SELF-MANAGEMENT AND ITS PART IN KNOWLEDGE WORKERS’ EXPERIENCES OF HIGH PERFORMANCE
Abstract

This study focuses on knowledge workers’ experiences of high performance, and whether there can be found evidence of self-management in those experiences. In previous researches, there has been found that self-management practices can result in higher performance by increasing motivation, organizational engagement and satisfaction with their work. At workplace, employees are able to utilize the process of self-management to pursue their goals more effectively. Some of these goals are set by the organization, in which case the employee can optimize their strategies for ensuring their possibilities to achieve the goals. The employee can also set personal goals regarding their reputation or status at work, regarding their career advancement, or their development in specific skills. The aim of this study was to examine, if implementing self-management practices in employees’ work activities can improve their task performance. This was studied with a phenomenological approach by analyzing the participants’ descriptions of their experiences of high performance. The descriptions were collected through a written interview from employees, who had relevant experience from different knowledge working positions.

The results were in line with previous researches about self-management; there was evidence that reducing control-oriented management orientation and including self-management practices in workplace can result in higher performance of knowledge workers. Circumstances of the work task, the work environment, and personal sovereignty and attitudes were the themes that arose from the participants’ answers as having an effect on their performance. Participants also stated, that the experience of high performance has a positive effect on their future work tasks. These findings contribute to the discussion of which kind of management orientation can be used to enhance performance of the employees, and therefore, the whole organization. Managers can utilize these findings about the positive effect of self-management in their organizations to improve the performance of their subordinates. Because the participants in this study were Finnish knowledge workers, these findings can confidently be generalized only to employees from similar cultures than in Finland. More research is needed on validation of these findings to other cultures, industries, and different personalities.

Keywords

Human resource management, self-leadership
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An increasing amount of organizations are transforming their management strategies from control-oriented management towards self-management. Organizations are encouraging their employees to have more responsibility and to be more independent with their work activities (Renn et al., 2011). Employees might be able to make their own strategies regarding the details of task performance: making schedules independently, forming teams for projects, crafting budgets for projects, and deciding in which location they are going to work. In addition to instrumental activities, self-management is also about the cognitive process which occurs when employee is performing work activities. At workplace, proper self-management strategies will aid the employee to reduce “deviation from standards in higher level control loops”, meaning that self-management training can assist the employee in fulfilling their job requirements (Manz, 1986). Introducing self-management at workplace will also accommodate the employee’s need for autonomy in work activities (Chen & Chung, 2014).

To what extent organization provides freedom of choice in work activities depends vastly from organization to another, which is for the most part due to managerial decisions. Two practices can be found; whether the managers want to focus on their instrumental activities, or to focus on their leadership activities. Implementing self-management in organizations will facilitate the management to concentrate on leadership activities, as employees can perform instrumental management, to some extent, on their own. Only relying on external methods of control in organizations can lead to a number of problems: employees will only perform those activities that they will be rewarded from (Manz et al., 1980). This will eventually result in a very rigid organization which will have problems in alternating their methods or strategies in developing markets.

The industry in which the organization operates has an impact whether employees are able to make independent decisions or whether the work processes are predestine and based on a specific routine. Other factors affecting the appropriateness of self-management are “the nature of the task, the nature of the problem, the availability of
time and the importance of subordinate development” (Manz et al., 1980). Both self-management and external control are present simultaneously in work situations (Manz et al., 1980); but which of these practices should be emphasized more in order to achieve the highest performance in work? Increasing the amount of self-managing actions helps the organization to develop a more viable and functional management system than only focusing on external control (Manz et al., 1980). Assuming the selection and training of employees has been appropriate, the employees have the best knowledge about how to perform their work, and are also qualified to decide the best method of performing it (Uhl-Bien & Graen, 1998).

Self-management from organizational perspective can be divided to many aspects. Some of these are the decisions related to executing the work, planning the work hours, extent of the work and important decisions regarding the task (Phil-Thingvad, 2014). This requires actions from the management, for powering the employee to independently answer the questions why, how, and when work should be done. It can be even stated, that the external control systems that organizations provide don’t affect the behavior of employees directly; they merely affect the self-management systems of each employee (Manz et al., 1980). Self-management in a broader definition accommodates employees to facilitate “behaviors that are not naturally motivating and that meet externally anchored standards” (Chen & Chung, 2014). This process is also essential in life outside the workplace, because it gives us instruments for actions that are necessary in everyday life but which are only externally motivational.

Many aspects of employee’s work activities are not naturally motivating, at least when comparing to alternative activities (Chen & Chung, 2014). Undesirable work activities can be facilitated by using self-management strategies. The basic self-management process, both in personal and work life, includes following steps: self-assessment, goal setting, self-monitoring and self-reinforcement. These steps will assist in behaviors that will lead the individual to their goals.
1.1 Transferring the responsibility from managers to employees

Adair and Allen (2003) explain, that the responsibilities of a manager are to build a team, motivate the individuals and consequently achieve the goals of their projects. The most competent managers are able to build effective teams, because they know their subordinates’ strengths and attributes in team work. Based on this information, they are able to connect the most suitable people to achieve the goal efficiently and without conflicts inside the team. Managers should also have the experience and up-to-date knowledge about how time-efficient employees are in completing tasks and what motivates individual employees. Depending on the task, there are many instrumental aspects that need to be taken under consideration: arranging schedules, estimating budgets, seeking and overcoming obstacles and so on.

Perhaps, the employees, who are daily in contact with these issues, would have more suitable knowledge more easily available for completing those kinds of tasks. What if employees would be encouraged to take these tasks under their own supervision? Self-leadership strategies have the possibility of replacing many of the monitoring and controlling tasks from the managers to their employees, such as goal-setting, self-reward or punishment, and self-motivation (Wilson, 2011). Self-management is useful or even critical for organization’s competitive advantage (Uhl-Bien & Graen, 1998). It is beneficial for organizations from financial perspective (Manz et al., 1980). This is because of the supervisors’ possibility to concentrate on their own work tasks more efficiently when they are not constantly focusing on controlling the actions of their subordinates.

It is fundamental to notice, that the position of managers is not being underestimated or neglected. Managers are essential in giving longer-term direction for the company, providing an example for the employees and managing the dynamics at the workplace (Adair & Allen, 2003). They are also essential in communication between employees and top level management, and they should be available for the employees if they are in need of help or guidance. Encouraging employees for self-management would liberate supervisors from tasks that they are not primarily recruited for, and enable them to be more effective in their work (Manz et al., 1980).
Thus, self-management can become a powerful method of management (Christensen, 2010).

Self-management strategies can also maintain competitive advantage better than “top-down management control” (Chen & Chung, 2014). Mills (1983) suggests, that employee self-management will allow the manager to focus on supportive management rather than instrumental management. Managers don’t have to assist their employees in every unexpected situations which only showed the employee that they have no responsibility to solve problems independently. This easily leads to a circle in which the manager doesn’t have the time to perform their primary work activities, because the employee is accustomed with turning to their supervisor every time they need to make decisions or solve problems (Oncken, 2010). Tasks like monitoring progress, correcting action and seeking for guidance would be some examples of responsibilities transferred for employee (Uhl-Bien & Graen, 1998). Eventually, when self-management practices have been successfully implemented in the workplace, managers are needed to monitor and reinforce the self-management process itself (Manz et al., 1980).

High performance means, that the pursued goal is achieved with the least use of resources that is possible. In the case of employee performance, the goals vary from organizational level to personal level, and the resources are for example the employee’s time or the organization’s funds. Regulating personal behavior has been found to increase individual’s performance (Marques-Quinteiro & Curral, 2012). Mills (1983) found that employee’s self-management ability will affect their performance and vice versa. He continues that in situations where self-management is promoted, there is a noticeable increase in cooperation between employees. This is due to the lack of formal authority from whom to seek instruction, which leads to the authority being granted between employees on behalf of their achievements. In many cases, a competent employee can have more knowledge about an instrumental procedure than the formal superior would.

Not all employees are equally prepared for self-management practices. A distinction can be made between personality types, as some personality types may be more
suitable for performing self-management (Mills, 1983). Renn et al. (2011) found also, that personality traits have effect on the ability to self-manage. Mills made a distinction between internally and externally controlled people: the difference is whether the person believes that events occur because of their influence on them, or whether they believe that occurrences are outside of their own control and posit on factors such as faith or luck. Mills suggests that the first personality type might be better suited for self-management role.

1.2 Motivation for this study

When the work hours are dictated by the management, in some cases the employee is tempted to use their work hours for non-work-related activities; thus, the time for work is not spent efficiently. This is especially the problem of knowledge workers. If an employee is dissatisfied, they might cut back their effective work hours and dedicate the time to an activity that gives them more satisfaction (Jones & Chung, 2006). Everyone may be guilty of this behavior from time to time, but excessively it is very harmful for the organization. I have noticed this kind of behavior at workplaces as I have observed people performing their work activities. The following incident has also convinced me that strong control from the management isn’t always the most preferable way to work: A team was given a budget for organizing a company event. When the team had made all of the necessary purchases, there was some money still left in the budget. The money wasn’t saved but spent on completely useless purchases so that the team wouldn’t get a smaller budget for the following event. In the long-run, this type of behavior can weaken the competitive advantage of the organization.

Conversely, in many cases where I have observed employees given the responsibility to independently craft their budgets or schedules, I have seen them gone to further lengths in order to make all of the resources matter. I also noticed that they are generally more efficient during their worktime, because they know that they will be available for other activities when they have completed their work tasks. Some employees also require fulfillment of their need for autonomy. Self-management
strategies promote for training employees to act independently and solve problems that arise individually (Uhl-Bien & Graen, 1998).

At my University, I have had a great amount of freedom in managing my studies. Whether it’s the schedules or where and how I have wanted to carry them out. This is beneficial for intrinsic motivation, which be established by the process of enhancing the individual’s “feelings of competence and self-control” (Manz, 1986). I have found this to have a great impact on my studying performance. When I have had the ability to choose the time and place of my studies, I can get much more done comparing to a situation where this has been decided for me. This observation was also one of the factors that got me interested in the subject of self-management. Lee et al. (2014) state that flexible, independently chosen work environment can promote “widespread benefits”. Some of the reasons for this are having “greater freedom and autonomy over where, when, and how to work” and “uninterrupted time to focus on [work activities]” (Lee et al., 2014). When the task requirements are well defined and explained, this task-related knowledge will become a substitute for leadership (Manz et al., 1980).

1.3 Research problem and research questions

Self-management is usually presented in the mainstream media from the aspect of self-development, which transfers the focus on individuals rather than organizational management. That is an individual process arising from the employee’s personal goals, which relate to individual’s personal development. At the same time, managers are increasingly empowering their employees, rather than relying on external control solely (Prussia et al., 1998). Focus should be shifted from personal development towards developing behavior strategies at workplace. For example, across the Internet, there are humorous tests linking self-management to work life; employees are able to determine, how much time they spend in personal activities, such as Internet browsing or social media applications, during their work hours. This isn’t very favorable for organizations, which would prefer their employees not spending their work hours on anything else than work activities.
There are also quite an amount of discussion in the media about work motivation and how to improve it. One potential possibility in increasing motivation, commitment and performance of employees is to create a work environment, where the employees would be able to perform self-management. Renn et al. (2011) found that self-management has been used to improve work behaviors, task performance among others. Self-management strategies in organizations are very helpful for decreasing the need of managers to supervise their employees, giving employees autonomy and challenge, and also provides possibilities for telecommuting (Gerhardt, 2007).

Performance describes simply, how efficiently the employee is using their resources. Self-management strategies have been found to increase task performance, creativity and innovation, the former which also strongly relate to knowledge workers performance (Marques-Quinteiro & Curral, 2012). Resources can be temporal: from employee’s work hours to the time utilizing a rented machinery. Financial resources are also of a great importance for organizations. Employee’s energy is a limited resource, but which can be recharged during the day for example by taking a break. Employee’s performance can be measured differently, depending on the employee’s work description: the amount of reports an accounting analyst produces in a week, or the amount of articles a researcher publishes in a year. Sometimes it is very difficult to identify the employee’s type of output or the time period in which the amount of this output should be measured. This makes the evaluation of employee performance quite challenging. The most convenient method is to let the employee track and report the changes in their performance themselves. This will provide relevant insights for comparison of situations with low level of self-management and situations with high level of self-management.

Knowledge workers are a great example of the types of employees, who could vastly affect their work environment and work processes. Knowledge work can be defined as work that focuses on creating, analyzing, and spreading knowledge. Knowledge workers can be found in all kinds of companies, either for-profit, non-profit or academic organizations, and the titles can vary significantly, but what is common for them is that they perform their work activities in an office environment. Some examples are computer programmers, researchers, accountants and consultants.
Knowledge workers usually work on a computer using different kinds of software such as text editors, invoicing programs and image processing software. They also cooperate with their colleagues and report to their superiors. Many times the work is carried forward in phases which are dictated by projects taken by the company, which last from weeks to months or even few years.

Because self-management is a rising management trend it is interesting to try to find whether there can be found traces of self-management in the employees’ experiences of high performance. The focus in this study is on knowledge workers, who usually work in the service industry, because they have the most opportunities to affect their work conditions in the ways that self-management requires. The experience of performance in this study will be explained by knowledge workers, who have can be described as having some level of self-management in their work.

The aim of this study is to find out, what kind of experiences the participants have on high performance, and whether there can be found evidence of a connection between increased amount of employee self-management and their performance. This will be done by asking the participants to describe their experiences on high performance and what elements were part of it. The answers will be organized into categories and themes, and analyzed to find out whether self-management is present in the participants’ descriptions on high performance. Statistics Finland (www.stat.fi) publishes a classification on Finnish industries, and after examining it the most suitable industries for this study can be found from the group “Professional, scientific and technical activities”. The industries in this group are legal and accounting activities; activities of head offices; management consultancy activities; architectural and engineering activities; technical testing and analysis; scientific research and development; advertising and market research; other professional, scientific and technical activities; veterinary activities. All of the previous are knowledge work industries.

The population of this study will be small Finnish companies working on those above-mentioned industries. Finnish small companies are chosen on the grounds of accessibility, as this will ensure as high level of responses as possible. Utilizing
convenience sample I have reached a 10-person marketing company operating in Helsinki. Other company participating in this study is an 80-person private wealth management company. In addition, I reached for a group of students in University of Oulu, who I knew had the work experience that was required in this study. The responses to assess the productivity and self-management will be collected by using an internet based interview. This is a rather unusual method of data collection in a study which focuses on the participants’ descriptions of their experiences. This is largely due to the difficulty of getting enough data to analyze, but the group of participants provided enough data to ensure data saturation.

With the narrowing factors I have described earlier, I can state the first research question:

1. What is the meaning of high performance for knowledge workers?

The second research which will tie together the two concepts of self-management and increased performance:

2. Does high performance involve self-management in participant’s experiences? If it does, how does the participants experience self-management in high performance situations?

1.4 Contribution

Self-management has been found to enhance job performance (Gerhardt, 2007; Renn et al., 2011). If there is evidence that self-management can increase work performance, it will be of a great interest for organizations to affiliate self-management practices in their strategy. This, on the other hand, will imply that more research is needed to facilitate organizations to shift their management strategies from strong management control to employee self-management. This is a process that includes lots of resources, and organizations are not willing to transform their culture without vast evidence that it is beneficial for them. Media has presented examples of companies which have completely discarded the conventional
management structures and strategies, and it is an evolving trend as well as an interesting phenomenon, which should be studied profoundly.

The discussion of the need for employee self-management begun around 1970. Until then, the supervisors couldn’t feel that they could trust their employees to have responsibility to make decisions and to solve problems regarding their work. This resulted in a very control-driven management style, which was often too demanding for the supervisors. They didn’t have enough resources to participate in all of their subordinates’ problematic tasks, and this lead to neglect of their primary work tasks. The situation has changed a lot to this day, and knowledge workers have more independence in their work than they did in 1970’s. This study is participating in the discussion that started over three decades ago, about whether employees should be given even more responsibility in order to increase their performance.

1.5 Research method and design

The aim of this study is to try to find and understand the relationship between two concepts, self-management and performance. Specifically, the intention is to find whether there is a connection in giving the employees more options to perform self-management and thus improving their performance in their work. This study will be concentrating on the current state of this connections rather than trying to detect changes in the phenomenon through the years. The link is going to be studied with empirical material gathered from participants, who are or have been employees in an organization which has enabled them to operate part of their work time managing themselves. The sample was chosen discretionary. One reason for this was its convenience because of my current connections to these companies and students through my network, but apart from many other companies it represents well a situation where we are able to compare how the employees assess their performance in lower and higher states of self-management.

The data will be gathered using a structured interview form. The questions will be constituted in a way which enables the sample group to tell about their experiences and associations about self-management. In this sense, this study adopts a
phenomenological approach, because it concentrates on answering the research problem through the participants’ understanding of the world and the issue. The data will be analyzed by using a phenomenological analysis method, which means that the participants’ answers will be formed into statements and then the meanings behind the statements will be found. The meanings will be the divided into categories and further into themes. Based on this, an extensive description and fundamental structure of high performance can be created. On this ground, I will be able to discuss whether self-management affects the participants’ performance and if it does, in which ways.

1.6 Structure of this paper

In the next chapter I will describe the most important concepts for this study; firstly, what self-management is generally and what it is in the workplace. The process of self-management, self-leadership, self-regulation and motivation will be defined on the basis of self-management. Other essential concepts for this study are knowledge worker and performance. These concepts will narrow down the context of this study and they will also assist in understanding this study and the issue as intended. Then, I will present self-management from both managerial and employee perspectives; why it is important, what needs to be considered, and what steps can be taken. I will present a figure in the end of this chapter which ties the theoretical part together. The literature in this study will include academic articles, books and relevant business publications focused on the issue of self-management and concepts that are related to it.

When the theoretic background, concepts and different aspects of self-management are presented, I will move on to describing the methodology of this study. The chapter about empirical materila will also include the description of the data collection process, as well as the results and findings of my empiric material. Finally, I will discuss the findings in relation to the previous research and answer the research questions. In the end of the conclusions I will also evaluate the reliability and validity of this research, explain the limitations of this study, and give suggestions for future research.
2 KEY CONCEPTS OF SELF-MANAGEMENT

2.1 Self-management

Self-management at workplace is about “planning, organizing and controlling [the employee’s] own work activities” (Renn et al., 2011). Self-management practices are useful in enhancing the behavior that is desirable for the employees at workplace, and controlling the behavior that is undesirable and which may arise from impulses, innate habits and behavior learned due to upbringing. Self-management differentiates from management relying on strong supervisor involvement because it is conducted without the immediate presence of external control. In this way, self-management can aid in internalizing motivation so that the motivation system of the workplace doesn’t depend only on external ways of motivating.

Self-management practices can be performed, when the employee has the sufficient amount of responsibility to make decisions independently (Uhl-Bien & Graen, 1998). Thus, the employees own need or will to perform self-management is not enough; the support of the organization is needed in order to do that. Successful self-management can be very beneficial for organizations, as it can “enhance job satisfaction, attendance, self-efficacy, job performance, learning and career success”, as well as “improve work behaviors such as learning, attendance and task performance” (Renn et al., 2011). Thus, introducing self-management practices to workplaces can resolve many issues that organizations face nowadays. A more complex problem at the workplaces is one that might be hard to identify; organization has their visions and values, but they differ radically from their employees’ counterpart systems of visions and values (Manz et al., 1980). Self-management can be useful in merging these two separate systems together, so that the employee internalizes the organization’s values in their work and becomes a more productive employee.

People practice self-management in their everyday life even without any formal training; otherwise people wouldn’t have been able to develop a civilized society. Impulses of fulfilling needs discarding the consequences, being hostile towards other
people and taking items into possession without permission are some of the primal actions that people avoid doing by self-managing. These are usually learned alongside the upbringing as a child, and they become automatic for an adult. In order to succeed in social relationships, in personal goals and in work, the person will have to adopt more sophisticated aspects of self-management. Some of the important actions of self-management that are needed in the contemporary work life are being able to avoid procrastination and the ability to delay gratification. Frequent postponing of the tasks that should be completed, although they are not preferable for the person, will not be tolerated by the organization for very long. Financial gratification from the organization is usually received monthly, which might feel like too long ahead when a work task is completed. Personal ways of gratification are useful immediately after a task is completed and they help to carry on with the work, but rewarding oneself too often, for example with a coffee and chatter with coworkers, will affect performance critically.

Self-management can be conducted in two different ways. It is possible either to change the environment in which the person is operating or to change own behavior; altering situational factors before altering behavior or concentrating on developing one’s feelings, thoughts and behavior (Manz et al., 1980). Changing the situational factors can be difficult in some cases, but an example of this would be choosing a place to work that suits the person. If the person is finding it hard to concentrate in a loud room with lots of people in it, they could move to a more calm and silent place to work. If this is not possible for some reason, the person will have to change their own behavior; they will have to learn to understand why it is hard for them to concentrate in a busy environment; they will have to identify, whether the reason is actually the noise or other discomforting aspects about having other people around; and they will have to learn, how to cope in these situations. The latter option is clearly more challenging, although, it can be very useful in developing knowledge about oneself and learning how to operate in different circumstances.

Although self-management is powered with internal thought process and decisions, it can be argued that the self-management process will not work in the long run without external constraints: the self-management process itself needs to be reinforced
externally in the long run (Manz et al., 1980). In the society, the long-run reinforcements are the law system and the police institution, which remind people of the boundaries inside of which the self-management about personal life should be performed. If this fails, there will be punishments. Social relations also have their own reinforcements; person who fails to self-manage in social interactions will be punished by the group, for example decreasing trust towards the person, and the ultimatum is the abandonment from the group. At work, financial rewards act as a reinforcement for being able to self-manage the work tasks, as well as the feedback from the supervisor.

Self-management practices are of a great interest for organizations as they can provide a competitive advantage for them (Uhl-Bien & Graen, 1998). Self-management can cut costs by reducing the need for strong involvement of the supervisor, self-managing employees are more productive thus increasing the overall productivity of the company (Renn et al., 2011) and the organization can transform from a rigid, management-down structure to a flexible and adaptable organization because it trusts its employees to make valid suggestions and decisions. Self-management is suited well for contemporary markets “because of its emphasis on employee commitment rather than on control-oriented approaches to management” (Uhl-Bien & Graen, 1998).

Self-management or different aspects of it can be beneficial for the organization not only by improving the performance of the employees. Employee commitment, which can be increased with implementing self-management in organization, is very important for an organization, and it has been reported to have an impact on the organization’s revenue (Ajibade & Ayinla, 2014; Zatzick & Iverson, 2011). Commitment will also help in developing a flexible organization which is able to implement new ideas into practice fluently. Involvement of the employees enhances their engagement, which further improves their performance and reduces the turnover of employees (Vance, 2006). Increased involvement also leads to positive attitudes and behaviors in employees (Zatzick & Iverson, 2011).
Involvement of the employees can be increased by giving the employees “more autonomy and decision-making authority” (Zatzick & Iverson, 2011). This is a rather logical causal connection, but organizations might shun the idea of giving their employees the authority to make decisions in their work. It is hard for the employees to feel involvement and thus, engagement when they sense that they are not trusted by the management. Job satisfaction is also increased with more involvement and autonomy in work; building blocks for self-management practices (Zatzick & Iverson, 2011). Self-management can increase self-efficacy and job attendance (Frayne & Lathan, 1988). Clearly, self-management practices can be helpful in improving the employee’s overall experience of working for an organization.

Setting goals and implementing them into action are integral components of self-management (Abele & Wiese, 2008). Other components of self-management process, such as self-evaluation and self-reinforcement, are supporting this basic structure of self-management. Self-management can be implemented generally in one’s life (e.g. learning to communicate in a more positive way) or specifically related to a content area, such as work (Abele & Wiese, 2008). This study will especially concentrate on the self-management at work, but many of the findings here are suitable for both purposes. An example of a work-related self-management goal could be the intention to make worktime more efficient by eliminating non-work-related actions, such as browsing the Internet for personal reasons.

In both cases, general and content area self-management, self-management is related to change management, whether the change is to weigh less or solve more cases at work. People set the standards for change based on comparison of three referents: “past performance, the observed performance of others and socially acquired performance criteria” (Manz et al., 1980). In the context of work, there are different methods to measure own performance. If the person has not been satisfied with their performance in past, they are able to use their performance of the previous task as an evaluation in the process of improving one’s performance. Other way to evaluate one’s need for change is to observe the people around them performing. If the person is not capable of being objective regarding their own behavior and compare this to other people’s behavior realistically, this is not a well-functioning method. Socially
acquired criteria is what other people explicitly or implicitly tell the person that the standards are. At work, after performing insufficiently in a task and getting feedback from the supervisor regarding it can be considered as a standard for changing future performance.

Self-management strategies can be divided into three categories: behavior-focused strategies, natural reward strategies, and constructive thought pattern strategies (Prussia et al., 1998). All of these strategies require independent, thought-centered work; no other person can perform this for another person. Behavior-focused strategies are the actions individuals take to achieve goals, such as goal selection, self-monitoring, and self-reinforcement. Natural reward strategies are concentrating on making the work tasks themselves rewarding, by changing the method of execution, or focusing thoughts differently on the task. Constructive thought pattern strategies are about the psychological means to facilitate goal achievement: analyzing and modifying one’s beliefs, mental rehearsal of task performance, self-talk, and using positive personal procedures, policies and rules instead of ineffective ones (Prussia et al., 1988).

2.1.1 Self-management process

First step of self-management is evaluating the current situation. When the person identifies something they are not satisfied with in their work or personal life, they usually would like to change these aspects into better. Behind every unsatisfactory aspect there can be found a certain behavior that is leading into that specific outcome. When the behaviors that the person would like to change has been identified, they move on to the process of selecting goals to pursue. Selection is essential, because the scarcity of resources prevents us from pursuing every goal that we think about. Whether it’s our work life or personal life, we don’t have time, energy or financial resources for everything.

The problems can also stand in between the individual and the goal (Gerhardt, 2007). That’s why individuals need to assess their current behaviors, thoughts and feelings alongside the current situation. We need to simultaneously consider “societal
expectations, opportunity structures, as well as individual skills and competencies” (Abele & Wiese, 2008) in our selection process. It is not always most useful for the person to pursue goals that at first seem the most preferable; if they are unreachable due to lack of skills or if they are inappropriate considering societal expectations, they should be changed to goals that are achievable and that benefit the person in their life.

The goals should be specific so that the progress in achieving them can be measured. When the goal is vague, for example “I want to get a good career”, it is hard to decide which actions would help in achieving this. Monitoring the progress becomes also harder when it is not clear which actions actually have helped in getting towards the goal. Breaking the goal into smaller goals that are measurable and time-specific will promote for achieving those goals, e.g. “I will get a promotion in the next two years” could be the first step towards a desired career. This can be further divided into even smaller goals, such as in order to get a promotion, “I will increase my monthly performance by 10%”. Short term goals are achieved more effectively (Manz et al., 1980).

The goals can concern developing beneficial behaviors, maintaining achieved goals or eliminating detrimental behaviors (Renn et al., 2011). People have many goals simultaneously, and they usually consist of a combination of those three different types. Therefore, there is a risk that people unconsciously are aiming for goals that are conflicting with each other, for example “spending more time socializing with coworkers” and “being more productive in work”. This can cause a lot of stress for the person, as making progress in the former can be very harmful for the latter. Because of this, goal selection needs to be performed properly and the person should be aware of whether their goals are contradictory. Achieving goals can be more effective if the goals are stated publicly (Manz et al., 1980). Depending on the goal, it can be stated inside family, among friends, supervisor or colleagues.

The second step after goal selection is the process of optimization (Abele & Wiese, 2008). Optimization describes the subsequent actions of acquiring relevant strategies for pursuing selected goals, and refining them to fit the individual’s situation better.
Planning of the process of goal pursuit can even change the individual’s motivation
towards achieving the goal (Townsend & Liu, 2012). If the person is not ready to
take the necessary actions, they will have to change their goals to more achievable
ones. It is usually necessary to repeat optimization a few times as pursuing the goal.
This means that the person needs to periodically assess their behavior in relation to
their goals, which enables the person to modify the strategies and behavior from time
to time to suit their situation better (Renn et al., 2011). Therefore the goals need to be
measurable in some way, otherwise it is difficult to assess the progress of attaining
the goals.

Self-observation is a necessary part of all phases of the self-management process.
Self-evaluation isn’t possible without self-observation, and self-evaluation is a
prerequisite for changing behavior (Manz et al., 1980). Self-observation becomes
self-monitoring when the person has selected goals and strategies and observes their
behavior in relation to them: are their actions beneficial for pursuing the goals and
are they following their chosen strategies? Self-monitoring is a process of active
monitoring one’s behavior, thoughts, feelings, time and environmental management
and identification of problematic factors that prevent reaching their goals (Gerhardt,
2007). Self-monitoring can initiate the optimization process during the process of
pursuing goals, if the person notices that the actions they are taking aren’t beneficial
for them.

Performing the planned actions in order to achieve the desirable goals is a vital part
of pursuing goals. Taking action without the previous phases of self-evaluation, goal
selection and the simultaneously occurring self-monitoring cannot be considered
self-management; neither can any other phases of self-management process be
considered self-management on their own. In the case of a complex action, the
individual can use the help of self-imagery to facilitate the success of their actions:
this is a cognitive simulation of how the task should be performed and imagining the
desired outcomes (Marques-Quinteiro & Curral, 2012). In this phase, unrealistic
goals and strategies will be impossible to act on and therefore managing oneself will
fail. The failure has a lot to do with unsuccessful or neglected self-evaluation, which
enables selecting inappropriate goals and strategies. Self-evaluation is essential in
this phase for refining strategies that didn’t work in goal pursue, and finding better strategies for the future (Gerhardt, 2007). The visible part of action is the change in one’s behavior, but it usually also involves change in one’s thoughts and feelings (Renn et al., 2011). Thought-patterns and feelings about different situations regarding the selected goal usually need to be changed in order to achieve the goal.

In some cases, the person may also make changes in the environment, so that achieving the goal would be easier (Renn et al., 2011). The concept of cueing strategies means that the individual should reduce gradually the exposure to discriminative stimuli which prevents from goal attainment, and increase gradually the amount of stimuli that evoke desirable behavior (Manz et al., 1980). Discriminative stimuli can vary from specific people to specific locations and items. Some people can be harmful for change, if they are trying to persuade the person to discard changing the behavior. Locations, situations and items can make it very difficult to keep up with the new behaviors, if the person is used to a specific behavior around them. Self-cueing can also be attempts to increase advisable stimuli, so that the person remembers the goals and rewards (Marques-Quinteiro & Curral, 2012). This can be messages and reminders for oneself in strategic locations for the goal pursuit.

Self-reinforcement in the form of reward or punishment is the final phase in self-management process (Uhl-Bien & Graen, 1998). The practices for self-reward and self-punishment have been found to resemble the practices that were initially performed by other people for reinforcement (Manz et al., 1980). If supervisor has given verbal praise after a successful work task, the person is bound to use self-praise as self-reinforcement. When the reward has been a pleasant experience such as a dinner with coworkers, the person is bound to reward themselves in a similar way. Self-reinforcement is a very powerful method for successful self-management, but self-reward has been found to be greatly more effective than self-punishment (Manz et al., 1980). The main reason is that because of the unpleasant nature of punishment, it might be avoided and thus it will not effectively influence self-management. Because of this possibility, the punishment shouldn’t be too severe so that it will be avoided, but not too mild to not have an effect on behavior.
Attaining goals works as a strong reinforcement, which leads to further success in achieving goals (Manz et al., 1980). If a person continuously fails in achieving their goals, they could start thinking that they are not capable of changing their behavior and stop setting goals for themselves. On the other hand, succeeding in goals can improve person’s self-confidence regarding to changing their behavior, and they approach self-management with a mindset that can improve their chances of success. Rehearsal is an integral part of self-management (Manz et al., 1980). Learning the process of self-evaluation, selecting realistic goals and strategies, self-monitoring, and self-reinforcement and repeating it will make it easier and thus, the person is more likely to succeed in it. The structure of self-management in everyday life isn’t as explicit as described here; people pursue many goals simultaneously in different aspects of life. The processes vary in time and intensity, and they are in different phases. Some goals can be achieved in a day, and others take from months to years to be completed. The important part is to be aware of own self-management processes and keep up with them in some way, for example by writing them down.

2.1.2 Unsuccessful self-management

It is possible to perform self-management incorrectly, and this can result in negative effects in work performance and other behaviors self-management was initially aimed towards (Renn et al., 2011). Failure in self-management means, that one of the self-management phases was not successful; self-evaluation, selecting goals, monitoring behavior, taking action or self-reinforcement. This means, that simply selecting and defining goals doesn’t suffice for proper self-management; all of the phases need to be performed in order to succeed in self-management. In work environment this can be because of unsuccessful or complete lack of self-management training. Before training, it is crucial to select the employees, who are suitable for self-managing (Uhl-Bien & Graen, 1998). Not all employees are capable of performing successful self-management at work to the extent of reducing the presence of the supervisor. Although, even for them self-management training can be helpful for defining personal and professional goals, and to develop strategies for goal pursue. But, there is a limit for how far can professional assistance help a person
who is performing improper self-management (Renn et al., 2011). For them control-oriented management styles are more appropriate in performing their work well.

The concept of self-defeating behavior describes the phenomenon of acting in a way that does not promote successful self-management practices (Renn et al., 2011). This includes behavior that interferes “with performance or coordination of the three self-management practices [goal-selection, self-monitoring and self-reinforcement]” (Renn et al. 2011). Some examples of self-defeating behavior in society are associated with inability to act by the norms of society, such as criminal activity, or hurtful behavior towards other people, like physical and mental violence, or even hurtful behavior towards oneself by behaving in a manner that hurts their goal pursue, like alcohol abuse or gambling. The person might not always be conscious about the reasons for self-defeating behavior; again, the problems arise due to inappropriate conduction of self-evaluation.

Self-defeating behavior can have an indirect effect on the goal pursuit; using the previous examples, criminal activity can hurt a person’s reputation in a way that the person’s goals about a successful career can be compromised. Mental violence towards other people can compromise person’s goal of having a family. More direct ways of self-defeating behavior is neglecting the phases of self-management process: not being truthful in self-evaluation, selecting unrealistic goals and strategies, neglecting self-monitoring, not implementing the new behavior, or failing in self-reinforcement. Self-defeating behavior does not always result in self-management failure, but it makes it more likely (Renn et al., 2011). If a person notices that they are unable to achieve their goals, they should observe their behavior in order to find whether they are unconsciously performing self-defeating behaviors.

2.1.3 Self-regulation

Self-regulation is an element of self-management. Usually it occurs automatically, but in some situations deliberate adjustments are needed to “reduce discrepancies from established reference points” (Manz, 1986). It is about the ability to resist innate behavior and impulses which are not desirable at workplace or in personal life.
Everyone has impulses that could potentially harm their goal pursuit, but successful self-regulation will ensure that the behavior will not change because of the impulses, or at least it will not change so radically as without self-regulation. If we take an example of work lunch: the person has lunch hour at 12 o’clock goal, but they have an impulse of eating at 10:30. Without self-regulation, the person would leave for a meal at 10:30. When the person practices self-regulation, they can dismiss their impulse of leaving early without a permission. Continuing with lunch, if the person has a weight loss goal but they crave for high calorie food, without self-regulation the person would go for the unhealthy lunch. If they are able to alter their behavior so that it wouldn’t affect radically the goal pursuit, like adding a small unhealthy element to an otherwise healthy meal, they have used self-regulation to decrease the difference between their actual behavior and their preferred behavior.

Self-regulation is needed in all of the processes of self-management (Abele & Wiese, 2008; Renn et al., 2011). If employee’s self-regulation fails at work, their “thoughts, feelings and behavior are driven by immediate internal and external stimuli” (Renn et al., 2011). Understandably, this can lead to undesirable behavior which may harm goals at workplace, such as career opportunities or social relationships. It has been found that: “Proper self-management can reduce self-regulation failure by formalizing self-goal setting, self-monitoring and operating on oneself and the environment to reduce discrepancies between behavior and self-set goals.” (Renn et al., 2011) This way the person becomes more aware of their goals and their progress in achieving them, and they are more capable of avoiding behavior that doesn’t benefit in goal pursuit.

The following characteristics can be found from situations requiring self-regulation: “the existence of two or more response alternatives; different consequences for the alternatives; and usually, the maintenance of self-controlling actions by longer-term external consequences” (Manz et al., 1980). This means that the person needs to choose, which alternative they will take, and as they are doing this they need to consider the consequences of these alternatives regarding to their goal pursuit. The regulatory acts use the same physical resources, no matter the target of the action (Chan & Wan, 2012). This means, that when exerting self-regulation in one task, this
will temporarily reduce the capability of self-regulation in other tasks. Because of this, it is very hard to pursue a significant amount of different goals at the same time; having too many goals to pursue requires a tremendous amount of self-regulation to stick with the behavior that is beneficial for pursuing them and discarding the contradicting impulses. When having successfully resisted a harmful impulse that would have suspended progress in one goal, it is harder to resist another impulse regarding another goal.

Self-regulation does not only mean choosing the behavior that the person wouldn’t primarily choose; it extends also to controlling feelings and showing emotions (Chan & Wan, 2012). When performing an undesirable task that will benefit in achieving a goal, in order to perform it successfully the person might need to control their unpleasant feelings and resist showing their actual emotions to other people. If an employee’s goal is to get more sales although they are not comfortable with sales work, in order to gain more customers they cannot show their discomfort for the potential customers. This will also decrease the physical resources of self-regulation, and can reduce the capability of self-regulation in other tasks.

2.1.4 Self-leadership

As a concept, self-leadership differs from self-management: self-leadership is more about the cognitive processes behind the self-management strategies and actions (Millikin et al., 2010). Self-leadership and self-management are closely related with each other, and to ensure success in self-management, it requires self-leadership. Self-leadership goes further to consider the desirableness of the standards that self-management strategies are developed for achieving, and provides reasons for self-management behaviors (Manz, 1986). Self-management as a concept concentrates more on the practical questions about what the person should do in order to achieve their goals, and how and when the person should do it. Self-leadership can answer the question why people do this and gives intrinsic value for the behavior. As an example, if an employee aims to finish one report per day in their work, and because of that schedules their day to enable that, as well as reward themselves for succeeding in it, this can be considered as self-management behavior. Self-leadership
on the other hand, will concentrate on asking why they should provide one report per day. The reasons can vary from being the employee of the month, being a good provider for the family or developing themselves to become faster in analyzing and producing information.

It can be said, that self-leadership encompasses the behavioral decisions of the self-management process (Manz, 1986). Leadership is required in successful management; this is relevant also in self-management. Self-leadership is about motivating oneself, giving purpose for what they do and persuading oneself to do things that don’t seem appealing. Along with self-management, also self-leadership has been showed to have a positive relation to task performance (Hauschildt & Konradt, 2012). Self-leadership gives the employee the responsibility for internal regulation and for developing internal incentives (Pihl-Thingvad, 2014). Self-regulation and self-motivation are integral parts of self-management and thus, performing well in self-leadership will increase the chances in succeeding in self-management processes. Internal regulation is a very effective approach for management, as well as internal incentives are very effective for employee commitment and motivation (Pihl-Thingvad, 2014). Self-leadership strategies have been found to increase job satisfaction and therefore they can predict job performance (Marques-Quinteiro & Curral, 2012; Ross, 2014).

Self-leadership incorporates intrinsic work motivation into self-management strategies (Manz, 1986). Because of the cognitive process behind self-management behavior, the person is able to discover new motivators for the tasks that might seem undesirable at first. Self-leadership emphasizes the role of the employee’s need for self-actualization as a motivator (Pihl-Thingvad, 2014). Thus, with the use of self-leadership, it might be that the person motivates themselves in their work tasks, rather than the overall organizational visions and motivational systems (Pihl-Thingvad, 2014). Self-leadership is also about evaluating individual’s values and beliefs; evaluating how their values and beliefs fit to their current work activities and then molding these beliefs to fit the situation better and avoiding intrapersonal conflict (Marques-Quinteiro & Curral, 2012). If the person is unable to perform this kind of self-leadership processes, they can find themselves in a very stressful work
situations, because of the conflicts between the person’s and the organization’s values and visions.

Self-esteem, self-concept and self-perceptions are important self-influencers that affect person’s psychological functioning and personal values (Ross, 2014). All of these aspects influence, how the person sees themselves and their current situation, and based on that, what kind of goals they should pursue. Personal values also affect the goals a person will choose in order to perform self-management. Self-perception means how the person sees their capability to achieve goals, and this will affect the person’s motivation to pursue goals (Ross, 2014). Achieving goals will increase the level of self-perception, which then will lead to selecting more challenging goals. Self-leadership is an integral element of being able to truthfully evaluate oneself, and carrying out realistic goal selection.

Self-leadership strategies can also go beyond immediate task performance and improve performance in supportive work activities and personal life (Hauschildt & Konradt, 2012). Becoming better in self-leadership in all aspects of life can significantly improve the person’s quality of life by being able to achieve challenging goals in personal aspirations, social skills as well as work environment. Proactive behavior can be enhanced by teaching self-leadership strategies at workplace: “self-starting, future oriented action with the aim to change the situation and/or oneself” (Hauschildt & Konradt, 2012). This promotes for the employee’s active role in the workplace, which is essential in order for the employees to create new standards and more effective work procedures (Hauschildt & Konradt, 2012). This is especially important for knowledge workers who are crucial for the organizations because of their innovation and creativity.

2.1.5 Motivation

Motivation is the origin for work-related behavior, as it causes employees to perform particular actions that are beneficial for the organization (Hauser, 2014). Motivating their employees is therefore necessary for the organization in order to function properly. Maximizing motivation of their employees is a way to increase
performance of the employees and thus, the organization (Marques-Quinteiro & Curral, 2012). Self-management can aid in transforming organization-level visions and values into intrinsic motivation (Chen & Chung, 2014). When the organization-level visions and values are very different from the employee’s personal visions and values, it is hard for the organization to motivate the employee; they will have to rely on extrinsic and economical motivation which can be very resource-consuming (Hauser, 2014). Involvement and engagement by implementing self-management at workplace can help the employee to internalize the organization’s visions, and therefore become as an intrinsic motivation for the employee.

Self-management can act as a way of internal motivation for the employee in the absence of external motivation from the organization (Manz et al., 1980). In cases where resources are not sufficient for motivating the employees enough externally and economically, it is beneficial for efficient performance of the employee’s tasks that they are able to motivate themselves. Self-management practices can help the person to identify new motivational means, such as self-reward and self-praise, and finding motivating aspects of the task, such as personal development and fulfilling their values. Finding ways to “feel good” about one’s work will improve the level of motivation of the person (Korschun et al., 2014). Successfully performing self-management will affect positively on motivation (Manz, 1986). This means that when the employee has set personal goals regarding their work and they have successfully performed self-management, it will increase their motivation of performing their work.

Self-managing individual’s motivation can also be about recognizing one’s intrinsic motivations and combining them into work activities (Manz, 1986). For example, a person who enjoys conversations over phone would try to implement that method of information sharing rather than sharing information through emails. This will increase the motivation for the task, because the person has merged an intrinsic motivational factor into possibly otherwise undesirable task. Being able to affect their work conditions and methods for performing the work is therefore important for the employee’s motivation. Involvement in job activities has shown to increase employee’s motivation (Zatzick & Iverson, 2011). If the employee is able to
participate in planning their work tasks, creating evaluation criteria, and organizing their work conditions, they are more motivated to perform their work.

2.1.6 Team-level self-management

In team level self-management, the members collaborate in performing the same steps as in individual self-management: evaluation of the team, selecting goals, monitoring and reinforcing (Uhl-Bien & Graen, 1998). The responsibility of a team might be higher than an individual employee’s would be, but the responsibility is divided between team members. Self-managing teams can be very beneficial when the work includes a lot of projects which require the participation of around five persons. Although, working in a self-managing team may lower the appropriate level of self-management, because the team members are interdependent (Uhl-Bien & Graen, 1998).

In fact, members can even experience a loss of control in teamwork. Because they have to put their team’s goals first, they are not able to select goals and strategies that would be most suitable for them; they cannot evaluate the current situation only from their perspective but rather this becomes a step requiring social skills; monitoring the team’s performance becomes significantly different from self-management as the means of monitoring rely strongly on social skills; the means for motivating the team might not be as motivating for individual members, because the sources of motivation are different from people to people and compromises will have to be made; the time and method of reinforcement might not be appropriate for the individual members. The elements of team self-management can differ from individual self-management so greatly that they wouldn’t be considered in individual self-management at all (Uhl-Bien & Graen, 1988). In this way, self-managing teams are differentiated from individual self-management, although the process seems similar in both.
2.2 Other concepts relevant for this study

2.2.1 Performance

Performance is the achieved level of doing, which is measured with the agreed standards of how the task should be performed. Many aspects can be used as a basis for measuring performance, such as financial, temporal, creativity, and quality measures. Each organization determines its own measures for performance, and they can vary quite much between employees. Performance of knowledge workers is crucial for organizations, but it can be challenging for organizations to get the most out of their knowledge workers (Korschun et al., 2014). Measuring the level of performance of knowledge workers can be very difficult, as it can be hard to determine the practical output of the employee and to define a relevant timeframe to produce the output. In the case of knowledge workers, the most convenient way of measuring and comparing performance between different situations is by performing self-evaluation.

It has been found, that performing deliberate self-management and succeeding in it will have a positive effect on performance (Manz, 1986). Regulating personal behavior is a way to increase individual performance (Marques-Quinteiro & Curral, 2012). By regulating one’s behavior, the person is able to decrease the level of undesirable actions and concentrate on behavior that is beneficial for achieving goals. Self-management will aid the person to realize what is the most efficient way for them to get things done (Drucker, 1999). If the person is unaware of how they should complete their work tasks in order to be as efficient as possible, this usually leads to nonperformance (Drucker, 1999). Putting in extra hours of work when incapable of completing their work in time will backfire at some point; there will be exhaustion, disengagement and burnouts (Schwartz & McCarthy, 2007). Because of this, when an employee notices that they are not able to keep up with deadlines and other criterion of the work, they should concentrate on improving their self-management ability rather than doing overtime work every day. Improving the employee’s performance will allow the employees to “get more done in less time at a
Maximizing performance can be done in work environment by deliberately modeling environment (transforming negative stimuli in the environment to positive ones), or suppressing negative thoughts about the work tasks (focusing on the positive aspects or disregarding the negative aspects) (Marques-Quinteiro & Curral, 2012). Working methods are unique for people. This can be slightly modified but not completely changed, and people achieve the best results by working in their unique way (Drucker, 1999). This means that the person should utilize the methods of self-management and implement the elements that are useful for them in order to complete the tasks. Enhanced “feelings of competence and self-control” through self-management practices can lead to higher performance (Manz, 1986). This can be noticed in the confidence in selecting more challenging goals and thus achieving more. Self-management can also provide a sense of purpose for one’s work that extends beyond the rewards. The belief in one’s purpose and contribution will add to task performance (Manz, 1986).

2.2.2 Knowledge worker

Focusing on self-management is not an appropriate method of management in all kinds of organizations. When the processes are very constant, tied to a specific location, and the work doesn’t require independent reflection and problem solving, self-management can be used in a significantly smaller scale. It can be useful personally in easing undesirable tasks or finding new methods for motivation, but it is not essential for the organization level performance. Including self-management into work is appropriate when the work task is largely “creative, analytical or intellectual in nature” (Manz et al., 1980). Work of this kind is performed by knowledge workers. Knowledge worker can be described as an employee who uses mental power rather than physical power, and the process of knowledge work is usually hidden in the employee’s head (Jones & Chung, 2006).
Two categories of knowledge workers are managerial and professional workers, and they both possess a specialized expertise usually acquired through professional education (Krausert, 2014). Examples of knowledge workers are lawyers, analyzers, researchers, programmers and designers; anyone, who can be considered to have knowledge as their main capital or product (Dekas et al., 2013). Knowledge work is characterized as non-routine work, and thus there is debate whether some professions, such as doctors, can be considered as knowledge workers or not (Dekas et al., 2013). The definition can be considered from person to person rather than strictly from the profession point of view; there can be employees performing knowledge work although the profession generally wouldn’t suffice as knowledge work itself.

In this study, knowledge workers are defined by whether the person is working with different types of knowledge in a non-routine way; receiving, analyzing, creating and distributing knowledge. Workers of this kind can fairly easily implement self-management practices in their work, provided that the organization is enabling this. Self-management practices work especially well on knowledge workers; it has been found to be among the most effective ways of strengthening their commitment to organizations (Phil-Thingvad, 2014).

2.3 Conclusion on the concepts

In this chapter I have explained the concepts, which are relevant for this study. First, I extensively went through what previous researches have found about the aspects of self-management; these included the process of self-management, self-regulation, self-leadership and motivation. Then I explained the two concepts that I have used to narrow the focus of this study: knowledge workers and performance. Based on these concepts, I have created Figure 1 to explain, how they are related to each other.
Figure 1: The process of using self-management to affect the performance of knowledge workers

Figure 1 shows, how the knowledge worker can affect their performance by using self-management. It could be found from the previous researches that if the employee is successful in their self-management practices, they can increase their performance. This requires that the person is able to complete the self-management process successfully, as well as performing self-regulation, self-leadership, and finding intrinsic motivation. If the person is unable to complete some or all of these, they will result in failing in their self-management attempts. Based on previous research, this cannot lead to an increased level of performance, but either to a stagnant or decreased level of performance.

In the next chapter I am going to go through more deeply, what is required from the work environment and the employee themselves in order to perform self-management at work. I will discuss the organization’s role in supporting the culture of self-management, as well as what the supervisor can do in order to encourage and teach their employees for self-managing. Self-management requires a lot from the employee, but it can be very beneficial also in their personal lives. Finally, I will combine the findings of the chapter into Figure 1 to create a more coherent picture of self-management practices in a work environment.
3 SELF-MANAGEMENT FROM MANAGERIAL AND EMPLOYEES’ PERSPECTIVES

3.1 Managerial perspective

3.1.1 Empowering employees in the organization

The first shift from management methods based on strong control over employees towards a more employee engaging method started in the 1970’s (Covey, 2010). Before that, managers felt that they were unable to give responsibility for their employees. They felt that they couldn’t trust their employees to make decisions regarding their work. But then started a shift towards a more empowered environment for the employees, and nowadays employees are having more and more independence and personal responsibility in their work. Self-management requires less resources from the organization than instrumental management, which makes it desirable for organizations (Manz et al., 1980).

Practicing employee self-management in organizations has its own difficulties; it takes time, effort, and money from the management and the whole organizational structure (Covey, 2010). It might take much more time for supervisors to develop their employees to solve problems independently than just handling them by themselves, but this is a dangerous path to go for (Covey, 2010). If problems are constantly arising and the supervisor has to attend to every obstacle the employee encounters, the supervisor can found themselves in an escalating circle where the employee has stopped giving effort for independent problem solving and self-development. The supervisor is unable to concentrate on their own tasks, and the employee’s ability to perform their work is highly dependent on the presence of the supervisor.

Implementing self-management in an organization can have widespread benefits. Employee self-management increases the employees’ commitment to the organization, because in that case, commitment is self-established (Uhl-Bien & Graen, 1998). Enthusiasm and performance are also examples of aspects beneficial
for the organization, which will improve in work because of self-management strategies (Prussia et al., 1998). For employees, self-management at workplace means that they “are responsible for determining approaches to task execution as well as monitoring and managing their own behaviors” (Uhl-Bien & Graen, 1998). These are traditionally seen as the supervisor’s tasks, but with appropriate self-management, employees are capable of performing them independently. This requires that the supervisor and the employee share the same understanding about the employee’s job description and task assignments; therefore the communication between supervisor and the employee has to be forthcoming and explicit. When the task demands are well defined and explained, this task-related knowledge becomes a substitute for leadership (Manz et al., 1980). Task demands are them used as a basis for the employee’s self-management process. When employees are practicing self-management, the management is able to concentrate on longer-term issues rather than monitoring and controlling the minor issues of the employees (Manz et al., 1980).

Employee self-management can be a great help in sustaining the organization’s competitiveness (Uhl-Bien & Graen, 1998). Developing employee self-management is a long-term project, and maybe de-emphasized by management because of that. The benefits of self-managing employees cannot be seen immediately, and because of that managers might feel hesitant in implementing such a change in the organization. Employee self-management can be advantageous for organizations, but it’s important to notice that self-management and external management control are never completely excluding each other (Manz et al., 1980). There will always be both, although the proportion of each can vary. In any case, reinforcing the self-management process is left for management. This means that reinforcing the self-management strategies of employees’, training and educating, giving information and resources are needed from the organization in order for the employees to be able to self-manage (Chen & Chung, 2014).

In organizational level, it is essential that the managers are rewarded for giving responsibility for their employees; “delegating decisions and developing people” (Covey, 2010). Otherwise, managers might not have enough motivation for teaching
self-management for their subordinates because it is largely time-consuming. Also, managers can feel like their position is weakened when they give control to their employees (Covey, 2010). The organization has to ensure that this is not the case, and that self-managing employees are the foundation for an adapting and vigilant organization. Managers with low managerial self-efficacy pose the strongest feelings of being threatened from giving employees control (Fast et al., 2014). If the managers are willing to give responsibility for the employees and they articulate this clearly, the employees are more likely to be successful in self-managing (Fast et al., 2014). If the manager is not ready for sharing responsibility, and for considering their employees’ ideas, suggestions and proposed actions, the employees are not able to conduct self-management properly, even though they would strongly have the will to do so.

There are three types of commitment between the organization and the employee: compliance, identification and internalization (Chen & Chung, 2014). The first is a relationship based solely on extrinsic rewards, the second is a satisfying relationship but where the employee feels still as an external part to the organization, and the last is a relationship including congruence between the organization’s and the employee’s values (Chen & Chung, 2014). Self-management is a way to increase commitment in employees, which in turn increases the congruence. An employee who is committed to the organization, and is motivated in their work by the shared values between the employee and the organization, is very beneficial for the organization because they feel engagement. They are not likely to resign, and they can easily find motivation for their work tasks.

3.1.2 Introducing self-management to the employees

Nowadays, many organizations require self-directed work behavior, at least to some extent, from their employees, and therefore it is important for managers to introduce themselves to this concept (Renn et al., 2011). The culture of self-management can be very attractive for organizations to aim at, as self-management “can be a powerful management tool” when properly performed (Christensen, 2010). Specific training in thought patterns will increase task performance, satisfaction and self-efficacy of
employees (Marques-Quinteiro & Curral, 2012). Managers have to be able to convince their employees about the idea of self-management, which can be rejected by employees or even whole work environments. Employees’ eagerness, desire and capacity will affect the success of introducing self-management into a work environment (Manz et al., 1980). Manager has to find the appropriate way to present the methods of self-management, so that the employees will get excited about the idea rather than refusing to understand the benefits of it. It is impossible to teach self-managing if the employee doesn’t have the desire or the ability to do it, and the presentation of the concept can have a lot to do with it (Covey, 2010).

Before presenting the idea to employees, manager needs to first have extensive knowledge about the aspects of self-management: “self-management training, self-managed teams, managerial self-regulation and self-leadership” (Renn et al., 2011). Managers should only encourage employees for self-management if they have been selected and trained appropriately (Uhl-Bien & Graen, 1998). Not all employees are capable of switching to a strongly self-managed way of working, and they can experience stress and failure when forced to work independently. Even the employees who would be potential for self-managing can experience these feelings, if they are not properly trained for performing self-management successfully. Also, if the task assignment is not very clear, lots of information needs to be changed between employee and supervisor, and solutions need to be accepted by both parties, a more participative management method is more appropriate (Manz et al., 1980).

One efficient way to teach self-management to the employees is to act as a role model in self-managing or to find a role model among the employees, who already successfully conducts self-management (Manz et al., 1980). Successful examples work well in promoting the practices of self-management. Important in familiarizing employees with self-management is, that it should be introduced gradually, not by removing all support from the supervisor at once (Manz et al., 1980). A good way to introduce the process of self-management is to use questions that will initially act as a base for the employee’s personal self-management: How well are you doing right now? What will be your goal? How did you do today? Did you reach your goal? These questions will help the employee to approach the process of self-management,
and to get accustomed to the phases of self-management. Ultimately, the evaluative and reinforcement functions related to the task will be internalized by the employee.

The final goal for the supervisor is to be able to evaluate and reinforce the self-management process of the employee rather than task related performance. This means less direct control over the employee’s actions, but benefits as effective self-management will improve employees’ performance (Manz et al., 1980). The frequency of external feedback needs to be decreased gradually over time, so that the employees will be able to learn and get accustomed with self-monitoring and self-reinforcement (Manz, 1986). By continuing to monitor the employee’s ability to select appropriate goals and strategies, initiate behavior, and achieve goals, the supervisor can ensure that the employee is performing their work properly. By using efficient communication, it has to be made sure that in the long run supervisor’s external and the person’s internal evaluations don’t conflict.

3.2 Employees’ perspective

3.2.1 Benefits of self-managing for the employee

Organizations are constantly demanding more and more from their employees (Schwartz & McCarthy, 2007). Putting in extra hours isn’t a permanent solution; employees will have to improve their overall performance to respond to the demands of work life. Employees can use self-management to improve their task performance at work, but learning self-management can also be useful in personal life (Renn et al., 2011). The goals of self-management processes can be related to other aspects of life alongside work; family relationships, community participation and perceptions of self (Friedman, 2010). Even though the employee has learned the process of self-management in a work environment, the process itself is easily applicable to other aspects of life. Self-management can help a person to develop oneself; to achieve skills and abilities that they have previously been unable to achieve (Drucker, 1999). Self-management can also help in making one’s life purposeful; it can guide a person to finding their own contribution (Drucker, 1999).
Employees can develop their self-awareness by practicing self-management. Self-awareness is strongly linked to self-regulation; it means, how well a person knows their triggers and in which situations they tend to appear (Bonfante, 2014). Self-regulation is needed in being able to react on or discard triggers. Triggers can be useful for the person if they result in reactions, which are positive in relation to the person’s goals. Many triggers, on the other hand, are the kind which trigger actions that can be very harmful regarding to the person’s goal achievement. Self-awareness is an essential part of self-management; When you know what impulses and triggers you encounter in different situations, you can learn what to do to manage them (Bonfante, 2014).

Practicing self-management can also be beneficial for the employee’s career; previous research shows a relationship between self-management actions and career success (Abele & Wiese, 2008; Renn et al., 2011). The different aspects included in the self-management process are useful for realizing, what are the person’s true aspirations regarding their career, and whether the person is going in the right direction. Career goals can also be seen as goals in self-management processes (Drucker, 1999). The person can think about strategies for achieving their career goals, and change their behavior so that they can achieve them. Even though the person has considered their career goals, they might be acting in a way that is not beneficial for achieving those goals. Performing self-management can help in finding those conflicting elements, and defining, how the person should act in their work.

3.2.2 How to succeed in self-managing

The phases of successful self-management process were introduced in the earlier chapter: self-evaluating, selecting goals and strategies, optimizing, and self-reinforcing (Abele & Wiese, 2008). Completing any of previous separately cannot be considered deliberate self-management; all of them have to be completed successfully in order to consider it self-management. It all starts with evaluating the current state of the person’s different aspects of life. Self-awareness is needed in order to find out which are the things that the person would like to change in their behavior, and what kind of person they would like to be in the future. Considering
which goals are worth spending resources in is essential for succeeding in managing oneself. Also selecting appropriate strategies, which are suitable for the person’s situation, is important. The use of self-regulation and self-leadership in the phase of changing behavior is needed in order to achieve the goals. The person has to monitor, whether they are approaching their goals with the chosen strategies; if not, the strategies have to be optimized. The final step in a certain self-management process is self-reinforcement. It can be self-reward of self-punishment, depending on whether the goal was achieved or not. Self-management processes can vary in their length and intensity, but they should all follow this same pattern.

At work, individuals are self-managing when they have been given high responsibility to make decisions and perform work activities on their own (Uhl-Bien & Graen, 1998). There are two different strategies in performing self-management at work: changing situational factors or changing behavioral programming (Manz et al., 1980). Situational factors can be related to location, time or the day-plan. If the person is able to complete a certain task more efficiently at a time they are supposed to, they could perform the task at the time they feel more suitable. The same goes with location; some places can be better than others for performing specific work tasks. This should be taken advantage of, in order to increase the employee’s performance. Behavioral programming means changing how the individual feels, thinks and behaves in certain situations. This can be done by focusing on different aspects of undesirable tasks, or learning about unpleasant things could help in changing the attitudes towards them. Rehearsing can be very effective for succeeding in goals; covert rehearsal paired with imagined consequences can act as reinforcement for behavior, even before the behavior has occurred (Manz et al., 1980).

Self-talk is promoted in self-management strategies; it can affect self-awareness, problem solving and emotional control (Marques-Quinteiro & Curral, 2012). Self-talk is a private dialogue in one’s head or out loud; during this discussion the person interprets the situation, changes evaluations and gives themselves instructions (Rogelberg et al., 2013). The person might not be aware of their self-talk, or they are not sure how they execute self-talk or if it’s useful. Self-talk can also have negative
consequences in the situation if the person is making false conclusions about the situation, enforcing them with self-talk, and because of that behaving in a way that doesn’t help goal achievement. Self-talk training among sportmen and personal wellbeing is very useful in improving performance (Rogelberg et al., 2013). It can also be helpful in organizational environment.

Research has found, that the employee’s personality can affect the success of their self-management efforts. Firstly, the individuals should have “psychological readiness and capability” to successfully perform self-management (Chen & Chung, 2014). Neuroticism and conscientiousness are the traits from the Big Five theory that have been found to have the most effect on the person’s self-management attempts (Renn et al., 2011). The Big Five theory describes five factors that the human personality is constituted from: openness, extraversion, agreeableness, conscientiousness and neuroticism. Consciousness and extraversion are traits that can predict self-management activities (Marques-Quinteiro & Curral, 2012). The main issue with neuroticism and conscientiousness is that they affect the person’s ability to select goals and pursue them deliberately.

### 3.3 Framework for this study

In this chapter I have explained, based on previous literature of self-management in organizations, what is required from the work environment and the employee themselves in order to successfully perform self-management. First, I took the perspective of the management and found out that the organization and the supervisor can either create a basis for the employee or prevent the employee from practicing self-management. On the other hand, the employee needs to have the ability and willingness to practice self-management. I have combined the findings of this chapter into Figure 1, which was presented in the previous chapter. By doing this, I created the framework for self-management in this study. The updated framework can be found from Figure 2.

In Figure 2 I have added the knowledge worker’s capability or incapability of performing self-management as an element in the process of affecting performance
with self-management. If the person is capable and willing to self-manage, they are able to practice self-management. This can still lead into two outcomes: success or failure in self-management. But, if the person is incapable or unwilling to self-manage, it can only lead to failure in the use of self-management practices.

![Figure 2: Framework for the relation between self-management and performance for knowledge workers](image)

What has also been updated into the figure, is that the work environment provides the basis for the employees to perform self-management. This means that the organization itself needs to encourage its employees and managers to create the culture of self-management. The employees’ attempt to self-manage won’t succeed if the organization is not supporting them. Also, the supervisor has to act in a way that encourages their employees to self-manage. They need to evaluate, whether an employee is capable of self-managing, and to provide knowledge and training in how to perform successful self-management. The supervisor’s role is essential in monitoring and reinforcing the employee’s self-management process.

Based on this framework, I now move on to the empirical section of this study. In the next chapter I will explain my research strategy, the method of data collection and
the participants of this study. Then, I will go through the data analysis; how it was performed and how I worked with the data in order to find the extensive description of the phenomenon. Final step in the next chapter is to find the fundamental structure of the experience of performance. After that, I will continue into discussion on the subject.
4 ANALYSIS OF THE EMPIRICAL DATA

4.1 Strategy and participants

The aim of this qualitative study is to interpret, does practicing self-management increase performance in the experiences of the participants. The focus is on seeking the underlying structure between self-management and performance through analyzing experiences in appropriate work situations. The strategy is to write an extensive description of the experiences of high performance, and to analyze, whether there can be found references of self-management practices. The previous theories and findings were not used to create a hypothesis, as it would not be appropriate for a phenomenological research to compare the collected data to previous theories, but to let the concepts emerge from the data. In phenomenological research, the interest is on the participant’s subjectivity (Englander, 2012). Therefore in this study, the focus is on understanding what the participants have experienced and how they interpret the situations related to high performance.

Meanings from common life practices are possible to derive from the narratives that the selected participants create (Shosha, 2012). This is the general idea behind the phenomenological research strategy, and therefore it is important to get as extensive amount of data from the participants as possible. The experiences and interpretations might seem conflicting at first, but further in the process of analyzing the meanings behind the participants’ statements, it is possible to find the connecting aspects and to create a cohesive structure of the phenomenon. The attempt of this phenomenological study is to “find a human scientific meaning of a particular phenomenon” (Englander, 2012).

The process of finding participants for this research begun by asking the question, what kind of employees would have the experience that I am looking for? The focus is on knowledge workers, so the search was limited to companies that operate in the field of creating, receiving, analyzing and distributing knowledge and information. Conveniently, I have personal ties to a few companies like this, and I approached them in order to ask whether they would be able to participate in my study. Two
Finnish companies, Superson and Suomen Pankkiiriliike agreed to participate in my interview via internet. Additionally, in order to ensure that there would be appropriate amount of data to analyze and to draw valid conclusions from, I also reached for fellow students who I knew had suitable experience for my research from work life. Two students agreed to answer my interview.

In a phenomenological study, it is important to notice that the experience itself is under study. In that sense, the details of the person describing the experience are not relevant. Relevant is that the person has experienced the phenomenon that the research is trying to interpret. As I gather information about the phenomenon, the results are general, although the participants are not. When I ask relevant questions about the phenomenon, I am able to get general knowledge about the issue. Nevertheless, I also need to be critical about the information that the participants share. By providing anonymity for the participants, I am able to reduce the will to answer in a way which they think is socially appropriate although that wouldn’t represent their experiences truthfully. The participants are able to answer honestly and not to be afraid of consequences on their career or relationships.

The first company is Superson, which is a marketing company from Helsinki, Finland. It is a Ltd. which was established in 2011. The permanent personnel consist from six persons, and other personnel is a changing amount of freelancers or sole traders, but at the time of this study the company employed around 10 persons. This enables the company to perform a wide variety of functions, from digital content to event organizing. As I have discussed with a person who has worked for this company, she described the methods of work to be very independent and the skill of self-management is highly needed. The projects last from few weeks to few months, and the employees can be quite independent in some of the projects. They are able to decide the people who they are going to work with in order to complete the project, and to decide when and where they will perform their work tasks. The final goals of their projects are determined, but they are able to divide these into smaller goals, and create strategies for goal pursuit.
The second company is Suomen Pankkiiriliike, which is a private wealth management company located in several cities in Finland. Total amount of employees is around 80, and this Ltd. was established in 1997 by the name BH Broker House. The current state of the company was formed last year, when three companies merged and formed Suomen Pankkiiriliike. The company has the permission from Financial Supervisory Authority to provide investing services. Their services include investing, wealth management, and taxation assistance for private customers as well as for companies. Majority of their employees are sole traders, which are encouraged for self-management practices as well as independency. The process of customer acquisition, sales, analysis, and wealth management are some of the responsibilities of the employees, and they are creating their own goals and strategies in accomplishing their work tasks.

The last group of participants are students from Universities of Oulu. They all have suitable work experience in fields of knowledge work, as they have worked before University or during their studies in organizations requiring knowledge work. They have also experienced self-managing in their work tasks.

4.2 Data collection

When conducting the data collection process, the aim is to encourage the participant to provide a written account of the specific phenomenon; in this case, the phenomenon is high work performance. Best way to ensure a complete description is to conduct an oral interview, where the participant can describe more freely and usually in more words than in a written interview. In this study it was not possible to conduct the interviews orally, and so the challenge was to encourage the participants to provide extensive descriptions about the subject. This includes the thoughts, feelings, images, sensations, and memories alongside concrete description of the situation. It is not appropriate for the study that the questions would be directing the participants in any way.

Important aspect of a phenomenological study is that the assumptions of the researcher should not affect the data collection. This is called bracketing, and it will
ensure the validity of the data collection process (Shosha, 2012). That’s why the questions sent to the answerers didn’t include any presuppositions but let the answerers describe their experiences freely. In this study, qualitative data has been collected from the sample group. The data was produced by the sample group by answering interview questions. The questions were created according to phenomenological approach, thus concentrating on the experiences and feelings of the interviewee.

The interview was held over the Internet, using an interview form consisting from three main questions and three background questions. Anonymity was provided for the participants to ensure valid and honest descriptions. The interview took approximately 20 minutes for each participant to answer, and the rather brief length of the interview was deliberately decided. Because the participants are voluntarily in this study and there is no reward for them for answering, the length cannot be too long, or the answers wouldn’t be appropriate.

It was important to keep in mind, that the interview questions would provide appropriate data for answering the research questions. As a reminder, the research questions are as follows:

1. What is the meaning of high performance for knowledge workers?
2. Does high performance involve self-management in participant’s experiences? If it does, how does the participants experience self-management in high performance situations?

The questionnaire that was sent to the participants was in Finnish in order to ensure that the questions are correctly understood and the answers are true. The following translated text was included in the interview form to ensure that the experiences are described as extensively as possible in order to get the sufficient amount of data:

“This interview consists of three questions and three background questions. It is essential for the research that your answers reflect your experiences as broadly as possible. The answers are treated anonymously.”
This was emphasized once more before the questions, to highlight the importance of detailed and extensive answers:

“Read the questions and think about the answers carefully. Describe your experiences in detail.”

The focus on the interview was to get the participant to describe their experiences on high performance as clearly and in detail as possible. This is essential in order to find the meaning behind their answers and to create an extensive description on the subject. The three main interview questions translated into English:

1. Look back to a work-related situation in which you felt working exceptionally effectively. Try to describe the situation as precisely as you can: the task itself, people who were related to the task, the location, time and possibly other significant details.

2. What in your opinion made you work especially effectively in this specific situation?

3. What kind of effect did this situation have on your following work tasks?

Background information consisted of questions about participant’s gender, age and work title. The participants consisted of four females and seven males, aged from 22 to 52. The average of participant’s ages is 34.4. Some of their work titles are art director, event provider, client manager, and investment banker. From all of the people invited to participate in this study, four people responded from Superson, five people from Suomen Pankkiiriliike, and two of the students. The participation percentage wasn’t very high, probably because there wasn’t any extrinsic rewards for answering. The resources were not sufficient to provide a reward that would be motivating enough for the participants, mainly because they are people with steady income and they are not motivated by minor benefits, such as a free coffee or a movie ticket.
I wasn’t able to communicate personally with the participants in the organizations, but with contact persons who then forwarded the link to my interview for their employees. I am not aware of how the contact persons communicated the request of answering to my interview to the employees, so I don’t know how successfully the contact persons managed to persuade their employees to answer in this study. I expressed to the contact persons that the benefit of the findings in this study can be significant for their organizations, as it can help them to develop their organizational culture and working methods to be more efficient. I offered to provide copies of my thesis for the use of the organizations to analyze, whether they are providing their employees a working environment, where they can perform at their best. This can help in making the performance higher in the whole organization.

4.3 Data analysis

I will be following Colaizzi’s seven step strategy of phenomenological analysis developed in 1978 (Shosan, 2012). It will consist of following steps:

1) To understand the general idea of the collected material, it will be read several times as a whole
2) Significant statements related to the phenomenon (the experience of high performance) will be identified from the material and collected on a new sheet
3) The statements will be studied in order to discover the meanings behind each statement
4) The meanings will be organized into categories and further into themes
5) Based on these findings, a comprehensive description will be written related to the phenomenon
6) Based on the extensive description, a fundamental structure of the phenomenon will be formed
7) Validation for the study will be sought from the participants

As I had collected all the answers from the participants through the data collection service, the answers were gathered together into a single file. Then, I started going through them in order to get an understanding of the overall impression of the
answers, and I did this several times. In this phase, bracketing is an essential part of a phenomenological study (Parse, 2001). This means, that assumptions on the subject are acknowledged by the researcher, processed in a chosen way, and abandoned so that the data can be analyzed without bias. This was done by considering any thoughts that arose in my mind as going through the answers, writing them down and paying attention that the analysis was not biased by own preconceptions.

Next, I identified significant statements concerning the experience of productivity from the answers. These were included in the participant’s answers when asked to recall a certain work experience, in which they felt exceptionally effective. The situations that the participant’s described were highly varied and at the first look, some statements seemed mutually exclusive regarding to the idea of high performance. Here are some examples translated from Finnish:

“I preferably complete that phase alone in a quiet place, for example at home during a remote work day, so that I can work without interruptions as I enter the flow mode.”

“We were sitting comfortably in a little room on soft couches and one of us was drawing on the wall with a marker as we generated ideas.”

“I remember one night and its small hours when we worked on a case with my college via Skype, and we wouldn’t have reached the deadline otherwise.”

These statements describe very different circumstances for the experience of high performance. Third question of the interview concerned how the participants felt that the experience of high performance has changed their work afterwards. The time periods in the answers were very different; some participants analyzed the effect on following cases in a few month period, and some described the effect on the performance on the rest of the day. Few examples of the statements found from the third interview question:
“You cannot verify too much – I have also learned to make sure one last time that everyone stays in schedule – everything affects everything.”

“An experience of a responsible task and thus a steady belief in that I can manage independent work tasks.”

The complete amount of statements I was able to form from the data is 73. Towards the end of the data organizing, data saturation was evidently ensured. At some point, the remaining answers started to repeat the ideas of the previous ones. Because of that, I can be sure that the amount of data was sufficient for the research of the phenomenon and for making valid conclusions. All of the statements can be found from Tables 1, 2 and 3.

The significant statements derived from the first interview question can be found from Table 1. Statements were formed by finding sections from the participants’ answers which have information about the circumstances of the task. This information was written and is presented in a similar form in the following three tables to ensure that the statements are mutually perceivable. The first interview question was as follows: “Look back to a work-related situation in which you felt working exceptionally effectively. Try to describe the situation as precisely as you can: the task itself, people who were related to the task, the location, time and possibly other significant things.”

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**SIGNIFICANT STATEMENTS FROM THE FIRST INTERVIEW QUESTION**

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<thead>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>Person becomes especially effective when they “must” get things going under pressure</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>When the person needs to get things done by hook or by crook</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>Person had to go and buy, loan and sweet talk in order to get the things that they needed from other departments</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>There was only 24 hours until the expo and the client was going to be there</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
SIGNIFICANT STATEMENTS FROM THE FIRST INTERVIEW

QUESTION

any minute to approve the stall that the person had organized
5. Whenever the person has good colleagues as designers
6. Person is very good with the clients and get very easily the necessary information for solving their problems
7. Person is very good in briefing this summarized for the designers
8. Working with the designing coworker is very important for the person
9. As person gets the ideas in front of them, it is easy for them to see how they affect the client’s business and to choose the best of them and to develop them into a client presentation
10. That phase is the person’s favorite and because of that they feel that they are exceptionally fast and effective in it
11. During performing that phase person is rather alone in a calm space, for example at home during a remote work day
12. Then person needs to work without interruptions as they get into the flow state
13. Lots of responsibility
14. Explicit job description
15. Sitting in a small room, relaxed, on soft couches and one of the team drew on the wall with a marker as they through ideas together
16. It was midday and the person was in a meeting with three other people
17. In the task the person was assisted by three city officials in varying amounts. Especially there was cooperation with schools.
18. Timetable was very fast
19. The tasks were perceivable and they had clear schedules
20. Many students were helping with organizing the events
21. The person liked the task, because they could affect its contents by changing the practices from previous years
22. The task was suitable for the person’s education level and age
23. The person was able to get support when needed
SIGNIFICANT STATEMENTS FROM THE FIRST INTERVIEW QUESTION

24. Person feels efficient almost every time when there are a lot of waiting tasks
25. Person was working in the little hours with a coworker connecting through Skype
26. Person had a strict deadline
27. Nighttime gets the person very calm and they are able to concentrate on the task
28. Daytime is perfect for the person to efficiently perform work tasks that include social interaction
29. Meetings with the board get the person to perform efficiently
30. Person feels that work performance is at the highest when they concentrate independently and in peace
31. Very important for the person is that there are no external distractions
32. Performance was due to the good mood which was the result of a healthy lifestyle and a cleansing period
33. Earlier success in work was beneficial for performance
34. Positive attitude of clients
35. Self-confidence and trust for the company
36. Rush to get the work done

Table 1: Significant statements derived from participants’ answers to interview question number one

The second interview question was: “What in your opinion made you work especially effectively in this specific situation?” Significant statements derived from the participants’ answers to this question are in Table 2.

SIGNIFICANT STATEMENTS FROM THE SECOND INTERVIEW QUESTION
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SIGNIFICANT STATEMENTS FROM THE SECOND INTERVIEW QUESTION</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Trust from the clients and the person’s commitment to them</td>
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<tr>
<td>2. Personal distress that the stall wasn’t as promised</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Person had to start over as there was only few hours before the deadline</td>
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<tr>
<td>4. The understanding of the big picture, from the start to the end of the process</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. The power to choose, which alternatives the person will present to the client and how to present them</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Person likes the feeling of being their own master; success and failure can only be credited for themselves</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Calm and organized situation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Clear knowledge of own tasks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Having other people to throw ideas with</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. Relaxed atmosphere</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. Articulate goal and schedule for achieving it</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12. Very clear task assignment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13. Personal responsibility over the task</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14. Enthusiasm over the work task</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15. Working in pressure</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16. Working in a calm way</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17. Relaxed chatting with coworkers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18. Good preparation for the task</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19. High expectations for the outcome of the task</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20. Performance derives from complete focus on the task</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21. Attempt to keep in schedules</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22. Financial motivation enhanced performance</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 2: Significant statements derived from participants’ answers to interview question number two

The third interview questions was: “What kind of effect did this situation have on your following work tasks?” Significant statements derived from the answers to this question are listed in Table 3.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SIGNIFICANT STATEMENTS FROM THE THIRD INTERVIEW QUESTION</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Person has learned to double-check that everyone knows what they should be doing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Person has learned to check the schedule once again</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Person knows to leave enough time for the task to ensure successful performance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Person knows in which situations they work best</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Previous task left a positive mood for the rest of the day which helped to carry through</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. The experience helped the person to believe that they are capable of performing work tasks independently</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. The task left a positive memory of the work</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. The person has learned to become faster in their job</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Relationship with coworkers got closer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. Good experiences will motivate to work effectively in the future</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. Person learned that good preparations will lead to good decisions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12. Proper background work will make the task easier</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13. Planning and preparations result in great outcomes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14. Person has learned to keep in schedule</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15. Work self-confidence got better</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
4.4 Meanings and categories formed from the significant statements

The statements were then studied in order to find a meaning behind each statement. In each statement, there can be found an underlying value that the statement reflects. These meanings are essential in being able to understand the phenomenon of high performance. The following statements will act as an example of the process of detecting meanings behind statements:

“...As I get the ideas in front of me, it is easy for me to see how they affect the client’s business and to choose the best of them and to develop them into a client presentation.”

“That phase is my favorite and because of that I’m exceptionally fast and effective in it.”

In these captions the person states that they especially enjoy the specific phase of work and feel that because of that they are performing very well while doing it. The person also states that they are able to independently process the ideas how they like, choose the ones that they think fit best for the purpose of the client, and to individually create a presentation for presenting the idea. The meanings for understanding the experience of high performance that can be derived from these two statements are the ability to make independent decisions related to the work task (choosing ideas, how to present it to clients), and the overall enjoyment of the work task. All of the statements were then studied similarly in order to find the meanings behind all of the statements.

The total amount of meanings that were derived from the participants’ answers was 48. The amount of statements was 73, which means that there could be found similar meanings in many statements. The meanings were divided into 12 categories, which are describing the different aspects of high performance that the participants
experienced. The categories and meanings which belong in each category are in the Table 4.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CATEGORIES CONSTITUTED FROM THE FORMULATED MEANINGS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>1. Performance is enhanced by working in a pace that is suitable for the person</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Working in a rush</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Working under pressure</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Working in a relaxed way</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Slow pace of work</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>2. Instances before the work situation affect work performance</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Succeeding previously will affect positively</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Previous effectiveness will result in high performance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Good preparation has a positive effect</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Background work will ease the task</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>3. Possibility for uninterrupted work will increase performance</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- No distractions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Own peace</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- No interruptions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Possibility to concentrate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>4. External factors that affect performance</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Support from the supervisor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Explicit and accurate task assignment and explanation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Clear job description</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Financial motivation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Trust in the organization</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>5. High performance is a result from successful cooperation with colleagues and other people</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Working in team goes well</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Cooperation with people from other organizations goes well</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>6. Possibilities to affect the work task will increase performance</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## CATEGORIES CONSTITUTED FROM THE FORMULATED MEANINGS

- Possibility to work from home
- Person can choose their work pace
- Person can choose, when to work
- Person is able to make decisions regarding the work task
- Person is able to affect their work conditions
- Having power over own work
- Being able to choose working methods
- Being able to independent problem-solving
- Being able to use own special skills
- Keeping in schedule

### 7. Performance increases with personal authority and independency

- Possibility to work independently
- Having personal responsibility over your work

### 8. Personal aspects on high performance

- High expectations over the results
- Good situation of life
- Personal enthusiasm over the work
- Self-confidence on the work
- A good mood
- Suitable level of difficulty
- Organizational skills will affect positively

### 9. Development in the work-related skills as a result from high task performance

- Learning about methods that are suitable for the person
- Improvement in the work

### 10. Change in attitudes after a high performance work task

- Work-self-esteem gets stronger
- Self-confidence gets stronger
- Succeeding in a task helps to carry through the rest of the day

### 11. Advancement inside the work environment as a consequence from high task performance
### Categories Constituted from the Formulated Meanings

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>12. Learning to prepare for future after a high performance work task</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>- Getting better in preparations for tasks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Being better in predicting what will be needed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Learning to be time-efficient</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Getting better in planning and organizing</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Table 4:** Complete list of categories constituted from the formulated meanings of the participants’ experience of high performance

### 4.5 Themes in the Data

These categories can be combined into themes concerning the participants’ experiences of working with high performance. When merging these categories into themes, it is important to ensure that each theme is “internally convergent and externally divergent” (Shousa, 2012), which means that the meanings formulated from the statements could only be included in one theme, and that the theme represents all of the meanings impeccably. The formulated themes can be found from Table 5.

### Themes Emerged from the Experience of High Performance

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1. Circumstances of the work task</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>- Performance is enhanced by working in a pace that is suitable for the person</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Instances before the work situation affect work performance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Possibility for uninterrupted work will increase performance</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>2. Work environment</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>- External factors affect performance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- High performance is a result from successful cooperation with colleagues</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
THEMES EMERGED FROM THE EXPERIENCE OF HIGH PERFORMANCE

and other collaborators

3. Personal sovereignty and attitudes

- Possibilities to affect the work task will increase performance
- Performance increases with personal authority and independency
- Personal aspects on high performance

4. Effect on the future work tasks

- Development in the work-related skills as a result from high task performance
- Change in attitudes after a high performance work task
- Advancement inside the work environment as a consequence from high task performance
- Learning to prepare for future after a high performance work task

Table 5: Complete list of themes and categories included in them regarding the experience of high performance

The first theme, “Circumstances of the work task”, includes descriptions that the participants explained that effect their performance positively before and during the work task. The second theme, “Work environment”, consists of how other people and the organization can affect the work performance positively. Third theme, “Person-related sovereignty”, contains the psychological factors that can affect the work performance positively. The fourth theme, “Effect on the future work tasks”, is about how the experience of high performance has affected the person’s following work tasks.

4.6 Extensive description of high performance

The following step following the Colaizzi’s seven steps of phenomenological analysis is to write an extensive description of the whole topic (Parse, 2001). This description will be used as a basis for identifying the fundamental structure of the
experiences of high performance. The foundation for this description is on the statements that the participants provided. From the statements, I emerged meanings that the statements represented and then organized them into categories. The description will be divided into four sections regarding to the four themes that emerged from the participants’ answers.

1. **Circumstances of the work task**

At first, it seemed that there were mutually exclusive experiences of high performance inside this theme. After finding a way to combine very contrary opinions of requirements for high performance, it was clear that although people seem to want different things on the first look, there is a mutual will to being able to do things in a way they prefer. The participants’ opinions were divided whether they wanted to work in a rush or at an easy pace in order to reach high performance. Working under pressure will enable some people to work especially effectively, but some other people work most effectively when they are able to work in a relaxed way. Most important for high performance is that the person is able to work in a pace that suits them best.

Working history before the current work task will also affect the participants’ ability to work effectively: if there has been positive experiences in previous work tasks, such as succeeding well or being very effective in previous tasks, it will help the person to perform better also in the current task. Well-managed preparations and background work for the work task will result in higher performance.

What was also very important for the participants in order to maximize their performance, was that the work situation wasn’t interrupted. This was stated with different choices of words: “no distractions”, “having your own peace”, “no interruptions”, and “being able to concentrate”. Being able to work without interruptions, no matter was the preferred pace rushed or relaxed, was important for high performance for the participants.

2. **Work environment**
Several external factors were mentioned in the participants’ answers as being prerequisites for effective work. One of these was being able to have support from the supervisor. Financial motivation was also mentioned as having a positive effect on work performance. Having clarity about their work description and the current task was also important: clear job description, as well as explicit and accurate task assignment were stated as affecting the work performance positively. This was mentioned in total of seven answers, which is among one of the most mentioned factors. As discussed in the theoretical chapter, an explicit and articulate task assignment can become as a substitute for supervisor’s instrumental management. As many people feel that a clear task assignment is very beneficial for their performance, it would be possible to presume that the task assignment can be very useful as a substitute for control-oriented management, at least alongside supervisor’s support. Being able to trust the organization was also seen as having a positive effect on the effectiveness of the participants’.

Successful cooperation with colleagues and other people related to the task will affect the participants’ performance positively. When working in teams and working with people from other organizations goes well, the performance of the person will be high.

3. Personal sovereignty and attitudes

This theme includes the largest amount of the statements and therefore meanings formed from the statements. Thus, psychological independence was experienced as a very important aspect of being able to perform well at work. Possibilities to affect the work task from various angles were mentioned particularly many times; total amount of meanings in this category is 10. From a more practical point of view, participants’ stated that possibility to choose where they perform the work task and possibility to work from home affects their performance. Also, having the possibility to choose, when to work was mentioned as having a positive effect on performance. Participants felt that when they are able to make decisions regarding the work task and when they have power over their task, they are able to perform better.
Performance was higher when the participants were able to use their own special skills, which would not be a part of their regular tasks, and when they were able to solve task-related problems independently. Being able to choose working methods as well as being able to affect work conditions were seen as having a positive effect on the task performance. The feeling that the person can be in charge of the schedule and keeping in it, as well as being able to choose the working pace were mentioned as a positive factor for performance.

Personal authority and independency were very important for the participants as a prerequisite for high performance. Possibility to work independently, without the supervision of supervisor, and having personal responsibility over the work task are factors that can increase performance.

Personal attitudes, abilities and moods have an effect on performance. If the person has high expectations over the results of the task, they perform better. A good situation in personal life, having a good mood or being enthusiastic about the task can increase the person’s performance. Self-confidence was mentioned as a booster for performance. When the level of difficulty of the task is appropriate for the person, not too hard but not too easy either, it will affect the performance positively. Good organizational skills can also have a positive effect on performance.

4. Effects on the future tasks

The participants felt that the experience of high productivity has had many effects on their following work tasks. Some of the effects are long-term and some slightly shorter in their length. High performance in tasks can help in development of work-related skills: participants mentioned that they learned about the working methods that suit them best, and improved in performing the work task. High task performance has also some psychological effects on future tasks. The participants reported that their self-confidence and work self-esteem improved, as well as succeeding in high performance tasks will help in carrying through the rest of the day better.
High performance tasks will also have effect on the team that worked together in the task. Participants felt that the team spirit will get stronger after a high performance work task. They have also gotten better in preparing for following work tasks after a high performance task. Participants have become better in doing preparations for tasks, predicting what will happen during tasks and what will be needed for succeeding. Their planning and organizing skills have improved and they have learned to become more time-efficient.

4.7 Fundamental structure and validation

This extensive description of the topic is now used to find the fundamental structure of the topic (Parse, 2001). High performance among knowledge workers is the result of fulfilling personal preferences as completing the work task. It is a self-sustaining spiral of learning about oneself and the people around them, and due to this knowledge, as well as a higher self-esteem, improving the chances of high performance in following tasks. Experiences of high performance have a positive impact on the following work tasks as the person becomes better in their work. The preconditions for working with high performance is the possibility to work in a way that suits the person best, but what connects all the persons is zero tolerance for interruptions and distractions.

The occurrences in previous tasks, the level of preparations for the task, and personal attitudes towards the task will affect significantly the level of performance in the task. The preferred method of management is high level of self-management and low-level of control-oriented management; the people need to feel that they can rely on the organization for support and motivation, but they prefer to be able to affect their work conditions and working methods, use their own special skills, have personal responsibility over the task outcomes and to work independently. Because of this, a clear task assignment is a prerequisite for being able to work very efficiently.

The final step in Colaizzi’s seven step method is to validate the findings by discussing the findings with the participants. This will provide validity and reliability
for the data analysis and the findings. Because anonymity was provided for the employees participating in the interview, the analysis was sent to the contact persons of the target companies to discuss with their employees, whether the findings seemed true to them. As I personally knew the students who were invited to participate in this study, I could discuss the findings with both of them. The opinion of the participants was, that the description and the fundamental structure did very well caption the experiences of the participants. The participants ensured, that the findings were in line with their experiences.

In the next chapter, I will discuss these finding more deeply in relation to the theoretical framework of this study.
5 DISCUSSION

5.1 Theoretical perspective

The findings of this study are consistent with the conclusions of the previous researches. There was a lot of evidence that implementing self-management practices at workplace can improve the performance of the employees, and this study suggests the same. Many of the participants felt that a clear and explicit task assignment is the preconception for high performance; only few felt that the supervisor’s support is essential for effectiveness. As stated in the literary review, explicit information about the task assignment can become a substitute for leadership, and this encourages the person to perform self-management in order to achieve the goals of the task.

This study focused on the self-management of knowledge workers, and it is clear that this group of employees is the most suitable for performing self-management. The process of self-management requires that the employee is able to affect their working methods, schedules, strategies, and locations; these cannot be unchangeable if the person wants to self-manage. If the person’s work doesn’t include analyzing and creating knowledge, it usually is bound to a specific process that cannot be changed. These employees can also benefit from parts and elements of self-management; self-leadership, self-regulation, and self-motivating, or they can implement the self-management process to achieve their personal life goals.

Parts of the self-management process (evaluation, goal and strategy selection, monitoring, optimizing, and reinforcing) were mentioned as having impact on performance: the participants explained that preparation for the task is important for them (evaluation of the requirements of the work task and how the person is currently able to respond to them), and they prefer to choose the methods of how to work (selecting strategies for completing the task and optimizing this along the goal pursuit). The supervisors give the goals of the work projects, but the person could be able to divide them into smaller goals, or they can create goals that are work-relating although they are not directly related to performance of the work tasks. Career planning is an example of this. The participants did not mention monitoring their
development in the goal achievement process as a way to increase performance, but they didn’t either mention that they would prefer that the supervisor would constantly monitor them. It would make sense from the perspective of the organization that the employees would have the responsibility to report about their progress for their supervisor, so that the supervisor can keep track what has been accomplished and whether there are problems that are too difficult for the employee to solve.

The employee cannot perform self-management, if the organization doesn’t enable this. The structure and the culture of the organization need to be the kind that supports self-managing employees. Managers and supervisors should be encouraging the employees to self-manage, and their tasks should be more about monitoring the employees’ self-management processes rather than the details of the task execution. Employees have to be selected and trained properly for performing self-management, because not all employees are able to self-manage successfully and they can have significant obstacles in performance when forced to self-manage. Efficient methods of self-management have to be taught for employees, who would have potential for self-managing, or otherwise they might also have problems in transforming their work methods from strong management control to self-management.

5.2 Managerial perspective

The relationship between self-management and improved performance provides useful information regarding management methods. The employees’ perceptions about the working circumstances, which enable them to perform at highest level of performance, are a great source for managers to enhance the performance of their whole organization. The manager’s role is to encourage their employees to self-manage by giving them more responsibility and options to affect their work circumstances. Work environment without distractions can be hard to achieve at the workplace, where the person is surrounded by colleagues and managers, and where the noise level can affect the person’s concentration. Because of this, at least for the most demanding tasks, the person should be able to decide where to perform them;
the office might have some quiet spaces where the person could concentrate better, or the person might even feel best to do them at home.

Regarding the supervisor’s presence in the task performance, this study suggests that for achieving high performance, the supervisor should provide explicit and elaborate task assignments and enable the employee to have independence and the power to decide what to do with them. Participants in this study felt that choosing the methods of execution by themselves affected in their performance positively. Knowledge workers feel that it is important to have personal responsibility about the outcome of the task, and therefore they prefer to perform the task independently, without strong control from the supervisor. Being able to independently choose the methods of task execution gives the employee the possibility to utilize their special skills, which otherwise wouldn’t be taken advantage of in the organization, and personal problem-solving ability, which can create new, improved outcomes and methods of execution.

Successful cooperation with colleagues had a positive effect on the performance of the participants. Because of this, it could be beneficial if the employee would be able to choose with whom they would prefer to work in a certain task. They are likely to choose people with whom they get along well and have positive experiences of cooperation from the past, and that can ensure the success in the present tasks. The supervisor might not be fully aware of the relationships between all of the employees, and therefore the employees would be better in choosing their teams. Employees are not insensitive, and they have different attitudes towards their work tasks. Personal enthusiasm can be ensured by assigning tasks to employees who enjoy them. The difficulty of the tasks cannot be too hard; more support from managers is needed when the task is too complex, but a suitable level of difficulty can ensure high performance. Ensuring the wellbeing of employees will have a positive effect on the performance, as a good mood and a stable situation in the person’s life will ripple the benefits in task performance.

Enabling the employee to self-manage, the organization can develop themselves to a vigilant and constantly improving organization. The participants felt that the experience of high performance helped them to get better in their work, which might
not be the case if the supervisor is strongly controlling the process of performing the task. The employees’ work-self-esteem cannot become stronger if they don’t have the positive effects of high task performance. When the employees are constantly developing their performance in their work, the whole organization keeps developing alongside. This is a strong competitive advantage for organizations. What is needed from the organization to enable this, is to show the employees that they are trusted to make independent decisions and encourage the supervisors to let their subordinates to perform self-management. This can have significant benefits for the organization, and they shouldn’t be hesitant although it might take some time for the benefits to show on the organizational level.
6  CONCLUSIONS

6.1  Answering the research questions

The research questions were set in the beginning of this paper, and the aim was to study whether there could be found evidence of self-managing in the knowledge workers’ experience of high performance. The first research question was as follows:

1. What is the meaning of high performance for knowledge workers?

The particulars of the meaning of high performance are different between employees, but there can be found specific elements divided in four themes that describe the mutual experience of high performance. In common was the ability to organize the working circumstances according to their personal preferences. Every employee has their specific preferences, whether they experience high performance working in a slow pace or in a rush. Working without disturbances and preparing well for the task are essential for performing at a high level.

Knowledge workers have the possibilities to affect their working circumstances in a way that enables high performance. They needed to know that they have the support of the organization in their work, but they preferred to perform independently the tasks that require high performance. High performance required having personal responsibility over the task outcomes, and the possibility to use their own problem-solving ability as well as other special skills. The experience of high performance helped the employees to get better in their work, to strengthen their confidence, to better the relationships with the people involved in the task, and to learn to prepare properly for the future tasks.

2. Does high performance involve evidence of self-management in participant’s experiences? If it does, how does the participants experience self-management in high performance situations?
There was clear evidence of self-management in the participants’ experiences of high performance. The experience of high performance in the participants’ experiences involved independence, personal authority, and the possibility to choose the methods of work. These are essential elements of self-management practices, which is an independent process of task achievement. The participants’ described, that they prefer more independence in tasks because then they can use their own problem-solving skills and other special skills, and they don’t have to report to their supervisor every time when decisions need to be made. The possibility to choose the location and timing of tasks themselves was also a precondition for high performance.

The elements of the self-management process were indirectly present in the participants’ answers. They stated, that preparation for the task was essential for high performance; this can be assimilated as the step of evaluation in the self-management process. When the goals are clear, the participants’ preferred to choose the methods and strategies of goal achievement independently. The organization provides frames for which strategies are possible, but inside these frames the employees want to choose the strategies themselves. Independence and decision-making authority suggests, that the participants prefer to minimize the monitoring and optimizing power of the supervisor, and to concentrate on these elements by themselves. Many of the preconditions of high performance were related to self-managing, and as a reference, only a few of the statements regarded the need for control and support from the supervisor.

6.2 Theoretical and managerial implications

This study introduced a framework about how knowledge workers can improve their performance by using self-management practices. This was based on the previous findings and discussions on the subjects of employee self-management and employee performance. These concepts have previously been found to have a connection, and self-management has been shown to have a positive impact on performance. This study focused on the evidence of self-management in knowledge workers’ experiences of high performance, and provided more information about what
elements of self-management they see as preconditions for high performance. The themes that eventually were formed from the participants’ statements can help in identifying, which kind of work environment knowledge workers should be provided in order to improve their performance.

Managers and supervisors from organizations with knowledge workers are able to utilize the categories and themes presented in this study for improving the performance of their employees. As described previously, the management has to introduce self-management practices appropriately in their organizations; selection and training is essential in succeeding in the transformation from control-oriented management towards self-managing employees. This transformation can be very beneficial for the organization, because by improving the performance of the employees, the performance of the whole organization improves. Managers should concentrate on analyzing, whether the employees are able to affect the circumstances of the work task, and whether they have the possibility for independence and decision-making in their tasks. If the management does not trust and encourage their employees to do this, they could be wasting the full potential of their employees’ performance.

6.3 Validity and reliability

In this study, the amount of references used as a base for the theoretical framework was plentiful. The references were from different academic publications from different fields of research, such as management and psychology. In a qualitative study, the validity and reliability need to be provided in all phases of the data processing: data collection, analysis and descriptions (Shosha, 2012). The seventh step of Colaizzi’s phenomenological approach is checking the findings with the participants. This was conducted as a final step of data analysis in this study, and the participants agreed with the emergent results. Also, the bracketing conducted during the data analysis process helped in discarding own presumptions about the subject and being able to analyze the collected data more objectively. As this research has been conducted as a master’s thesis, the supervisor of the work has also ensured the quality of the overall process of the research.
Reliability was ensured by providing anonymity to the participants, so that they wouldn’t only answer in a way that they see is the socially appropriate and approved way. The questions in the interview form were not directing the participants to answer in a certain way, but to describe their independently chosen experiences in a way they remember them. The method of the study itself is also reliable for answering the research questions; phenomenological methodology seeks to describe the world through people’s experiences, feelings and interpretations of the situations. The phases of data collection, analysis and formation of conclusions are clearly articulated using extracts from the data in order to ensure the reliability of the findings (Thorne, 2000). The logical process is expressed in a visible way for all readers and the relation between the collected data and the emerged conclusions is visible (Thorne, 2000).

6.4 Limitations of this study and suggestions for future research

Limitations of this study include the fact that when performing qualitative research, the researcher’s perspectives of what information is relevant and what is not can affect the findings of the study. Because this study was conducted as a master’s thesis, it has several limitations in temporal scale, extent of this paper, and possible resources available for assistance. In addition, the resources of this study were not sufficient to conduct the data collection in a way that would have included face-to-face interviews, which could provide more detailed information as the researcher is able to get more extensive answers and to observe the person’s non-verbal communication. As this study is a master’s thesis, it means that the researcher is still quite unexperienced in conducting researches, and a more experienced researcher could have performed the research process more fluently.

This study was conducted with Finnish participants, and that can lead to problems with the generalization of these findings. According to Hofstede’s (1980) research on cultural dimensions, Finland is a country where people are highly individualistic. This might have an effect on the preference to work independently, and more research is needed to investigate how knowledge workers from different cultures
experience self-management. The ages of the participants’ varied between 22 and 52, and so the findings can only represent people between these ages.

The findings of this study provided information about the preferred working methods for increasing knowledge workers’ performance. The findings could be tested accurately by analyzing the perceived performance of the employees before implementing self-management practices in a workplace, and then comparing them to the perceived performance after the employees have had the ability to perform self-management. This could be performed either with a case study or a longitudinal study with multiple organizations. Research concentrating on a more quantitative methods could be beneficial for ensuring the generalization of these findings. It would also be interesting to research whether there are differences in the experiences of high performance between different cultures. From the managerial perspective, it would be very beneficial to research how the transformation from control-oriented management methods towards a culture of self-management could be performed as proficiently as possible.
7 REFERENCES


