likely to increase the meaningfulness they experience at work. The heightened sense of meaningfulness may subsequently positively affect the work engagement experienced by employees. As for client relations, autonomous employees may be able to influence the degree and manner in which they encounter clients in their work, hence enabling meaningful relationships with clients at least partly on the employees own terms. Again, these meaningful relationships can in turn positively influence work engagement.

*From here on I will use "he" instead of he/she, because all of the informants in this study were male.

Psychological safety

Kahn (1990, p. 708) defines psychological safety as “feeling able to show and employ one’s self without fear of negative consequence to self-image, status, or career”. The four sub-factors that have an effect on the experience of psychological safety and through it also on the experience of engagement are, according to May et al. (2004), *rewarding coworker relations* (the extent to which co-workers trusted each other and seemed to value a person’s input and persona), *supportive supervisor relations* (how much support and how little control the person experienced from his immediate superior), *adherence to coworker norms* (the degree to which a person behaves as he feels he is expected to behave) and *self-consciousness* (awareness of how other people judge and perceive them). Of these four, self-consciousness also has a direct impact on work engagement as seen in figure 3.

Only rewarding co-worker relations and supportive supervisor relations have a positive effect on the experience of safety, which in turn has a positive correlation with engagement. Interestingly, self-consciousness has a dual role in this framework. Public self-consciousness can negatively affect the experience of psychological safety, such as in a situation where a person constantly worries about what others think of him or is consciously uncomfortable in his work role. On the other hand, there can be a direct positive correlation between public self-consciousness and work engagement. This can be manifested, for example, in a situation where a person who is attentive of their own behavior can “monitor the social environment and adapt their behaviors to it” (May et al., 2004, p.18). Adherence to coworker norms can only have a negative correlation with the experience of psychological safety. This concept means “the degree to which individuals follow co-worker norms and do what is expected of them by co-workers” (May et al., 2004, p.21). The idea is that a person who feels they must adhere to co-worker norms does not feel safe to freely express themselves in the fashion they prefer. (May et al., 2004)

I see the link between autonomy and the factors presented above as being the ability to choose, at least to some extent, the people one encounters in his work environment, and how he can or

dares to act when around them. Depending on the degree of autonomy an employee has, he might be able to choose or have influence on who he works with and in some cases even who he works under. Furthermore, an autonomous employee can decree to some extent the way he acts inside his working community. This ability to make and influence choices may have a positive relation with work engagement.

Psychological availability

May et al. (2004, p. 17) define psychological availability as “an individual’s belief that s/he has the physical, emotional or cognitive resources to engage the self at work”. They go on to list two factors, *resources* and *outside activities*, which have an effect on work engagement through psychological availability. The authors claim that only resources have a positive correlation with engagement, and that they also have a direct impact, independent of psychological availability, on engagement. Outside activities on the other hand correlate negatively with engagement. In other words, May et al. (2004) believe that outside activities are depletive of work-life resources. This implies a view where an individual has only a fixed amount of physiological, emotional and psychological resources to spend on their activities, and expenditure of these resources in one area of life is always the same as reducing available resources from other areas.

While May et al. (2004) see outside activities mostly as distractions that draw away the energies an employee has for his work, not everyone see this issue as a zero-sum game. Successful role fulfillment outside work can even increase a person’s total energy reserves. I find that a worker who can use his autonomy to gain work time flexibility for the benefit of his family life can experience higher psychological availability and thus engagement, knowing that his home life is in order. Accordingly, studies by Rothbard (2001) indicate that outside activities can also have a positive correlation with engagement in the case of some individuals. Interestingly enough, this is also an area of work engagement where differences between the sexes have been found. Apparently, especially men’s activities in their work-life roles can have an enriching influence on

home-life roles and hence enable the experience of engagement. However, engagement at work originating from enriching home-life experiences is a rarer phenomenon. The author goes on to claim that in the case of women, aspects of their family roles only had a depleting influence on work-life roles, hence increasing the possibility for disengagement. Since all the objects of this study were men, we can expect that in the context of this paper outside activities can have either a positive or a negative correlation with engagement.

Autonomy in deciding one's work times, for example, can strengthen an employee's physical, emotional and cognitive resources and therefore positively influence work engagement directly and through availability. Likewise when employees use their autonomy to enable a sustainable relationship between work life and home life, outside activities can become an enriching factor, subsequently leading to availability and high engagement. However, I am doubtful whether it is possible to explore in depth, if at all, the links between work life and home life within the confines of an ethnographical study taking place *in situ* only in the workplace.

3. Methodology

3.1 Ethnography

My method of choice for studying the causes of work engagement in maintenance workers is the qualitative research method of ethnography, a concept utilized by various scientific disciplines ranging from organizational studies to cultural anthropology, the birthplace of modern ethnography. The definition ethnography has been subject to some controversy over the years, with positions ranging from its role as a philosophical paradigm requiring total commitment to a method one uses when appropriate - and everything in between. (Atkinson & Hammersley, 1998)

The general consensus, however, is that ethnography is not any specific method of data gathering, but more of a style of research including the gathering, description and analysis of data. It is a process where the goal is to understand human behavior and its social implications in a specific context. It is a process, where analysis and data gathering are not separate stages, but happen simultaneously throughout the duration of the field work. There is not only one way of conducting ethnographical research, but one can combine for example observation, interviews and the study of related documents. In ethnography, the researcher is commonly referred to as the *ethnographer* and the research subjects as *informants*. (Vuorinen, 2005)

In practice any form of social research containing a significant number of the following aspects can be referred to as ethnography:

1. An emphasis on exploring the nature of particular social phenomena instead of seeking to test out a predisposed hypothesis.
2. A tendency to work with mainly unstructured data.
3. Investigating a small number of cases in detail

4. Analysis of the data using explicit interpretations of the meanings and functions of human actions in the form of verbal descriptions and explanations. Quantification and statistical analysis are used sparingly if at all.

(Atkinson & Hammersley, 1998)

A rough division of data gathering methods sometimes used in ethnography is that between participant observation (ethnographer plays an established role in the studied scene) and nonparticipant observation (ethnographer does not partake in the activities of informants). This overly simplified division is not always very useful, however, because the role of the ethnographer can be manifested in myriad ways within this wide spectrum. To begin with, it implies that the nonparticipant observer has no part to play at all in the studied scene. This can be seen as suspect since, in a way, the social world can never be studied without being a part of it in some way or another. More widely used and perhaps more useful is the fourfold division of the ethnographer's role as either a complete observer, observer as participant, participant as observer, or complete participant. Furthermore, the ethnographer needs to consider the following additional dimensions of his study: 1. Are some or all of the informants aware that the ethnographer is conducting research? 2. How much is known about the research, and by whom? 3. What sorts of activities does the ethnographer participate in, and how do these activities position him in relation to the categories and notions of group membership used by the informants? 4. How consciously does the ethnographer adopt the role of either an insider or outsider? (Atkinson & Hammersley, 1998)

My study falls into the spectrum of ethnographic research, containing the features mentioned earlier in the following ways: 1. I did not have an initial hypothesis at the beginning of field work, but set out to explore the reasons why and in which ways work engagement occurs in the context of maintenance workers. 2. I worked with largely unstructured data, feverishly making notes of everything I saw, heard and felt throughout the days of observation, and carefully copy-typing my notes at the end of the day. 3. I investigated a small number of cases, only seven to be exact, but I strived to produce as detailed descriptions as I could. 4. I analyzed my data using explicit interpretations of the meanings and functions of my informants' actions and verbalizations, forgoing the use of quantifications and statistics. In the fourfold division of the role of the

ethnographer, I would define my conduct as that of an *observer as (occasional) participant*. Most often I merely spent time with the informants, observing their work, conducting discussions with them and asking them questions, but occasionally I would help out by carrying objects, holding open doors, shoveling snow or clearing ice from staircases. I did this both to get at least some kind of a personal feel for the work, but also to gain the trust of the informants and to strike up conversations with them. At some points I noticed hints of a phenomenon common in ethnography called fusing of horizons, where both the researcher and the informants change due to the research process. I noticed myself beginning to think about the work from the perspective of the employee, and respectively some of the informants pondered aloud the managerial implications of their work preferences.

As for the noteworthy dimensions of variation in ethnography presented by Atkinson & Hammersley (1998), I carefully considered these points before commencing my study. First, I decided that it would be best to be open about my role as a researcher towards the informants, despite the initial urge I had to conduct undercover research under the guise of a new trainee. I felt that being open about the study would both be ethical and produce better results, as I would be allowed to make more (and more varied) questions and actually concentrate on making observations instead of working all the time. Second, I did not go into detail when describing the study to the informants, merely telling them that I wanted to get to know them and their work, and try to understand what is important to them in the work, what makes them happy and what bothers them. This was both because there was initially not much detail to go into, but also because I did not want to seem overly academic by using the lingo of organizational psychology. Third, I participated only in menial, simple tasks when allowed to, so as to be helpful but not to seem too pushy and invasive. Fourth, I consciously adopted the role of an outsider, albeit a very interested and emphatic one. I made a point of clarifying that I was the novice and the informants were the experts, and that I simply wished to understand the nature of their work and everyday tasks.

To ease my acceptance into the sphere of the work community, I dressed in simple and practical heavy-duty winter clothing and heavy boots, spoke as I would to members of my hockey team or

army unit, and limited the topics of discussion I personally initiated to practical, mundane matters such as the amazing amount of snow, winter Olympics, food at the cafeteria, or the operation of some work-related machinery. I wish to emphasize that this was by no means done in order to be condescending, but merely to avoid alienating any informants in the first meetings. I have experiences of *some* working class people being unappreciative of academic types, so I did not wish to come across as a 'typical university student'. If an informant wanted to strike up a conversation about organizational structures or management concepts (this actually happened on a few occasions), I would gladly respond, but I did not want to directly approach those kinds of topics myself.

I chose ethnography and more specifically participant observation as my research methods because they have a number of benefits and advantages as methods of data gathering. First, as a novice with no experience of maintenance work whatsoever, participant observation put me in a position where I could learn what the key factors of the work regarding engagement are before formulating additional, more precise questions. Also, my novice status allowed me to make observations and make questions which a person with more experience might not think of. Second, using participant observation meant that I would not be relying solely on the verbal testimonials of workers or managers, but could also apply a critical approach by filtering their statements through my own observations and experiences acquired through the field work. Third, I feel that using participant observation allowed me to produce rich descriptions of the culture of maintenance workers and the reasons behind their degree of work engagement. (Vuorinen, 2005)

It must be noted, however, that there are numerous risks and shortcomings related to ethnographic studies and participant observation which the ethnographer needs to take into account. An ethnographer is especially vulnerable to making mistakes because of various reasons. First, there is always a risk that the ethnographers own prejudices, culture, attitudes or proximity (or lack of proximity) to the informants get in the way of correct interpretations. Also, as the novice ethnographer becomes more acquainted with his informants and their culture or 'goes native' as say, he may lose the sensitivity he needs to make analytical and unbiased observations. It is a paradox that an ethnographer needs to get close to his informants to make efficient

observations and good interpretations, but he should not become so close as to lose his objectivity. Second, the informants may lie for a number of reasons, be misguided or simply have no idea what they are talking about. They may also have a hard time verbalizing processes related to their work to someone who is not acquainted to the subject matter. This is why the ethnographer should always take the statements of informants with a grain of salt. Third, one should always keep in mind the ethical considerations that need to be taken into account when conducting ethnographic research. This includes confidentiality regarding the personality and details of the informant's personal life. The anonymity and safety of the informants should be respected when presenting results. Additionally, the ethnographer should respect the culture of the informants also during the course of the field work, avoiding passing judgment or pushing one's own values. (Vuorinen, 2005)

Naturally, there are a number of ways in which one can try to avoid problems and conflict arising in participant observation. Vuorinen (2005) suggests being open about one's role as a researcher and the objectives of the study if possible, getting the informants' written permission for the study and trying to inform the informants of the possible outcomes of the research.

3.2 Including Elements of Grounded theory

Before commencing this study I looked into grounded theory, sometimes known simply referred to as GT, a systematic qualitative research method most often used in the social sciences. The method originates from the early 20th century and from the discipline of sociology, and is defined by Glaser and Strauss (1967) as "an inductive, theory discovery methodology that allows the researcher to develop a theoretical account of the general features of a topic while simultaneously grounding the account in empirical observations or data." Additionally, Glaser and Strauss (1967) stress the need for the grounded theorist to enter the field entirely without preconceived ideas. For a method of qualitative research, grounded theory is remarkably structured and rigorous.

Corbin and Strauss (1990) list the following eleven (sic!) procedures and canons of grounded theory:

1. Data collection and analysis are interrelated processes
2. Concepts are the basic units of analysis
3. Categories must be developed and related
4. Sampling in grounded theory proceeds on theoretical grounds
5. Analysis makes use of constant comparisons
6. Patterns and variations must be accounted for
7. Process must be built into the theory
8. Writing theoretical memos is an integral part of doing grounded theory
9. Hypotheses about relationships among categories should be developed and verified as much as possible during the research process
10. A grounded theorist need not work alone
11. Broader structural conditions must be analyzed, however microscopic the research

My initial idea was to use grounded theory as the underlying research methodology paradigm when researching work engagement in maintenance workers. However, after carefully surveying how to conduct grounded theory research, I came to the conclusion that the method does not entirely fit the purposes of this study. With its constant coding and numerical microanalysis of the data, I was afraid that the finer points of the meaning-makings and emotional processes of the maintenance workers would be lost to me if I proceeded with using grounded theory. Altogether I did not find the positivist nature of the method very appealing when considering my research topic. Also, the entire process is hugely time-consuming, and going through large amounts of ethnographically collected data that are not even in recorded audio form due to the constraints of participant observation, would have been impossible within the context of a mere master's thesis.

However, there was one aspect of grounded theory which I desired to utilize in my research. As per the principles of grounded theory, I did want to enter the field and begin my ethnographic study with as little preconceptions as possible. Granted, claiming to be entirely free of preconceptions not only sounds like an impossible notion, but also a very naïve one. Any researcher will have his own agendas, biases and personal baggage, all things that simply cannot be separated from the experience of human existence. One can nevertheless try to protect oneself as much as possible from additional biases and preconceptions. For me this meant limiting my pre-fieldwork readings to a select few articles concerning the definitions of the concept of work engagement. I did not begin extensive theoretical research or even glimpse any documents or websites of Lassila & Tikanoja prior to the conclusion of my ethnographic fieldwork. This approach proved to be a very helpful one, as I found that I was able to confront my informants and their employer with an open mind, make my independent observations and only later compare them to existing theory and official company policies. Many of my findings received confirmation from the theory and readings, but I feel I was also able to spot crucial factors that might have gone unnoticed had I engaged in rigorous pre-study reading and hypothesizing.

3.3 The sample

The bulk of my research sample was gathered in the course of six separate working days, with the overall time collecting ethnographic data coming to roughly twenty hours spent in the field. The sample consists of ethnographic field notes of conversations, observations, narratives and in-situ open-ended interviews handwritten while in the field and transcribed immediately after each session. The study is by nature a multi-site ethnography, since my informants worked in three different units located around the Helsinki Metropolitan Area. There were seven maintenance workers who agreed to act as my primary informants. For the ethnographic observation, I had some general themes that I wished to survey as well as a few open questions that I posed to my subjects at appropriate moments during the observation. In addition to these men I met dozens of their coworkers, managers and customers, who all contributed to my understanding of the day-to-day realities concerning maintenance work.

It is important to note that the informants depicted here belong to two slightly similar yet in terms of job demands quite different professional groups within maintenance work. Informants A, B, C and D are *caretakers*. This means that their responsibility is to take care of all maintenance regarding one or a few properties (usually business real estate), performing both simple (shoveling snow) and complex (optimizing heating efficiency) tasks and operating complicated machinery (HVAC). Their work is mostly stationary. Informants E, F and G, however, are so-called *service men*, who do the jobs a layman usually accredits to maintenance workers. They operate in a larger area, fixing radiators, changing lamps, opening doors and inspecting locks. These workers operate in both residential and commercial properties, and their work is generally speaking not quite as complex and technically demanding as with the caretakers'. They do, however, have much more face-to-face contacts with customers and other stakeholders.

Since I was not previously acquainted with Lassila & Tikanoja and the employees of the company, I had to rely on members of management to suggest suitable informants for this study. Initially, I was worried that as a result I would end up with a selection of "employee of the year" –types, thus preventing me from getting a realistic view of work engagement in the profession. This is why I stressed to my contact at Lassila & Tikanoja that I wanted to meet all kinds of employees, not just the ones seen as great workers. I felt that discussions with some less socially inclined people could prove to be even more fruitful than those with very amiable people. After seeing many of the coworkers of my informants, I initially felt inclined to believe that my sample nevertheless represents the maintenance workers of Lassila & Tikanoja quite realistically. After the study I voiced my doubts about the extreme homogeneousness of the sample of employees to my contact manager. She replied, baffled, that she had specifically striven to provide me with as varied a group of individuals as could be found inside the maintenance workers. Indeed, according to their Human Resources department, 90% of maintenance workers at Lassila & Tikanoja are male, making an all-male sample a valid one. However, it turns out that even though six of my seven informants were middle-aged, the actual portion of employees between the ages of 40 and 59 was only 40.8%. In this sense, the sample is slightly skewed towards older employees.

To support the primary sample, I gathered additional ethnographic data by having discussions with Lassila & Tikanoja managers, studying the Lassila & Tikanoja corporate website and following news related to real-estate maintenance in the media to gain a wider understanding on the subject matter. Additionally, I spent some six hours generally discussing work engagement with cleaners before I actually read any academic works on the subject to get a grasp of a blue-collar perspective on the concept.

3.3.1 Lassila & Tikanoja

Lassila & Tikanoja, operating in Finland, Sweden, Latvia and Russia is a Finnish publicly listed company (NASDAQ OMX Helsinki), which specializes in property and plant support services as well as environmental services. Additionally, Lassila & Tikanoja is a supplier of recycled raw materials, wood-based bio-fuels and recovered fuels. In 2009 the company employed some 8700 people in all of its operating countries. Of these the majority, some 5700 employees, worked in Finland. Lassila & Tikanoja's net sales totaled 582 million € in 2009. In other words, we are talking about a very large maintenance company by Finnish standards. (Lassila & Tikanoja, 2010, Fonecta, 2010)

Lassila & Tikanoja's services organization is split into three divisions: 1. Environmental Services, 2. Property and Office Support Services, and 3. Renewable Energy Sources. All the research subjects of my study work in Property and Office Support Services. This particular division comprises six further sub-categories: 1. Cleaning Services, 2. Damage Repair Services, 3. Industrial Cleaning, 4. Property maintenance, 5. Maintenance of Technical Systems, and 6. Wastewater Services. Test subjects A, B, C and D work in Maintenance of Technical Systems, while test subjects E, F and G work in Property Maintenance. (Lassila & Tikanoja, 2010)

To keep an open mind towards my research subjects and their employer, I decided to adhere to a principle of grounded theory and not to acquaint myself with the company, its reputation and

strategy before I had conducted my ethnographic study. I wanted my initial information of the workplace to come only from my own experiences and communication with my research subjects. After reviewing my research data, the most prominent theme I discovered was the importance of autonomy to both the organization and the employees in day-to-day working life at Lassila & Tikanoja. My initial response was to wonder whether or not this was an intentional management strategy employed systematically at Lassila & Tikanoja, or whether it was some kind of an emergent model adopted organically and individually in the divisions of my research subjects.

It turns out that autonomy is, in fact an integral part of the management principles of Lassila & Tikanoja, even though the word autonomy is not used on the company's official website. A quote from the segment *L&T as an employer*: "Our leadership is based on trust on all levels of the organization. In practice, this means genuinely sharing responsibility extensively throughout the company, which increases job satisfaction and makes work more challenging. Personnel always have sufficient authority to carry out their responsibilities". (Lassila & Tikanoja, 2010)

In a post-fieldwork meeting with three members of Lassila & Tikanoja management (involved in project management, product and process management and communication), I presented them with my initial findings regarding the importance of autonomy both for the maintenance workers themselves and to the management processes of the company. I also asked them to elaborate on the management philosophy illustrated on the company website. They seemed positively surprised that I had come to these conclusions independently without consulting official company policies beforehand. They stated that they are indeed somewhat aware of the proactive and independent nature of their employees in certain divisions, and try to use these qualities and this work culture to their advantage. However, they stated that this culture is not uniform in all their divisions, and perceived the company to have numerous micro-cultures, making the whole organization quite a "mosaic". An expression they used to describe the mentality of their maintenance workers was "entrepreneurial" (Finnish: "yrittäjähenkkinen").

I asked if there were any other written documents detailing this autonomy-driven management ideology, or possibly written guidelines issued to management. It turns out no such documents exist, and the talk about trust, responsibility and authority is more of a general guideline. Also, there are no recruitment-related guidelines or policies regarding requirements for the ability to work independently. I speculate that no such guidelines are used, since the strong culture of the maintenance workers causes “the wrong type” of employees to be swiftly pushed out of their jobs unless they adapt to the norms of their new coworkers. I find it interesting that such self-regulation of recruitment is allowed to go on at Lassila & Tikanoja.

The managers agreed that in fact financial guidance mechanisms are what guide everyday management processes. As long as everything gets done within the prescribed financial guidelines, the managers get freedom to operate in the way they see proper. If they fail to meet requirements, however, they lose some freedom and “get a call to visit headquarters”, a trip most managers wish to avoid. Generally speaking, the corporate culture is built around the idea that if all divisions and units perform well individually, the company as a whole will prosper. The managers all agreed that this might need improving, as communication between units and divisions is neither very common nor efficient. “A more cohesive corporate culture is a goal for us,” remarked one of the managers. “However, we want that there is still room for these micro cultures to exist also in the future”. These factors reflect the kind of laissez-faire leadership I witnessed at the grass-roots level of the organization, and in fact I believe it is a modus operandi that trickles down the steps of corporate hierarchy.

3.3.2 Informants

Informant A:

A is a middle-aged man, approximately fifty years of age. He is married with children and lives in the Western Uusimaa region in a house he built himself. A appears to have a very steady temperament and a calm, technical and inquisitive approach to his work.

A, a caretaker, works in the Lassila & Tikanoja division of Maintenance of Technical Systems, and is together with research subjects B and C responsible for operating and maintaining the HVAC-systems of several government buildings located in the Katajanokka district of central Helsinki. Their team is a part of a larger, 30-person unit responsible for technical systems in central Helsinki. Has worked at Lassila & Tikanoja since 2008 and in his current position roughly a year. Has a long working history with B, with whom they operated the Technical Systems of Helsinki Opera House for over fifteen years. It was B who recommended his friend A to work for Lassila & Tikanoja.

Informant B:

B is a middle-aged man, aged 49 years at the time of this study. He describes his work as something he uses to fund his expensive hobbies; motorcycles, old cars and travelling. On the other hand, he is currently getting further education to move to more challenging positions in the company. B makes no mention of family relations. He comes through as a very sincere yet humorous man, who has quite a temperamental nature and a tendency to speak his mind.

B works in the same team as A, and as a caretaker his responsibilities are the same as A's. He has worked at Lassila & Tikanoja slightly longer than A, roughly two-and-a-half years, and recommended A for his current position. A and B have an interestingly close dynamic; C describes them as sometimes behaving like "an old couple".

Informant C:

C is a middle aged man, also roughly fifty years of age. He is a single man, who had been a farmer his whole life until now but decided to switch careers because there was no-one to take up his farm after he retired. He moved to Helsinki, and after a couple of years of odd-jobs and part-time work he joined Lassila & Tikanoja. C is markedly quieter than the other two men in the team, but seems very friendly and easy to be around.

C has worked in the same team as A and B since August of 2009, and because he is new in the profession has a different role from the other men even though he is also technically a caretaker. He is responsible for all the outdoor work conducted in their designated properties, a fact he says suits well with him, as he has been doing outdoor work for his whole life and quite enjoys it.

Informant D:

D is also a man in his fifties. He is divorced and has at least one grown-up son, with whom he shares an interest in ice hockey. D lives next to his workplace in Northern Helsinki. He seems to be somewhat of a lone wolf, preferring to work alone instead of with a team.

D works in the Lassila & Tikanoja division of Maintenance of Technical Systems and is, quite untypically in Lassila & Tikaonja, solely responsible for caretaking conducted on only one property. He belongs to a larger unit responsible for properties in Northern Helsinki and parts of Vantaa. D has worked at Lassila & Tikanoja for twelve years, and in his current position since 2002.

Informant E:

An exception among the research subjects of this study, E is not a middle-aged man, but is about 30 years of age. He is married and has a two-year-old son, according to E also an aspiring maintenance worker. The profession runs in the family; E's father is also a maintenance man and used to own his own maintenance company. E seems very pleasant and sociable, and is glad to

share his thoughts about his profession among other things, such as his previous careers or his affinity for World of Warcraft (an extremely popular online role playing game).

E works in the Lassila & Tikanoja division of Property Maintenance, in a unit situated in Espoo. He is part of a team consisting of roughly half a dozen service men who have a responsibility are of 500-600 properties. Unlike the men working in Maintenance of Technical Systems, E and his colleagues F and G spend most of the day driving around their designated properties situated around the city of Espoo. E has worked at Lassila & Tikanoja for four years, spending the last half-year on sick leave due to an injury to his arm. He is currently working towards a professional degree to further his career.

Informant F:

F is yet another maintenance man in his fifties. He lives in Espoo in one of his designated properties. Like D, he seems to be a bit of a loner, preferring to work independently and spend lunch times and breaks on his own.

F is also a part of the same unit as E, working in Espoo in a subdivision of the Property Maintenance division. At the time of the study, F was tutoring G, who was new to both the unit as well as residential property management in general. F has been working for Lassila & Tikanoja as a service man for six years now, and has spent the whole time in the same unit.

Informant G:

G, also in his fifties, has worked with his hands (for example as a ship's plumbing technician, shoemaker and an electrician) in various positions for his whole life. He is very enthusiastic about my study and eagerly wants to talk about his work. G is very proud of his professional skills.

G has worked for Lassila & Tikanoja for two years, but at the time of this study he had been in his current position as a service man only for two weeks. Hence, he is being tutored by the experienced but slightly reluctant F.

3.4 The research process

I began preparing myself for the study by trying to jot down my own ideas on the concept of work engagement, using my own experiences from working life as a starting point. I did this in order to orientate myself towards the subject matter and to reflect on my own experiences of work engagement. The only theoretical background to these initial writings was a verbal description of the concept of work engagement by professor Välikangas. I deliberately did not read any academic texts at this point. The result was a short, free-form paper depicting three work contexts and certain aspects of them that I suspected might cause either engagement or disengagement. To sum up, my layman analysis brought me to the conclusion that meaningful work, group cohesion and an experience of ownership regarding one's work were important factors affecting the experience of work engagement. Respectively, I felt that fatigue caused by getting sucked into one's work would be a major contributor to disengagement. In retrospect, I'm happy to note that I was not entirely on the wrong track with my thoughts. As proved by Kahn (1990), May et al. (2004) and my own study, meaningfulness and coworker relations do play an integral part in the experience of work engagement. I felt these two factors were especially important for my informants.

Having not yet chosen a research focus, I proceeded to conduct a few discussions and open-ended test interviews on the topic of work engagement with some acquaintances that had experience of both manual labor and academic work. The themes of meaningfulness as an aggregate and fatigue as a depleting factor once again emerged. I now began to survey the general field of work engagement research, and quickly noted that an obvious research gap existed. Almost all work engagement studies focused on the experiences of so-called knowledge workers; lawyers,

architects insurance claims investigators and the like. Once I learned that Lassila & Tikanoja was interested in cooperation with our research project, my goal became clear. I wanted to study the mechanisms of work engagement in a manual labor context, in this case with maintenance workers. Quick discussions with a Lassila & Tikanoja project manager provided me with a few contact persons to get the study started.

My fieldwork data gathering period lasted from late January 2010 to early March 2010. The period was marked by exceptionally cold and snowy winter weather in Southern Finland, a factor which greatly increased the workload of my informants. Typically I would directly call up the informant or his immediate superior, explain the general idea of the study and arrange for a session within the next few days. The days of research involved me getting up earlier than I was used to (at about 5am), being constantly cold despite heavy winter clothing and, gratifyingly, obtaining intriguing information from my informants during our time spent together. I took notes page after page, a fact which did not seem to bother the informants once I had apologetically explained that I needed them because of my terrible memory. Usually the maintenance workers seemed slightly reserved in the beginning, but seemed to get comfortable with my presence quite quickly. I tried to learn their lingo and understand their interests, always making an effort to be respectful since I was an outsider in the workplace. I let them do most of the talking, limiting myself to occasional questions and unrelated small-talk. I always tried to make strange the commonplace, in other words, to find meanings in even the most trivial details, expressions and actions.

At the end of the day I would transcribe my notes and add as much details and observations as I could remember from the day. I also tried to document my own experiences, whether I was tired, intrigued, bored, cold or confused. Once I felt that I had reached a point when I was not gaining significant additional information from my informants, I asked my contact at Lassila & Tikanoja to provide some additional informants. This point in ethnographic research is called the point of saturation, but I feel it is a misleading concept as no research subject is likely to be truly saturated no matter how much time one spends observing it. As I was conducting my data-gathering, I also began to read academic articles in order to deepen my understanding of work engagement. My work proceeded with an overlapping process of reading, writing and field work.

Once I had gathered what I felt was a sufficient amount of data, I began to organize the data according to themes by using a revised version of the path framework of engagement provided by May et al. (2004) as my sorting system. It quickly became evident that the dominant theme throughout the data was the significance of autonomy for the emerging of an experience of work engagement. Hence, the relationship between work engagement and autonomy became my primary research focus. I continued reading further theoretic material, and once I had finished the sorting out of my data I acquainted myself with documentation pertaining to Lassila & Tikanoja as well as their organizational and managerial principles.

4. Linking autonomy and work engagement in the empirical data

In the following segment I will present the points in my research data where the significance of autonomy to the experience of work engagement was directly or indirectly referred to. I will also mention the reasons which, to me, indicated the link between autonomy and work engagement. Starting from job enrichment and ending in outside activities, I will highlight the different ways in which I interpret the effects of autonomy on psychological meaningfulness, psychological safety, psychological availability and ultimately work engagement. As you will see, many of the data's central themes are present in different segments. In line with Kahn's (1990) thinking of engagement as a dynamic state, I will not seek to define whether or not my informants are engaged individuals or not. Rather, I will seek to define the factor which may enable them to engage in their work roles.

4.1 Factors affecting psychological meaningfulness

4.1.1 Job enrichment

Based on my data I feel that autonomy can have quite a significant effect on how enriching employees consider aspects of their work to be. Test subject B told me that the industry they work in has gone through a revolution during the last decade; "The work has become more organized and more professional as bigger firms have taken the market over (from smaller companies)". The traditional janitor, who used to do the work these men are currently doing, has all but disappeared. Interestingly enough, however, the independent and autonomous role of the janitor is still somewhat present. Actually, it appears that the direction of the profession seems to be moving into an even more autonomous model; "Foremen have disappeared from between management and us workers. We manage ourselves now, and managers kind of act as coaches." I detected a very informal and equal tone, in the discussions which I overheard the men having with

their managers. None of the conversations I heard involved the managers giving orders or assignments to the men; conversely, they were most often asking for an opinion or advice on a client case or technical issue. Overall, the maintenance workers I studied all said that freedom and autonomy are to them the best aspects of their work. Following this clue, I discovered five different themes linking autonomy and job enrichment.

1st theme: Influence on work content and context

The first theme I recognized was that the men were autonomous to such a degree that they held quite a lot of say in respect to the *content and context* of their work. By this I mean that they were able to choose, for example, in which unit they worked.

A had been able to move to a unit where he would work with **B**, a longtime work buddy from the time of both their current and previous employers. Additionally, he was interested in the actual historical government buildings he now tends to. **B** on the other hand, was incremental in bringing **A** to the same team he works in, and in fact had some years earlier helped management headhunt **A** to work for Lassila & Tikanoja. Together, these men had handpicked **C**, who as an assisting outdoor worker completes their team of three. **D** is a veteran of 12 years at the company, and has worked at the same location since 2002. His moving into the current location was, according to himself, mostly of his own doing. The motivations contributing to this move were the fact that the location is only a three-minute walk from his home, allowing him to eat lunch there and occasionally “work from his couch if he feels like it”. Also, this particular unit is responsible for only one piece of real-estate (a rarity), allowing him to take care of it solo, just the way he prefers to work. **E**, **F**, and **G**, being service men (a job that requires less training and experience being a caretaker, the job of **A**, **B** and **C**) have less say in respect to their assigned stationing, but stress that their opinions are heard. For example **F** was allowed to include his home building in his responsibility area.

2nd theme: freedom of execution

The second theme I found in my data was that the men had great *freedom of execution* regarding their work. By this I mean that while they were given certain tasks and responsibilities, the time, order and manner in which they conducted their work was for the most part up to them, excepting, of course, timed tasks such as shutting down the sprinkler systems to allow construction work or urgent tasks such as protecting a building from sudden water damage. The men know how which tasks and areas are under their responsibility, and mostly take care of them at their own discretion. Spending time with them, I felt that this arrangement worked quite well, as it seemed to both put the men at ease and create a motivated working atmosphere. As **B** puts it; “There’s no time stamping, we come and go as we like. No-one breathes down my neck.” **D** agrees; “I’ve managed to arrange it so that my work time is officially from 7.30 am to 4 pm (as opposed to the standard 7 am to 3.30 pm), but basically I come when I feel like depending on the amount of work. I live so close and I can always check my tasks from FIMX (the Lassila & Tikanoja CRM-program) or my mobile.” He also feels that he is allowed to mold the work and working style to fit his preferences. “If I get everything done I can be at peace (from my boss).” **F** holds similar views, even though his work as a mobile maintenance worker is slightly more regulated. “The work is independent. As long as everything gets done I can decide how my work day goes.” **E** additionally stated that the most important thing is that the jobs get done on time and that the task list does not grow too long.

Lunchtimes and coffee breaks are also up to the men’s own discretion. The team of **A**, **B** and **C** sometimes eat in their basement offices, sometimes in the cafeterias of the buildings the office buildings they care of. **E** usually has lunch with team members on the road in restaurants, café’s or at gas stations. **D** and **F** prefer to eat home because of the close proximity, but **D** will often stay in his office or eat at the office cafeteria also.

A told me that his work time, as well as **B**’s, is in principle from 7 am to 3.30 pm, but they often show up earlier and leave earlier also. Especially during the time I was observing them in their

work, in January and February of 2010, Helsinki was under some of the heaviest snowfall in recorded history. Naturally this caused a lot of more work in respect to ploughing and shoveling snow and clearing ice from stairs and doorsteps. Katajanokka, the area where the team works, is situated in the heart of Helsinki's older part. The area has a large population as well as many places of work. The narrow streets are filled with cars and pedestrians from early on in the morning, making snow work very difficult. The team has solved this problem by coming in early or *extremely* early as C, an ex-farmer who is used to early mornings often does, in order to clear the snow before there is traffic in the way. For example, one day he had started work at two in the morning, and was heading home after lunch at 11 am. His official work time is from 6 am to 2 pm. A and B had a harder time with short nights and grumbled a bit about it, but agreed that it was the best way to get the work done and were glad of the extra off-time during the day. I want to stress that to my understanding no-one has asked them to handle the situation this way, but they choose to do so. One morning B even seemed a bit insulted that a new colleague had called him to work at five am because of a "snow situation" even though the team had the situation under control and had monitored the weather radar pictures the previous night to prepare. The snow work itself didn't seem to be uncomfortable to the men, as A claimed they sometimes shoveled snow manually instead of using a motorized plow "for fun" or "for the exercise".

According to A, working overtime is basically voluntary and they don't do it "too often", though of course some crisis situations concerning accidents, weather or sick leaves just make it unavoidable. As I understand, taking care of these situations is more a matter of professional pride and solidarity than someone forcing them to. F says he has been required to work overtime perhaps once a year, and these have been emergencies. C adds that it is well understood that men with families aren't able to work so much overtime even in the case of an emergency.

Because there are times when there is more to do (such as winter) and other times when the pace of work is more relaxed, managing one's own work time is important. According to B, "If there's too much (free) time, things start going bad. You need to work evenly, so that you stay in rhythm and feel like you're useful." D supports this statement by telling me that a lot of unnecessary tasks and needless hurrying is avoided because he can set the pace himself. He thinks that by

anticipating future tasks he can save much time. According to A, it is best to have some quiet time every once in a while to be used for “wandering around and sniffing out” possible flaws or machinery in need of attention. “(In this work) you can’t be a person who will just stay and sit around.” Generally, the men felt that variation was an aspect that was an important enriching factor in their work.

3rd theme: possibility to concentrate on personally interesting aspects of work

The third theme I noticed was that the men often had the possibility to *concentrate on interesting and challenging aspects* of their work and to *utilize their special personal skills* if they wished. This is mostly because of the free-flowing, self-determined working rhythm characteristic of their work, a feature that allows them to use possible extra time between tasks to concentrate on areas of interest. Also, in many cases a maintenance worker will have the option of either performing a task himself or forwarding the task to an in-house specialist such as an electrician or plumber, or possibly calling a subcontractor such as a locksmith. If he is interested, he can take on the task himself even if it is not strictly required. Likewise if the maintenance worker is especially interested in some device, technology or computer program, he may put quite a lot of his spare time into achieving mastery in the chosen area of interest. **B** claims that it is this complexity and these challenges that make the work motivating. “It demands a lot of initiative and the right attitude. I’ve seen a lot of guys who aren’t like that and they’ve all had to leave sooner or later.

A, for example, is highly interested in many areas of his work and does his best to know everything there is to know about them. He comes across as having an engineer’s mentality and a very pedantic approach to his work, wanting to understand how the technology he is involved with works and how to make it work even better. A is able to go on for hours about the computer programs he uses to control the machinery embedded in “his” buildings, listing the pros and cons of each program. I kind of understand the fascination with the tinkering involved in operating all this machinery and controlling the big picture; these programs closely resemble the many types of

computer simulators I sometimes like to dabble with. Incidentally, he is apparently the only person who has managed to master the use of a certain type of specialized snow utilized in clearing snow off a private manor located on an island in the Helsinki archipelago. This manor does not belong to his official duties anymore, but he still clears the snow on that island as a side job. A is also intrigued by the buildings he tends to, especially the older, historic government buildings which he knows quite a lot about due to reading building history as well as the recent renovations to HVAC-modifications (HVAC; heating, ventilation and air-conditioning) that have been required to fit modern equipment into the old building frame. B, who to me comes across as a very analytical man aware of his employers higher-level goals, is on the other hand much more interested in the organizational dynamics and management practices at his work and is even writing a paper on the subject for a professional degree he is currently finishing. I will get back to this later in this segment.

In the team of A, B and C, it has been decided that C does most of the outdoor work. This suits him fine, since having worked on a farm prior to joining Lassila & Tikanoja, he is used to working outside and enjoys it. Since he did some horticulture studies to help with his work on the farm when he was younger, he is able to utilize the said skills in the summer when a major part of the outdoor work is tending to the greenery. G has a long history of different types of handyman jobs. He has been working, among other occupations, as a cobbler, an electrician and a ship technician responsible for plumbing. He likes the fact that even though he could ask some of Lassila & Tikanoja's many specialists to take care of certain problems faced, he can mostly take care of them himself. "I like working with my hands, building and repairing things."

4th theme: possibility to develop work

The fourth major theme I noticed was men's freedom to *develop processes and tools* they used in their work. I feel this was allowed, if not actively encouraged by Lassila & Tikanoja's management. However, it seemed to me that customers and other stakeholders encouraged them to do so.

As I mentioned before, **A** is extremely interested in both the tangible and intangible tools he uses in his work. One of the programs he uses to control HVAC in his assigned buildings is designed by an outside software company. He says that this program is still quite unfinished (Finnish “raakile”) and is so frustrated over it that he is basically doing free R&D work for the company that designed it by informing them of faults and glitches found as well as making his recommendations for improvement. I personally saw one of the troubleshooting lists he was compiling for them and it went on for pages on end. **A** claims that these flaws irritate him, but to me it was pretty obvious that he also enjoyed working on bettering the program. Overall, he has a very proactive take to his work, and together with **B** and **C** their team has independently approached customers and stakeholders to develop the maintenance of their buildings. For example, thanks to their team initiative they are holding semi-regular development discussions with the foreign ministry’s people in order to share ideas, review evacuation plans and monitor sustainable energy consumption. Especially sustainability in energy consumption seems to be a topic close to **A**’s heart, as he kept close tabs on, among other measurables, room temperature and underlined its importance on several occasions during my visits. At one point he even gave me a brief lecture on how energy costs and unwanted emissions in the metropolitan area could be reduced by using the condensate heat of the Loviisa nuclear power plant to heat offices and homes.

Likewise **F** has put much effort into trying to get the management to better the work processes of the maintenance workers. He tells me that he has sent many proposals to the management of Lassila & Tikanoja, especially concerning communication between teams (for example between teams responsible for business real-estates and teams responsible for larger outdoor areas), an area he feels is in serious need of improvement. **B** also likes to develop his work as well as the work of others. He says that it is thanks to the autonomy that he has that he can “even develop our working methods a bit” and overall try to “make our activities better”. He is especially adamant about proper documentation. I listened to him ranting to **A** for a while how important it is that every undertaken task is documented so thoroughly that “even an inexperienced guy can easily read it.” Also, the paper he is writing for his professional degree (work title “Teamwork in

real-estate maintenance”) is directly targeted at Lassila & Tikanoja’s managers to help them develop the organization.

5th theme: possibility for personal development

The fifth and final theme I feel provides a link between autonomy and job enrichment is that the men have the possibility, if they choose to utilize it, to *learn and develop their skills in their work*. This is an area of personal growth I feel Lassila & Tikanoja encourages its employees to engage in, both to excel at their work as well as climb the corporate ladder towards more challenging positions. In fact, the most of the men made references to middle managers who had started out in the lowest ranks of the occupation and made their way to managerial positions through additional education and professional degrees. According to **E**, who is currently working on his maintenance degree, education for professional diplomas is paid by Lassila & Tikanoja, provided that the employee completes his degree within a certain time limit and commits to staying at the company for at least three years. Failure to comply with these terms would result to the employee having to pay the costs of the degree back to his employer. The degree will allow him to move forward from his mobile maintenance worker’s position to more challenging jobs, such as the ones **A**, **B** and **D** are currently holding. He adds that he will later have the possibility to complete another degree which will qualify him for managerial positions. He feels that these possibilities help him become more committed to the company.

Another prime example of this is **B** who, as mentioned before is working towards a professional degree which will enable him to take on more challenging positions inside the company. This degree is in Finnish called “huoltomestari”, and it translates roughly to master of maintenance. His diploma work studies the relationships between management, foremen and the maintenance workers from the perspective of team work, arguing that the role of foremen is practically non-existent in maintenance work today. **F** completed his professional maintenance degree, including the mandatory practical training, in half a year before he came to Lassila & Tikanoja, and **G** is

currently working on his own degree, as he proudly tells me. C still seems to be in the process of getting to grips with his transition from farmer to maintenance worker, but I got the impression that he is willing to get some professional education in the field later on.

4.1.2 Work role fit

Work role fit mainly refers to the workers experience of whether or not he has the ability and possibility to express his preferred self through his work role. Here the link to autonomy might not be entirely obvious, but in my opinion it has much to do with freedom of expression, self-control and the ability to influence the norms of ones work role as aspects of autonomy. Are the maintenance workers I studied autonomous in the sense that they can express their so called true self in the work context? For the most part, the answer is yes.

However, I think this ability to enact the preferred self has much to do with the fact that the maintenance workers I met generally fit a certain fairly homogenous mold, placing them in an organization whose members have much in common. This mold is partly upheld by the men themselves, as they seem to have a quite clear opinion of what kind of a person can perform well in their profession. From what I understood, newcomers who do not fit the image of the stereotypical maintenance worker often have a hard time adjusting and eventually leave. I would not rule out the possibility that the work community actively pushes out misfits. The employee turnover rate is apparently quite small, the men get used to working with each other and having to include new people in the team can cause some anxiety. In this context, one might think it is not overly difficult for those who fit the underlying requirements to act according to one's personal self-image. Despite this, I noted some cases where this was not always possible and the research subjects struggled to balance their work role and self-image. In these cases it would often seem that this occasional breaking out of the work role was accepted and in a way supported by the work community. To sum up, I would say that the ability of the maintenance workers to enact

their preferred selves at work stems to a significant degree from their control over the work community's culture.

What then is this image of the stereotypical maintenance worker? The first thing that springs to mind from my research data is that they tend to listen to 'manly' radio stations at work. Classic rock and sports broadcasting dominate the audible background of the men's cars and basement offices. **C**, a self proclaimed 'country boy' is an exception to this rule, listening to evergreens and Finnish *iskelmä* (comparable to German schlager music) in his mini tractor. Topics of discussion, aside from work, often revolve around sports, such as the ongoing winter Olympics in Vancouver. By illustrating this I want to make the point that maintenance work is still very much a macho profession. All seven of my research subjects were middle-aged white males, with the exception of **E**, who is in his thirties. **A** states that "Our team works really well, but if there was even one wrong kind of guy, working could get really difficult" and "You can't just sit around." The right kind of guy (note the masculine) is "smart, capable and knows his job".

Competence is often underlined, and I detect he even slightly despises people, especially city-dwellers, with an ineptitude for manual work. "Some people don't even know how to use a hammer", **A** huffs. In the same breath he goes on to compliment his teammate **C**; "A man who's used to working!" **B** underlines the ability to work independently; "Many people are used to work in a hierarchy, that won't do in this work." He says that since a maintenance worker needs to be active and especially proactive, they cannot have lazy people in the team. An intelligent worker can get by with less work if he uses some time for pre-empting and planning, a foolish one will use a lot of time on needless work. **B** also thinks that a maintenance worker cannot be too nice. By this he means that you do the tasks listed in the maintenance contract, but nothing extra. He illustrates the point with an anecdote about a man who ended up spending a couple of hours of work time putting together an IKEA bed for a tenant. **C** thinks in line with his teammates, stressing the importance of "the right attitude" and saying that "those who aren't used to independent, hard work won't last long." To him workplace chemistry is important, and not all people can work well together. "We have people who are used to work (Finnish 'tekijäporukkaa'), it's good to work (with them)."

I think many of the men are comfortable in their role because on their years of experience. For example A, B, **D**, **E** and **F** have all been on the job for over five years. E, in addition to having worked in maintenance for some years, has a father who has worked as a maintenance man his entire life, even owning a small maintenance company at one point. E's small son, he tells me, wants to work the same job as dad once he grows up. In such a long time and with such family traditions, one would think the professional role grows to be a significant part of a person's self-image.

Aside from the lists of things a maintenance worker should not be like mentioned above, the research subjects referred offhandedly to specific cases where a newcomer could not establish his place in the work crew and eventually left. B mentions a new employee who was introduced to the job in their team: "It didn't work out. He couldn't cope with me (Finnish 'Ei kestänyt mua). He wasn't independent." Perhaps this is because of B's seemingly aggressive demeanor. Even though he seems to get by well in his current team with A, his long-time friend and C, who both of the former accept as a capable worker, I get the feeling that it is not always easy for B to fit in a team role because of his temperament and very direct style of communication. "I'll tell it pretty straight, but I just can't take it if work doesn't get done or is done badly. I don't care if someone is offended (by me) as long as the job gets done." E alludes to several cases where newcomers could not fill the standards of the old crew and implies that introducing new people to the job is not always pleasant. "Along comes some hairy-eared fellow (Finnish 'karvakorva', implies an immigrant from Turkey) he doesn't know anything and it takes a long time before he learns." I would say that in some cases the men use their power to weed out people who do not fit their image of what a maintenance worker should be like and how they should do their job.

However much control the maintenance workers have over their role and, hence, role fit, I believe that there must also for them be several ways in which the preferred self and the work role collide at work. Naturally, in the course of a study of such small scope as this one, observations will be unavoidably limited, but I feel I was able to witness a few tell-tale signs of this conflict. The first

one that comes to mind is the conflict between the expected team player –role and the image of a solitary worker some of the men appear to have of themselves. An example of this is B's occasional difficulties, referred to in the paragraph above, to cope with team members who he is not thoroughly acquainted with or has not chosen himself. He and others point out that many maintenance men are 'lone wolves', a statement which to me seems, in part, like a self-justification for the role-conflicts they are experiencing. The image I get from B is that he sees himself as something of an independent renegade. He tells proudly of his long journey of working around Finland in various different occupations, including a postman's position, baker and electrician. "I've been working since I was fourteen," he tells me. B says he will need to work as long as he "has his health" because of his expensive lifestyle which includes hobbies such as motorcycles, old cars and travelling, all reflecting to me the ideals of freedom and independence. Even the paper he is writing to obtain his professional degree seems to question many of his company's current practices.

Another role conflict I noticed was the conflict of the self image of technical expert and the work role expectation of a customer service person who also actively tries to sell his company's additional services to existing customers. I noticed tendencies towards experiencing this kind of conflict in B, D and F. B repeatedly implied, albeit often humorously ("It would be nice if we wouldn't have all these customers, ha ha"), he did not always like to associate with customers, especially those who do not understand his work. To my understanding he often feels working with customers is emotionally taxing. I overheard a couple of discussions where B vented his frustration over uncomprehending customers to A. Having similar feelings about customers, F has crafted his work to entail minimum direct contact with customers (all possible contact through email), not including internal customers (staff of Lassila & Tikanoja), who naturally understand what his work entails. F quite dryly notes that he is glad most residents in the buildings he takes care of are at work during the day.

An interesting role conflict experience, unique among the men I followed to only C, was the transition from a self employed and self reliant entrepreneur, a farmer to be exact, to a paid employee of a large company, or 'farm-hand' (Finnish: 'palkkarenki') as C himself put it. From what

I understood this felt initially, a couple of years ago, slightly strange to C, but he has since adjusted fairly well to this new role.

Despite these conflicts, the maintenance workers I studied are in opinion usually able to fit their preferred self-image to their work role quite well. This is partly due to the homogenous work environment and their own strong influence over the work culture, but also because of the support they get from their work community when faced with some of the more typical work-role conflicts such as with customer service and team work role expectations. I got the impression that many maintenance workers hold similar opinions of customer service as a 'necessary evil' or have themselves experienced difficulties with teamwork. This is why as B says "A lone wolf can get by in this line of work, as long as he does his job. There's some guys who don't do any team work at all. D, who has had a long career at Lassila & Tikanoja, is a good example of this. Maybe his solo position in charge of his own building is a reward for years of good service.

4.1.3 Client relations

Kahn (1990) suggests that client relations can have a considerable impact on experienced engagement especially in occupations where workers are constantly in direct contact with their customers, as is the case with maintenance workers. The customers of the maintenance workers can be divided into two groups: organizational clients such as government organizations, companies or housing cooperatives, and consumer clients such as employees of said organizations or residents, whether they are tenants or owners of their apartments, of housing cooperatives. Although May et al. (2004) did not include it in their framework because of the low customer contact their research subjects experienced, after surveying my data I decided that it was such a significant part of the maintenance workers' lives that I could not omit it from my analysis. In contrast to co-worker relations and supervisor relations which affect the experience of psychological safety, I propose that the effect of client relations is mostly directed at psychological meaningfulness.

I see two general themes in my data where the links between experienced autonomy and work engagement become apparent. First, the maintenance workers seem to be, either subliminally or consciously, dividing their clients into groups; the good and the bad. Note that this distinction is purely my construct, and the maintenance workers themselves never directly used these terms. Generally speaking bad clients tend to complain, are overly active in making contact, do not see the 'big picture' and do not understand the work or the costs related to the tasks the men perform. Good clients are understanding, appreciative and especially knowledgeable about the details of the maintenance workers' profession. Depending on which category a specific client falls into, the men may make decisions on how they try to control communication with the client and how they handle tasks related to the client. Second, some of the maintenance workers seem to be independently and very proactively building deeper relations with some clients and other stakeholders, both individual people and organizations. Even though this deepening of relations seems to stem, to an extent, from professional pride and a desire for good customer service, it clearly also has its advantages as a tool for exerting control over client relations, be it through, for example guiding customer experiences or the lengthening of contracts with organizational clients.

1st theme: classifying customers

The first theme, dividing clients into groups and managing client relations according to their groupings was manifested in the data on several occasions. The men themselves made several references, both direct and indirect, that some clients are more pleasant to deal with than others.

For example when it comes to organizational clients, **A** highly values Senate Properties, the organizational client who owns the buildings he is responsible for and rents them out to the government agencies that actually use them. According to A, Senate Properties, which operates under the Ministry of Finance, has a very long-term focus in their administration of the properties

they own. The maintenance of the buildings, which are often of historical and architectural importance, is the highest priority, environmental issues are taken into consideration and there are no expectations of making profit off the properties. For a pedantic professional such as A, this is the very model of an ideal real-estate client. I get the impression that A is very much annoyed by what he considers shortsightedness on behalf of privately owned real-estate organizations. **B** makes a similar division and elaborates by dividing organizational clients into three classes of ownership (in order of superiority): public sector (long-term commitment), Finnish private sector, and foreign private sector (no interest in having good relations with the maintenance company, just looking to profit short-term, no investments or repairs). In commercial real-estate, he feels that another segment causing the men extra work and worry are retailers and businesses who rent out business premises.

When talking about individual customers, meaning people who work or live in the buildings maintained by Lassila & Tikanoja, there exist many different divisions. For example **F** says every residential building has a “stalker” (Finnish: “kyttääjä”). Additionally, “A lot of people have no idea which tasks are our job and which are not. Luckily (based on our feedback) the operators are pretty good at filtering them out”. One group that gives some men grief are the chairmen of the housing cooperatives, who often seem to want to show off their knowledge on how to manage properties. As I was spending time with **F** at a certain residential block, the elderly chairman of the building followed us around ceaselessly giving “helpful” advice, which clearly irritated **F**. **B** said he understands the difficulties of the position, but some of the chairmen are outright trying to cheat maintenance workers into doing extra work for free. When it comes to residential buildings, **F** thinks the ones with tenants are less pleasant to take care of, a notion echoed by **E**. The men seem to think there are socio-economic factors that come into play here, but it is also a matter of temporary residents not putting as much effort as resident owners into keeping places tidy. Certain residential areas with government supported housing are seen as slightly dangerous, a factor that is manifested especially in the work of those who occasionally work night shifts. **E** tells me an anecdote of an incident which also **F** claims to have heard of: “There can be tough situations during nightshifts, like difficult drunks who try to pick a fight when you open a door for them (a situation where a resident has lost their keys). This thing happened to another guy once: A call came to the switchboard about opening the door for a resident. The operator who took the

call heard a man say (on the background) “Be ready! He’s coming soon.” The operator called the police who found three men waiting to jump the maintenance man.” During the time I spent with F, I was once present when he opened a door for a couple slightly drunk of alcoholics. The situation was fairly unpleasant, and I understand that the maintenance workers would rather not spend too much time with these kinds of clients.

As mentioned before, the maintenance workers sometimes seem to, whether it be consciously or not, relate to different clients differently depending on whether they are seen as ‘good’ or ‘bad’ clients. I find that this kind of mental division is totally normal human behavior, and I did not find that it caused anything that could be called poor customer service. Rather the different handling of clients was manifested more as, for example, controlling the ways clients can communicate with the maintenance workers. For example **D** says he has tried to “train customers” to only contact him through task lists or email, as he seems to dislike talking to them on the phone unless there is an emergency situation. However, certain customers and stakeholders, such as the building manager of the property or the personnel of Lassila & Tikanoja headquarters (internal customers) get to associate with D face-to-face or by telephone. D implies that this is because they “know things”, meaning that they understand what his job entails (Lassila & Tikanoja employees) or have good technical knowledge (building manager). **A** dislikes tasks assigned by telephone also, but for a different reason: the calls leave no documentation trails that can be followed when conducting future task in the same area. **B** is dissatisfied with how the government workers treat external labor such as the maintenance men. “We aren’t invited to any parties. They badmouth us.” To me this seems to have the effect that B keeps a bit more distance between the government employees and himself as he does with other clients.

Another issue that seems to constantly get on the nerves of the men is the eternal, repetitive and mostly contradicting complaints about heating they get from employees and residents. A elaborates: “We get a lot of email about how it’s cold in the office. This is always a problem because the bureau says temperatures should always be at 21 (degrees Celsius). It feels like this is not warm enough for a lot of people, especially women, so we get a lot of requests to turn up the heat. We can’t do anything about it, because a rise in one rooms’ temperature would screw up the

whole buildings' heating." C agrees that there is a lot of conflict because of heating issues, and the men are often "caught in the middle" of arguments between the contractor (Lassila & Tikanoja), the owner (Senate Properties), and the tenant (Foreign Ministry). D states that there are a lot lot of "difficult customers who ask unnecessary questions and complain about heating." Similar cases abound on the residential side as well, as I witnessed myself while riding with the mobile maintenance workers. A significant portion of the house calls we made had to do with heating problems, a normal seasonal trend probably heightened by the uncharacteristically cold winter of 2009-2010. Naturally, this causes slight cynicism in the way the men relate to the complaints, but most of them seem to understand that the repetitiveness of the complaints must not affect their quality of work. "We check every request, because often a radiator is really broken. You can't get numb because of the complaining, there might be a real problem," A emphasizes. F thinks that one "just needs to be patient and take it easy."

2nd theme: proactive relationship building

The second theme linking client relations and work engagement to autonomy, the proactive relationship-building which the men engaged in with both organizations and individuals was also clearly evident in the data. The maintenance workers not only concentrated on clients in their networking efforts, but tried to establish good relations with various other stakeholders (such as outsourced security personnel, independent remodeling contractors) as well. I think it is noteworthy that the maintenance workers seemed to engage in these relationship-building activities totally independently and seemingly without any pressure towards this kind of behavior from the management. I think they understand that comprehensive networking enables them to develop their work and perform their tasks as well as possible.

For example, since the team of A, B and C valued working at the real estate of Senate Properties so much they seemed to put a significant amount of effort into building a relationship with them. While I was observing the team, a new property manger of Senate Properties took over the real-

estate and A immediately invited him to join them for an unofficial introductory chat about their work. Also, at the team's initiative, they hold regular development discussions with Senate Properties in order to find ways of improving each party's operations. Recent discussions topics have included for example energy efficiency and the updating of evacuation plans. Aside from the good customer service these talks represent and the possibility to exchange ideas they provide, regular contact has the benefit of allowing the team to introduce their point of view on, for example, what kinds of tasks they are capable of performing, how much time certain operations require, or what the most urgent repair needs in the real estate are. Aside from talks, the team might also do small favors to their organizational client in order to increase goodwill between the parties. For example on Shrove Tuesday (Finnish: "Laskiaistiistai") when the staff of the Foreign Ministry were holding a small function on the grounds, C agreed to fence off, sand and clear of ice a small portion of the parking lot even though it was not, strictly speaking, a part of his duties. B jokingly called the event an attempt to save on staff costs, as the employees of the ministry had to have lunch outdoors and were served pea soup from a mobile kitchen. By doing these little favors, C has come to know some of the staff, and even gets a few greetings from some of them when they pass by. In contrast, maintenance workers usually seem to be ignored by employees working in the buildings they take care of.

By building a good relationship, the team is also increasing the possibility of Senate Properties extending their three-year maintenance contract with Lassila & Tikanoja, and thereby safeguarding at least their current assignment, but possibly also their jobs as a whole. D claims he sometimes chats generally about maintenance work with the CEO of Lassila & Tikanoja, whose office is located in the building D takes care of. I can't help but think this will be an advantage for D in the future should he wish to keep working on the same premises. Likewise, though E and F sometimes grumble about having to deal with the "snoopy" chairmen of housing cooperatives, they seem to think that building relationships with them will ultimately make work a little bit easier, and likewise increase the likelihood of a renewed contract in future negotiations. For example, since F knows all the chairmen and superintendants of the buildings he maintains, he always knows who to call in case there is a problem and how to deal with the more difficult individuals.

4.2 Factors affecting psychological safety

4.2.1 Coworker relations

Autonomy regarding coworker relations is manifested in my data in two ways; 1. Control over who one's coworkers are and what kind of a relationship one has with them, and 2. Control over which subcontractors are used and what kind of a relationship one has with them.

As for my first point, it has been evident to me from the start of my observing period that the maintenance workers, or at least the more senior ones, have quite a lot of say on whom they work with and they relate to their coworkers. A good example of this is, once again, the team of **A**, **B** and **C**. **B** joined Lassila & Tikanoja some years ago, and quite soon afterward recommended **A**, his colleague of many years to his superiors, who subsequently head-hunted him to work on the same unit as **B**. A couple of years later **A** and **B** were given a responsibility area of their own, and had significant control over who was picked to be the third man on the team. That member ended up being **C**, whose work ethic, attitude and skills **A** and **B** highly value. **C**, being a more recent addition to the tandem of **A** and **B**, seems to be not as vocal about his views as the other men, but he still seems to be regarded as a 'full member' of the team. The dynamic of **A** and **B** sometimes amuses **C**; "They're like an old couple. Someone might think they just argue all the time but that's just how they talk to each other." He adds that even though the other men have their inside jokes, the whole group get along well. "We're all about the same age and we understand each other.

As for **D**, his choice (a choice I doubt most workers do not get to make) has been to opt for working alone, since he prefers doing things his own way. Aside from the times when an emergency requires many sets of hands and he is called in to help in another building, **D** has next to nothing to do with the other members of his work precinct. "Sometimes I miss having someone to talk to but at least I get to control everything." **E** and **F** work in similar positions in the same area, but have quite a different approach to their coworkers. Neither of the two have had an impact on who works in the same team with them aside from initial comments on new recruits,

but due to the nature of their mobile work, they can mostly determine how much they socialize with other team members that are scattered around the same part of Espoo. On paper the work may seem very lonely with each maintenance worker operating from his car in his own designated area, but in practice most of the men help each other in many ways and meet face-to-face often on a daily basis. If there's a sudden influx of work, they might take care of tasks on a coworker's behalf or help out with more demanding tasks. Discussing on the phone how best to deal with a specific task is also an everyday thing. E says that coworkers have a big impact on how good he feels at work and how well he can perform his tasks, so he tries to stay in touch with them as much as possible. Indeed, during the time I spent with E he was constantly calling his coworkers and receiving calls from them, chatting away about things related directly or indirectly to their work. He also seemed to know a great deal about their personal lives, which to me indicates a quite close working relationship. From what I understood, they often eat lunch together at petrol stations or restaurants, and sometimes just stop to have a cigarette and chat for a while. E says that they have a good atmosphere in the team and that it is always tough when someone leaves because employee retention is normally so high.

F by contrast does not seem as social as E. Even though he recognizes the usefulness of the team structure, it seems to me that he does not enjoy associating with his colleagues very much. For example, he seemed to be a bit uncomfortable around G, whom he was introducing to his new tasks. When G called him up one morning, asking him to help him because his car battery had expired, F sighed loudly and said to me after the phone call: "Well, I guess I can't leave him there alone." Later, he comments on having a trainee under his wing: "It's nice that I got a guy to work for me, I can give him some jobs. On the other hand I can't hassle him (Finnish: "juoksuttaa") too much, otherwise he'll get mad and quit the job. He does give out advice on the phone if requested, but not once during the time I spent with him did he call any of his coworkers to ask advice himself. He prefers to eat lunch at home, once outright declining G's invitation to go out for lunch.

The maintenance workers seem to strive to build beneficial relationships also with non-customer – stakeholders, who do not have a direct impact on maintenance contracts or other issues related to

the security of their employment. Though these people are not on the same payroll as the maintenance workers, I would say that they can definitely be defined as co-workers, since they essentially share the same work goal; maintaining the buildings and keeping their HVAC machinery in working order. For instance A is well acquainted, and by this I mean on a first-name basis, with the outsourced security personnel working at the government buildings. Wherever they meet, greetings along with some small talk and possibly tidbits of work-related gossip are exchanged. It clearly helps A to keep tabs on what is happening at his workplace, in addition to giving him a few extra pairs of eyes who might inform him of possible maintenance tasks that will need to be done in the future. Possibly because of the same potential benefits, B seems to know well the subcontractors Lassila & Tikanoja uses for tasks requiring specific expertise, such as plumbers, electricians and locksmiths. He also underlines how much he appreciates them and their professionalism. Even the slightly antisocial F recognizes the need to maintain good relations with in-house contractors, saying that he makes a point of getting to know, above all, the specialists and chairmen of housing cooperatives well, so that he knows who to call in which situation and how to act with each person to get the best results.

4.2.2 Supervisor relations

Supportive supervisor relations in the context of work engagement are all about how much support and how little control the employee experiences from his higher-ups. From what I understood, Lassila & Tikanoja managers seemed supportive enough of their subordinates' actions and decisions, a fact that is somewhat linked to the amount of autonomy the employees experience. However, from the point of view of autonomy the most significant way supervisor relations impact psychological safety in the maintenance workers I observed is through the lack of control they experienced from their superiors. In fact, I got the general impression that the maintenance workers themselves are mostly the ones that define how much they are in contact with their superiors, who seem to act more like middle management or coaches than team supervisors. This supports B's claim, presented earlier, that the supervisor cast in its traditional role has pretty much disappeared from Lassila & Tikanoja over the last few years.

A brings out a contrast between Lassila & Tikanoja and his and B's previous employer organization, a place where, according to him, "the management was bad, and many people left the job". From B's comments on the subject I got the feeling that there was basically no control and no support, a situation which led to infighting and petty quarrels among the employees. However, the men are satisfied with the way things are run by their current employer. "There's a lot of freedom, which is nice", says A. He adds that contact with their superiors is not frequent, they call each other maybe once a week in situations where advice is needed or when a specific problem they cannot deal with themselves arises, which happens rarely. **C** agrees on the contact with management being limited to problematic situations. In fact he is not quite sure who his immediate superior is. In other words, the men themselves control the amount of contact with their supervisor, not the other way around. Support is readily available if the men decide they need it. B gives an example of this: "Sometimes the maintenance contract is not clear on what our responsibility is and what is not. In these situations I can either make the call myself or give the problem to my superior (if it is a difficult problem or customer). There's no use in arguing over it myself." C agrees. He says he appreciates the support system (Finnish: "tukiverkosto") in the company.

The theme of hands-off management continued when I spoke about the subject with other maintenance workers. In the case of **D** this is even more evident than in the team of A, B and C. "I get a call (from the manager) maybe once a month. He asks me how I'm doing", he states. The mobile maintenance workers E, F and G also have quite rare encounters with their superiors, though not as rare as the stationary workers. Overall I would say they are less autonomous in relation to management, a fact that I think has a negative impact on the work engagement of these men. E says he usually sees his supervisor at the office in the beginning of the working day, and once a week they have a team meeting. Managers higher up on the corporate ladder are seldom heard from. He has only positive things to say about his superiors, calling his closest supervisor, who used to be a maintenance man himself "a great guy (Finnish: "todella asiallinen jätkä)". E goes on to claim he has had only one bad superior during his time at Lassila & Tikanoja. "He didn't know his job, didn't know what was relevant. But he's gone now." **F** says he sees his

supervisor once a week at the team meeting. “We get along, but it’s nice that I don’t need to see him all the time”, he says with a crooked smile.

The mobile maintenance workers also seem to encounter more control, a fact that seems to annoy some of them. E was the first one to tell me of the GPS-device installed in the maintenance workers’ cars. According to him, management claims it is there for the security of the maintenance workers themselves, but E suspects it has more to do with monitoring that the men are where they are supposed to be, and F thinks they are for making sure they don’t use the vehicles on their own time. “Big brother is watching”, he said. I later got to see it, a small electronic device, under G’s cars hood when his car’s battery ran empty. According to F, this was because of the said GPS-device, which uses the car battery even when the car is not running. He told me this is the fifth such incident so far this year. They’re kind of useless, but I guess they have a point regarding safety”, he reflects. E also told me about a smoking ban in public places, a rule he finds irritating and useless, since everyone, management including, smokes publicly anyway. I even saw E having a cigarette break with the unit’s service manager. Another incident of what I felt was excess control was when E told me that he had been scolded for staying to chat and have coffee after a work task at an elderly lady’s apartment at her own request. According to my understanding, some of these elderly people are quite lonely and as B put it “have only the maintenance man to speak to”. I would see a short chat as good customer service that is likely to bring good reputation to the company. In any case, if all the maintenance workers’ tasks get done, does it matter that they spend a few extra moments with clients?

4.2.3 Coworker norms

According to May et al. (2004), adherence to coworker norms can only have a negative effect on the experience of psychological safety and hence work engagement. The idea is that a person who feels he must alter his behavior to fit the mold presented by the norms of his coworkers will not experience psychological safety and hence will be less likely to feel and act engaged. I can certainly

relate to this notion, having experienced such situations and feelings of not being safe for example during my year as a conscript in the Finnish army or during my freshman year at Helsinki School of Economics, both environments I did not quite feel I belong in. However, I think the idea that adherence to coworker norms can only have a negative effect on the experience of psychological safety is slightly questionable. What if a worker shares the values and beliefs of his work community and is comfortable adhering to them? Would this kind of a situation not lead to the worker feeling safe in his work environment, surrounded by like-minded people? I think that in the context of my study adherence to coworker norms is of great importance regarding the feeling of safety that the maintenance workers experience. Indeed, I heard several stories of workers who did not “fit in” the work community in some way and subsequently left or were pushed to leave the job. However, the ones who did stay in this quite homogenous group seemed to feel quite comfortable.

Autonomy comes into the picture when one looks at how these men, especially the more senior ones, use their power to define what kind of a person is “right” or “wrong” for the job. They use this kind of rhetoric to protect their culture and norms, and to sustain the integrity of their group by keeping unwanted people from gaining a foothold in the occupation. On a more positive note, the rhetoric is also a way of building team cohesion. In a way, most of the maintenance workers I observed had built themselves a work culture inside which they could behave in a way natural to them, and where they did not have to significantly conform to the norms of others. For example the talks I had with **B** and the rest of his team indicated that **B** has not gotten along well with all of his co-workers. He has not had to, either. All those who could not handle his demeanor have left the job. I have the impression that **B** has had the backing of his colleagues for his straight-talking approach to conflict. As **A** says, “He’s a bit gruff (Finnish: “jörö”), you have to know how to deal with him. We get along just fine (Finnish: “juttu luistaa”) because of our long experience. On the other hand, I feel that in the workplace in question this is only possible for those who fit a certain mold to begin with.

The words and concepts which the maintenance workers used in their rhetoric to build an image of what kind of a person fits their working community were numerous and often repeated. For

example, B was very vocal about the need to be “hardworking”, “independent” and “proactive”. He emphasized that their workplace is no place for people who need a rigorous hierarchy around them to function and that initiative and the “right attitude” are imperative to being a member of a maintenance team. C agrees, adding that their similar ages help them to work together and understand each other. Despite his different background and slightly more quiet nature, he seems to be a full member of the team and comfortable with his role in it.

D on the other hand does not have to adhere to coworker norms, because he in fact has no coworkers. This is entirely of his doing, having requested a position where he can manage a building by himself. In a way D also has created a work culture where he can work and act in a way he feels natural. E seems to be well adapted to his work community’s norms, or maybe one could say that he has in fact not had to adapt at all. His father being a maintenance worker and formerly an owner of a small maintenance company, E has grown up with the culture of maintenance men and is quite comfortable with it. Having worked in similar occupations for his whole life, one could see that G is also in a position where he does not need to adapt to conform to coworker norms. The only maintenance worker I talked with who seemed sometimes to be ill-at ease with the work community’s norms, hence adhering to the original idea of negative effects on psychological safety by May et. al. (2004) was F, who to me seemed to be the least engaged worker of the group. He seemed to avoid contact with his coworkers, not making many calls to colleagues himself and even retreating to his home for lunch breaks. Obviously he has had to compromise somewhat because of the team structure of the organization, but clearly he would rather not be in contact with colleagues very often. It is hard to say why on the basis of such short observation, but it comes to mind that this disinclination to socialize with other members of the organization might in part stem from problems in adhering to coworker norms.

4.2.4 Self-consciousness

According to May et al. (2004), self-consciousness can have a negative impact on psychological safety and through it work engagement, but on the other hand it can also have a direct positive impact on work engagement. I do not think that self-consciousness and the experience of autonomy are linked strongly enough in the data to be included in this analysis.

4.3 Factors affecting psychological availability

4.3.1 Resources

May et al (2004) indicate that the availability of resources can affect experienced work engagement both directly and through psychological availability. When talking about resources, the thought that immediately springs to mind is that in this category, unlike the others, the marked lack of autonomy and power when it comes to physical, cognitive and emotional resources can have a significant negative effect on resources and hence availability as well as work engagement. Although the men clearly have a lot of say regarding how they conduct their work, they still, for the most part, cannot really impact such things as pay, budgets, number of employees, overall workloads and the general appreciation of the profession.

As mentioned earlier, the lack of autonomy regarding the scarce physical resources (such as tools, programs and funds) of the maintenance workers makes for the most obvious example of the negative impacts of resources on availability and work engagement. **A** has many complaints about the quality of the software he has to use to control the HVAC-systems in his buildings, as well as the locations of the computer terminals this software is on. Despite his efforts, he has not managed to relocate the terminals or change the programs, some of which he claims are largely unfinished products. Another depleting physical resource factor he mentions is the temporary

location of their operational headquarters. Due to renovations their regular base of operations, along with a couple of key computer terminals, is buried under a mass of protective plastic canvas in another building. As I personally witnessed, every so often a member of the team has to weave his way through an active renovation site and crawl under the protective plastic to access those critical terminals. Generally speaking, renovations all over their buildings tend to cause significant amounts of extra work, a fact that also **D** attests to. Both **A** and **B** agree that this is both an annoyance and a waste of energy as well as working time. Budgets and funds in general are another factor the maintenance workers have little control over. The exception to this rule seems to be **D**, who claims he has been strongly involved in determining the size of his maintenance budget. As for the mobile maintenance workers, the physical resource most commonly referred to as lacking was manpower. According to my understanding, this is because the mobile maintenance units normally operate close to or at the limit of their resources with only a minimum-sized crew hired for each maintenance area. In the event of sick-leaves such as during seasonal flu epidemics or when a member of the team leaves the job, the remaining members of the team are immediately overwhelmed with a larger work load. **E** says sick leaves always cause too much work, and **F** says this has caused him an abnormally large workload for the last half a year. He ponders that this abnormally heavy work load feels like it is starting to become the norm. The situation is especially bad for him now, since due to sick leaves and one maintenance man quitting his job, he currently has twice the amount of buildings to look after than he normally would. Amusingly, **G** says the only physical resource he feels is overly taxed is his legs, which are tired of all the walking. Otherwise he feels quite content.

As for cognitive resources, the maintenance workers mostly seem to complain about the stress caused by all the hurrying and time problems. Every single one of the men I spoke with mentioned that there are often problems with time in their work. With all the snow work and machinery breakdowns, winter is by far the busiest and most taxing time of their work. This is mentioned to sometimes make them tired and frustrated, but there is a general feeling that the occasional busy periods come with the job description. **C** reminds me that a balancing factor is the long, unhurried periods they often get to enjoy during the summers.

As for emotional resources, the fact which most of the maintenance workers brought up as a slight depleting factor is that they feel their profession is generally underappreciated and perhaps misunderstood, something I can attest to myself, having had no idea of the complex and demanding nature of their work. In the same breath the men usually mentioned that as a result of the lack of appreciation they also feel they are underpaid. “Well, we’re underappreciated and underpaid, but I don’t know if it matters,” comments B. He also makes a point of noting that the cleaners working for Lassila & Tikanoja receive even less recognition and an even smaller paycheck. However, the men mentioned this in a way that led me to believe that the pay is for them mostly a measure of respect and not a matter of survival. “The pay could be bigger but I get by all right,” says C.

4.3.2 Outside activities

How can autonomy regarding outside activities result in an enriching work experience? Or, along the lines of May et al. (2004), can the lack of autonomy regarding outside activities result in reduced availability and hence reduced work engagement? This issue is especially challenging to address in my study, since it is not easy to get to discussing important, personal, non-work related issues with gruff men such as the ones I studied. At the very least, an in-depth analysis would require much more time spent with the men. However, the issue of balancing outside activities and work was touched upon a few times during the time I spent observing the maintenance workers, even though nothing in the data clearly linked these issues with autonomy. Since some studies (Rothbard, 2001) suggest that outside activities can have a positive correlation with work engagement, especially when the subject individuals are men, I think we can safely assume that both a negative and a positive effect is possible in the context of this study. Interestingly, Bakker et al. (2005) suggest that both work engagement and burnout experienced by an individual can cross over from one partner of a relationship to another. Alas, within the confines of this study it is not possible to speculate on the levels of work engagement experienced by the maintenance workers’ spouses and whether or not their work engagement has crossed over to their partners, or vice versa.

5. Conclusions

5.1 Findings

5.1.1 Significance of autonomy to work engagement

To conclude, I can state that based on my ethnographic research data, the experience of autonomy and the associated feeling of having influence over the content and meanings of one's work that comes with it is one of the most influential factors related to the emergence of an experience of work engagement for the maintenance workers I surveyed in my study. According to my observations, autonomy affects work engagement in maintenance workers to some extent through each of the three psychological pathways (psychological meaningfulness, psychological safety and psychological availability) listed by Kahn (1990).

The link between autonomy and work engagement is evident, as seen in chapter 4.1, especially in relation to the experiences of psychological meaningfulness due to the maintenance workers' ability to enrich the content of their work (job enrichment), mold their work roles to fit their ideal self-image (work role fit), and control their interaction with clients (client relations). The men can enrich their work by 1. affecting its content and context, 2. choosing the time and method they use to complete assigned tasks, 3. choosing to concentrate on personally interesting aspects of their work, 4. developing the tools and processes related to their work, 5. concentrating on personal and professional development through additional training and education. Work role fit is optimized in the case of the maintenance workers in question by molding the work role to fit the personalities of the workers through influencing team culture and processes, choosing "suitable" new recruits and ousting "unsuitable" persons from the team. All the men seem to fit a fairly tight mold, making the teams quite homogenous. In this situation, not much adapting is needed on the part of the men to fit into their work roles. As for client relations, the men control their interaction with clients by dividing them into "good" customers and "bad" customers, managed in different ways, and by proactively building strong relations with key clients and stakeholders.

Chapter 4.2 illustrates the links between autonomy and work engagement through psychological safety. The links here are strong, but perhaps not always as obvious as with psychological meaningfulness. I find this is because aspects of psychological safety (coworker norms, self-consciousness, coworker- and supervisor relations) related to autonomy have to do with the extent an employee can affect his interactions with other people. It all begins with supervisor relations, since the lack of immediate supervision and general micromanagement is what gives the maintenance workers their relatively autonomous positions. The men themselves control how much they keep in contact with their closest superiors, who act more like distant coaches than managers. The men also control coworker relations by greatly affecting who is recruited or gets to stay, and which subcontractors are used. Some men even control the extent to which they come into contact with coworkers. Coworker norms can be seen as something a worker does not have much power over, but in this case the homogenous maintenance teams have themselves built a culture of like-minded individuals who share the same norms. People who do not adhere to these norms will be pushed out of the team. Self-consciousness did not prove to be relevant in the data regarding the link between autonomy and work engagement.

Aspects of psychological availability (resources and outside activities) were less relevant to the link between autonomy and work engagement, as shown in chapter 4.3. Outside activities may or may not affect work engagement in this research context, but it is impossible to determine whether or not autonomy has anything to do with the matter since I could only observe the maintenance workers in a work context. As for physical, cognitive and emotional resources, the lack of autonomy over these factors sometimes had a negative effect on work engagement. The men most often felt they were lacking time, something they could not affect in any way. Also physical resources such as tools, programs, manpower and funds were occasionally found to be insufficient.

It must be noted, however, that the data sample is limited and its implications are contextual. I would be very careful in making any generalizations about Lassila & Tikanoja employees in other divisions, maintenance workers in general or manual laborers as a larger group.

5.1.2 Maintenance as knowledge-intensive work

A powerful initial reaction that I had once I had begun my research was that the tasks the maintenance workers performed were often very complex and demanding, requiring diligence and professionalism. The mastery of machinery, computer programs and professional networks were required to adequately perform these duties. I think these observations illustrate how maintenance work, as many other professions, has become increasingly knowledge-intensive. The live-in janitor, a fixture of the 80's and 90's apartment building environment I remember well myself, has disappeared from 21st century Finland. He has been replaced by the autonomous, proactive service men and caretakers who are adept at using complex machinery and able to coordinate their work using information technology.

The profession has changed so much that applying an archaic class-implying term such as blue collar worker does not do justice to the demands of modern maintenance work. I shortly considered whether maintenance work could be seen as knowledge work, but after further inspection I noted that maintenance does not meet all the requirements. Pyöriä (2005, p.124) states that the ideal-type knowledge work “requires extensive formal education and continuous on-the-job learning”, features transferrable skills and involves a low level of standardization and working with abstract symbols and knowledge. He adds that organizations featuring knowledge work range “from professional bureaucracies to self-managing teams”, use “knowledge a primary production factor” and feature “job and task circulation”. The medium of work is symbols and/or people.

Of the aforementioned requirements not all can be attributed to maintenance work. Most notably, it does not require *extensive* formal education or use knowledge as the *primary* production factor. Additionally, maintenance work has physical materials, a feature of traditional work (Pyöriä, 2005, p.124) as a medium of work as well as symbols and people. To summarize, I would say that even though maintenance work does not meet all the requirements of knowledge work, it is nevertheless in its modern form so complex and knowledge-intensive that it should not be defined as blue-collar (implies class) work or traditional work.

5.1.3 Fierce independence – a sign of vulnerability?

The maintenance workers seem to be very aware of their autonomy and influence over working conditions, and sometimes appear to be exploiting their powers most efficiently. They control their working methods, to some extent working times, and often even who is admitted into their work community. The cultures inside the maintenance teams seem to be very strong, but also, on occasion, seemingly frail. Even the slightest hint of control or bureaucracy is seen as a threat, and expressions such as “big brother” and “stalking” are thrown around when alleged attempts at reducing autonomy are detected by the men. The team cultures I witnessed are also quite homogenous, with little tolerance for any kind of deviance.

I find it interesting that diversity is viewed as a threat, and deviants from the team norm are pushed out of the work community. Perhaps the culture is not as strong as it might initially seem. One can speculate, that perhaps the work culture and professional egos of the maintenance workers are indeed so frail, that they need to be protected by keeping the “wrong” kind of people out of the work community. New people with different views of work and life might build pressure to change the ways these maintenance workers operate in, and I get the impression that change is not something they want. It might be so, that the choosing of “suitable” new members for the teams is the easiest way forward, and guarantees the longevity of the established culture that the maintenance workers are so comfortable with.

5.1.4 Homogenous teams

As stated before, one central observation of this study that maintenance workers at Lassila & Tikanoja seem to be an amazingly homogenous group. I was skeptical of this at first, thinking that Lassila & Tikanoja management purposefully had hand-picked a group of very similar employees. This turned out to not be the case. In fact (and quite surprisingly), my contacts had on the contrary tried to pick as diverse a group as possible for me to study.

There has been some research into homogenous teams and their performance in relation to more diverse work communities. Bowers et al. (2000) conducted a meta-analysis of 13 studies to find out whether homogenous teams performed better than heterogeneous teams. They categorized heterogeneity by three categories: biographical differences (age, race, educational background, sociocultural background) differences in initial ability and differences in personality. The most obvious sources of homogeneousness in the teams I studied were biographical, the informants all being Caucasian, middle-aged (with the exception of one man in his thirties) men with only some vocational education. Similarities in initial ability and personality were hinted at by the informants, and indeed many of them expressed that it would be desirable for all team members to be roughly of the same skill level and personality.

According to Tziner (1985), there are two competing social psychological theories regarding the link between team performance and team composition. The first one, the *similarity theory* states that homogenous teams or groups will likely be more productive than heterogeneous teams because of mutual attraction felt by team members. Likewise, the theory predicts that heterogeneous teams will have more inherent tensions, reducing productivity. The second theory, the *equity theory* claims that the tensions inside a dissimilar, heterogeneous team will enhance team performance through the members comparing their own performance to that of other team members and then trying to compensate for the observed differences.

After they concluded their meta-analysis, Bowers et al. (2000, p.326) concluded that neither of the mutually exclusive theories mentioned above is entirely correct, but rather the truth lies in between. They state that their analysis “showed no clear advantage of homogeneity or heterogeneity of one particular attribute over another. It appears that any advantages are dependent on the task”. They concluded that homogenous teams will likely have an advantage in simple low-difficulty tasks, while heterogeneous teams would perform better in complex high-difficulty tasks. This is because cohesion and the lack of interpersonal conflicts allows homogenous teams to smoothly perform simple tasks, while their lack of openness to new sources of information would hold them back in complex problem-solving tasks, giving the edge to the more innovative heterogeneous teams.

Basadur & Head (2001, pp. 13-14), on the other hand, do not discuss team performance in different tasks, but simply state that heterogeneous teams with varied problem-solving skills perform better than homogenous groups in creative problem-solving situations. However, they claim that “heterogeneous teams experienced less satisfaction than the homogenous teams”. Staples & Zhao (2006, p.389) support this statement, claiming that “heterogeneous teams were less satisfied and cohesive and had more conflict than the homogeneous teams”. If the teams started out as virtual teams communicating through collaborative technology, the negative effects experienced in diverse teams were less pronounced. However, this study did not discover statistical differences in team performance levels between the two groups.

Despite some differing findings, to me these theories suggest that the optimal team composition for the mobile maintenance workers and the stationary maintenance workers may not be the same. I find that this could be a very rewarding topic for Lassila & Tikanoja to look into to optimize their team composition, performance and job satisfaction. The service men have mostly simple and straightforward, though by no means easy, tasks, such as fixing radiators, opening doors and changing lamps to handle, and thus could benefit most from a homogeneous team structure. However, the caretakers face complex performance, high-difficulty and problem-solving tasks, where homogeneity could lead to lack of innovation and new ideas, hampering performance. For these themes, a little more heterogeneity could be very beneficial even though it might slightly

lessen team cohesion and work satisfaction. One also has to weigh the importance of job satisfaction versus team performance. Is it worth sacrificing performance for the benefit of satisfaction or vice versa?

5.1.5 Hands-off management

I also find it to be noteworthy, that the autonomy of the maintenance workers is supported in the official management strategy statements of Lassila & Tikanoja, but in practice no active efforts are made to support the autonomy of the employees. Rather, the management employs a hands-off approach, only setting goals and then stepping out of the way of the employees. Neither management nor the maintenance workers themselves seem to want to have much to do with each other. Rather, workers and managers alike see “being called to see the boss” as an indication of failure and try avoid it at all cost. A situation such as this can be hard to change. As evident in the data, the maintenance workers were very much used to the low level of control, and found new methods of control, such as the GPS-tracker in the cars of the service men, to be threatening.

Ram (1999) conducted an ethnographic study of autonomy management in small professional service firms. The research context does not exactly match that of this study, but certain commonalities regarding both the lack of autonomy management and the informants’ love of independence and fear of control can be seen. Also, the degree of autonomy between employees varied according to tasks and seniority, as was the case at Lassila & Tikanoja. Ram (1999, p.27) concluded that instead of a thought-out management strategy, “autonomy is often an outcome of personalized nature of customer client relations; ‘project’ work, and pre-occupation with contract delivery. Nevertheless... autonomy still has to be managed”. Could a more active management philosophy which supports employee autonomy also support the creation of high work engagement?

As seen in the data, the operation of the maintenance teams at Lassila & Tikanoja is largely self-managing within a certain financial and operational framework. As long as certain requirements are met, the workers continue to enjoy trust and a significant amount of autonomy. Benefits from a workforce that has great individual autonomy and loose control systems include increasing the possibility of innovative knowledge creation (Nonaka, 1994), encouraging learning and information sharing (Simons, 1994) and creating intrinsic motivation (Deci & Ryan, 1985). There are, however, risks and possible negative performance effects involved with high trust and individual autonomy, as noted by Langfred (2004, p.391): “high levels of individual autonomy can become a liability in self-managing teams when the level of trust is high and little monitoring takes place.” He recognizes that there are organizational benefits to trust and autonomy, such as “improved communication, more organizational citizenship behaviors, less competitive behavior in negotiations, higher group performance, less conflict, and greater job satisfaction”, but notes that too much trust and autonomy *can* be harmful in self-managing teams (Langfred, 2004, p.385).

Coleman (1999, p. 40) suggests that this tension between control and empowerment can be managed by “measuring outputs and holding people accountable for them, as opposed to a focus on inputs.” This suggestion seems to be in line with Lassila & Tikanoja’s current practice of letting employees operate how they wish within certain guidelines as long as financial targets are met. As observed earlier, the autonomous nature of teams at Lassila & Tikanoja stems in part from their non-hierarchical management model, where the closest manager is actually not part of everyday routines and acts more like a coach than a superior. Baskin (1998) suggests that this kind of a low-bureaucracy company where employees have self control does not necessarily need powerful, controlling management, but managers who merely coordinate activities and monitor the overall functioning of the company so that individual teams can function entrepreneurially.

In the context of Lassila & Tikanoja, the degree of autonomy and amount of monitoring varies by team. Based on my observations, monitoring is more common with teams of service men (meetings every morning, GPS-surveillance, more frequent contact with managers) than with caretaker teams. This could make teams of caretakers more vulnerable to performance risks. Some indications of these risks materializing were evident in the data, for example in the case of

the caretaker who seemed to be losing his customer focus after a long period of work in an environment where he was hardly monitored at all. Hence, Lassila & Tikanoja should be careful when balancing with autonomy and control. Too much control can lead to lowered job satisfaction, while too much autonomy can hamper team performance. Even when teams are performing well and are comprised of trusted individuals, there is no need for excess naiveté on behalf of management. Also, the total absence of control can in some cases lead to the abuse of autonomy, as seen in the data in the form of discrimination.

5.2 Limitations

A central limitation of this study is, due to using ethnography as a research method, is the highly contextual nature of the acquired data. Even though I believe my observations to hold true when talking about maintenance workers at Lassila & Tikanoja, it is hard to say whether the same conclusions can be drawn about, for example, cleaners at Lassila & Tikanoja, maintenance workers at Hansalaiset Oy, or other manual laborers in similar professions. Also the highly homogenous nature of the sample must be taken into consideration. All informants were ethnically Finnish males roughly in their fifties (with the exception of one thirty-year-old), and hence represent only a portion of the staff at Lassila & Tikanoja.

Although I am satisfied with the data acquired and the number of informants, I am nevertheless aware that my conclusions are based on a relatively small sample. If it would have been possible to follow the maintenance workers for a longer period of time over the course of a full working year, it might have been possible to extract observations which at this point remain unnoticed. Furthermore, my observations were limited to in-situ ethnography in the workplace, without getting even a glimpse of the lives of these men outside the immediate work context. Work engagement is a holistic construct, and events and processes in the informants' home life contribute to it.

I am fairly confident that my contacts at Lassila & Tikanoja did not willingly try to guide my research process by limiting my view of the organization. However, I feel that if I had had the possibility to hand-pick my informants after viewing the whole scope of the organization, I could have eliminated all possibilities of the management knowingly or unconsciously promoting a positive image of Lassila & Tikanoja employees by selecting suitable informants. For example, most of my informants were middle-aged, even though according to Lassila & Tikanoja Human Resources workers between the ages of 40 and 59 constitute only 40.8 % of total maintenance staff. In this case, I cannot be entirely certain that the sample is a realistic representation of maintenance workers in the company or in the business sector in general.

5.3 Implications for further research

This research paper has detailed the ways in which autonomy can affect engagement in the context of manual labor. However, in the course of this study I have managed to only superficially survey how managers can support autonomy and the creation of employee engagement at work. I think that focusing on this link especially in manual labor contexts, which have received relatively little attention, could prove to be very useful to both academics and practitioners.

The maintenance teams studied during the course of this ethnography consisted of men pretty much made of one mould. A larger factor in their engagement at work was the support and safety they received from their extremely homogenous work community, their apparent fit in their work roles and their acceptance of and familiarity with the norms of coworkers. I find that a comparative study detailing engagement differences between homogenous and heterogeneous teams within the same organization.

As I met members of Lassila & Tikanoja management during the research process, they expressed their interest on conducting a similar study inside some other division inside their company. I feel that the link between autonomy and engagement described in the context of service men and caretakers can not be generalized throughout the whole organization. As expressed before, we can assume that there are vast differences in organizational culture between different teams and divisions inside Lassila & Tikanoja. This is due to both the varying tasks which the employees conduct and the non-organic, acquisition-based growth path of Lassila & Tikanoja, which has led to the existence of numerous microcultures inside the corporation. I find that by ethnographically studying the psychological paths to engagement in another context either at Lassila & Tikanoja or some other company where manual labor is prevalent could prove to be a very fruitful and interesting research endeavor.

A final point I that would like to make is that even though the informants of this study were middle-aged men, there is a growing number of Lassila & Tikanoja maintenance staff who belong to younger generations. As shown by recent studies (For example Loughlin & Barling, 2001, Bickel & Brown, 2005 and Sheahan, 2005) and hinted to in this study through the observations of informant E, the values of the younger generations entering working life differ substantially from the work-centered values of their parents' generations. At the same time, younger generations are demanding more meaningfulness and content from their work. It is hard to draw conclusions from observations of one man only, but I noted that E discussed his home life and hobbies far more than his older colleagues. I see this as an example of a value rift, with younger generations valuing life outside work higher than working life. As these people move to the forefront at Lassila & Tikanoja, the company's management needs to accommodate for this value shift in order to maintain a skilled and motivated workforce. Further engagement studies concentrating on the younger employees of Lassila & Tikanoja would help build a working environment where it is easier to engage and find meaning at work for also these members of generation Y that are only starting out in maintenance work.

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