Group Part

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BURNOUT IN REMOTE WORKING ENVIRONMENTS – COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF CORPORATIONS AND STARTUPS

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Abstract

The World Health Organization has identified burnout as a workplace syndrome that presents significant challenges for organizations and employees. By comparing the indicators in startups and corporations, this thesis investigates burnout in remote work environments. Key stressors, including isolation, nature of tasks, and uncertain futures, are identified through 17 interviews. Regardless of the organizational size and structure creating supportive environments is essential. Corporations should prioritize prevention and resource communication, while startups can implement resource-efficient, adaptable practices like "no-send zones." The hybrid work model is recommended as an efficient solution approach that strikes a balance between flexibility and a supportive team culture.

Keywords: future of work, burnout, work-life balance, organizational structures

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1. Introduction

Burnout, identified by the World Health Organization (WHO) as a syndrome caused by chronic workplace stress, has become a critical issue in remote and hybrid work settings (WHO 2019). Despite decades of research, burnout remains prevalent, with 77% of professionals experiencing it and over half facing it multiple times (Pham 2023). Alarmingly, 58% of workers report overwhelming stress levels, often impairing their ability to function effectively (Wiens 2024), underscoring the urgent need for solutions.

Generational shifts have further amplified the importance of addressing burnout. By 2030, millennials and Generation Z will comprise over 70% of the workforce, with 38% citing burnout as a reason for leaving their jobs (Deloitte 2024). These generations prioritize work-life balance, making employee well-being a central factor in organizational success. A supportive work environment enhances productivity and organizational attractiveness (Ali et al. 2014).

The COVID-19 pandemic significantly reshaped work models, with remote work peaking at 70% during the crisis and stabilizing at 27% in 2024, alongside rising hybrid work adoption (Vox Media 2024). While remote work offers flexibility, it also introduces risks like blurred boundaries and isolation, contributing to burnout, with 69% of remote workers reporting heightened burnout levels (Haan 2023).

Burnout carries both human and financial costs, including decreased productivity, employee turnover, and a $3.7 trillion annual economic burden due to untreated mental health issues in workplaces (Pham 2023). Beyond financial losses, burnout leads to workplace errors, isolation, and depression (Garcia 2024). In response, organizations must adopt proactive strategies to prevent and mitigate burnout. This study focuses on the unique challenges of burnout in remote and hybrid work environments, offering actionable insights for startups to foster healthier workplaces.

2. Research Objective and Context

Research has suggested that the primary factor influencing burnout is the organizational context, and the level of stress experienced by individual employees. In this regard, variables such as the degree of authority and the level of interaction are essential (Morrice 1984). The objective of this paper is to evaluate the potential solutions that startups can implement to address employee burnout, considering the specific characteristics of their size and organizational structure. To this end, we concentrated our attention on the topic of burnout in the context of remote and hybrid working environments, with a particular focus on the experience of employees in large companies and startup settings. Our research is based on qualitative methods, with data drawn from 17 interviews, thereby allowing a detailed comprehension of the ways in which burnout manifests in different organizational structures. The report is structured in three sections. The first section introduces the subject matter, a review of the relevant literature, a description of the methodology employed, and a presentation of the findings regarding burnout in remote working environments. The remaining sections are the individual parts addressing startups and corporations. The research objective guiding this paper is as follows:

A comparative analysis of burnout in large corporations and startups within remote and hybrid working environments: Identifying key factors of burnout and developing recommendations for companies regarding the organizational context.

3. Literature Review

3.1 Overview

The modern workplace has undergone significant changes in recent years, driven by technological advancements and global events like the COVID-19 pandemic, leading to an increase in remote work (Waizenegger et al. 2020). Remote work, now a key feature of the workplace, is particularly favored by younger generations who expect hybrid work

environments (Deloitte 2024). While remote work offers flexibility and focus, this review and accompanying interviews explore whether it also increases burnout risks among employees.

This literature review examines burnout by exploring key theories, including Christina Maslach's Maslach Burnout Inventory (MBI), Karasek's Job Demand-Control (JD-C) model, and the Job-Demand Resource (JD-R) model. These frameworks provide insights into how job demands, control, and resources affect burnout, particularly in remote work settings. Understanding these causes is essential for interpreting interview results and developing strategies to address burnout in both large companies and startups. While the literature review provides a theoretical foundation, the interviews aim to reveal how employee experiences align with these models.

3.2 Conceptualizing Burnout

The term "stress" is defined as a disruption of the equilibrium of the cognitive-emotional-environmental system by external factors, which are referred to as "stressors" (Demerouti, Nachreiner, and Schaufeli 2001). The impact of stress on individuals can be either beneficial or detrimental. While stress can be useful in terms of facilitating growth, it can also become excessive, potentially leading to anxiety or depression (Mwendwa 2021). Prolonged or unmanaged stress can have serious consequences, including burnout, heart disease, diabetes, and depression (Precker 2022). Stress frequently develops in response to a particular incident. Burnout, however, refers to a cumulative level of stress as a response to ongoing occupational stressors (Maslach and Leiter 2007). The concept of burnout is a multifaceted topic that can occur in various spheres of life across a diverse range of professions. This study, however, is exclusively focused on occupational burnout, which occurs specifically in the context of work.

Individuals experiencing burnout frequently report symptoms such as a lack of interest or energy, accompanied by a reduction in personal motivation. Freudenberg states that the distinction between stress, burnout, and depression lies in the temporal and occupational

specificity with burnout being temporary and work-specific (Morrice 1984). The term “burnout” was first introduced by the psychoanalyst Herbert Freudenberg in 1974 to describe the complete exhaustion and sacrifice of individuals in human services. The term is derived from the phrase “to burn out”. Freudenberg emphasizes that this implies that only something that has previously burned can burn out. This is why burnout frequently affects employees who are highly motivated and have been working for an extended period at a high intensity (Mayou 1987).

3.2.1 The Maslach Burnout Inventory (MBI)

Christina Maslach built upon Freudenberg's work to develop the widely-used burnout model (Malesic, 2022). Her model defines burnout in three dimensions: emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and reduced personal accomplishment (Maslach & Leiter, 2007).

Exhaustion refers to being overwhelmed and depleted of emotional and physical resources, making it hard to cope with daily demands. Depersonalization is marked by a cynical attitude and emotional detachment towards work and others (Edú et al., 2022). Reduced personal accomplishment involves negative self-assessment and dissatisfaction with work achievements (Maslach et al., 1997). These dimensions are interconnected, with cynicism often leading to feelings of ineffectiveness (Leiter & Maslach, 2015).

The Maslach Burnout Inventory (MBI) is the most widely used tool for measuring burnout levels, focusing on these three components (Leiter & Maslach, 1999). In contrast, job engagement is characterized by high energy, involvement, and efficacy, which contributes to well-being and productivity (Schaufeli et al., 2002; Ali et al., 2014).

Maslach and Leiter also developed the Six Areas of Worklife model, identifying six key aspects of the work environment—workload, control, reward, community, fairness, and

values—that influence burnout or engagement. A mismatch between an individual's needs and these areas is a strong predictor of burnout (Maslach et al., 2001).

Workload	The job demands exceed human limits. People have too much to do in too little time.
Control	Employees perceived ability to influence decisions affecting their work, to exercise professional autonomy, gain access to the required resources to fulfill their tasks.
Reward	The monetary, social, and intrinsic recognitions for contributions and achievements.
Community	The quality of support from colleagues and supervisors and social interactions.
Fairness	The perceived equity and fairness in organizational policies and decision-making.
Values	Alignment between individual and organizational ideals and motivation, ensuring that employees feel their work is meaningful.

Table 1 Description of the Six Areas of Worklife (M. Leiter and Maslach 2004).

The graph below illustrates the relationship between the six areas of work life and the Maslach Burnout Dimensions, demonstrating how a misalignment in the core areas of the work environment can contribute to the development of burnout.

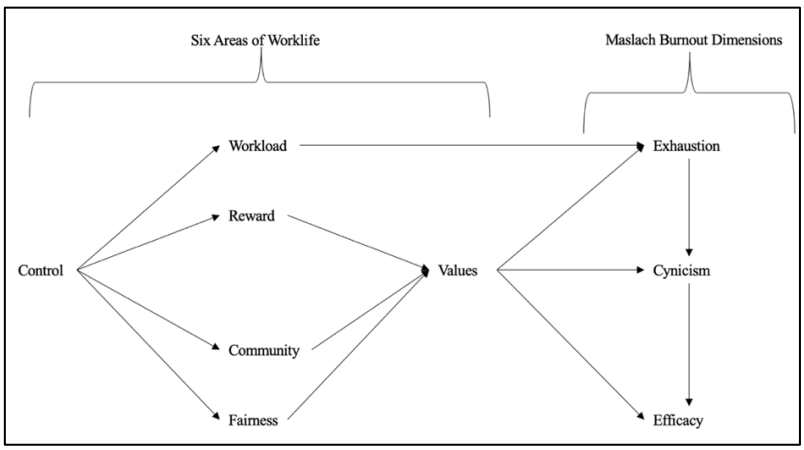

Figure 1 Interaction of Six Areas of Working Life with MBI (own creation)

The workload area is especially important in terms of burnout development, as emotional exhaustion is most likely the consequence of a too-heavy workload (Brom et al. 2015). Control plays a central role, influencing numerous other factors, such as workload and reward. Values are depicted as being of particular importance, affecting both burnout dimensions and other work-life areas. When employees encounter high demands in these areas,

like an excessive workload or a misalignment of values, it initially leads to exhaustion, which can subsequently result in cynicism and a reduction in personal efficacy.

3.2.2 The Job Demands-Control Model (JD-C)

The discrepancy between an individual and their job can arise from a lack of resources, conflicting values, or excessive workload (Leiter & Maslach, 2015). This lack of control aligns with the JD-C model by Karasek, which remains a key framework for understanding the impact of job characteristics on employees' well-being, health, performance, and burnout (Kain & Jex, 2010). The model highlights two key factors: job demands, which encompass workload, role conflicts, and emotional/physical demands, and job control, referring to autonomy and decision-making authority. The four work environment types are based on varying levels of these factors (Dessers, De Kort, & Hootegem, 2016).

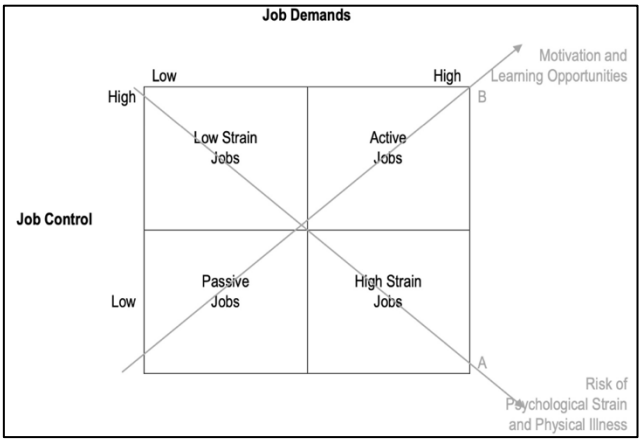

Figure 2 Job Demands-Control Model

Low-strain jobs involve tasks with low demands and high autonomy, but excessive control may reduce motivation and learning. High-strain jobs are demanding with limited control, leading to stress and health issues. Jobs where demands match control are either passive or active. Passive jobs have low demands and control, leading to monotony and limited growth. Active jobs offer high control and demands, encouraging learning, motivation, and commitment. The JD-C Model suggests high-strain jobs cause stress-related health issues (Arrow A), while active jobs promote motivation and learning (Arrow B) (Gameiro, Chambel,

and Carvalho 2020).

3.2.3 The Job Demands-Resource Model (JD-R)

The JD-R model explains the impact of job demands and resources on employee well-being and performance. It addresses both positive and negative work aspects, focusing on job elements that require sustained effort and may lead to exhaustion or stress (Bakker and Demerouti 2007). Job demands are similar to those in the JD-C, while job resources include physical, psychological, social, and organizational factors that support personal growth, goal achievement, and reduce demands. These resources, like social support and autonomy, are key to creating a motivating work environment.

The model includes two processes: the Health Impairment Process (burnout pathway) and the Motivational Process (engagement pathway) (Bakker et al. 2014). The Health Impairment Process occurs when job demands exceed available resources, leading to stress and burnout. The simultaneous presence of high job demands, and an absence of job resources can result in a prolonged state of stress and exhaustion (see Figure 3 below). The Motivational Process enhances employee engagement and performance when adequate resources are present, improving job satisfaction and motivation.

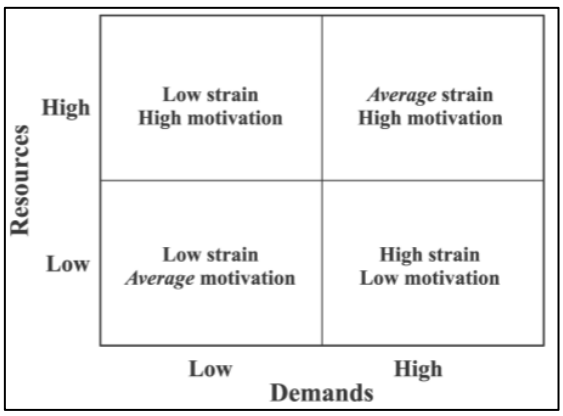

Figure 3 Predictions of the Job Demands- Resources Model Based on Interaction Effects

A key strength of Bakker and Demerouti's (2007) JD-R model is its flexibility, allowing it to be applied across various contexts and industries. This adaptability helps organizations use the model to identify excessive demands and insufficient resources, guiding effective burnout prevention strategies.

An important concept within the JD-R model is job crafting, which refers to actions employees take to shape and redefine their roles (Wrzesniewski and Dutton 2001). This involves adjusting job tasks and relationships to enhance the work experience physically, relationally, and cognitively. Job crafting helps balance job demands and resources, aligning with the JD-R model's focus on preventing burnout.

3.2.4 Coping Mechanisms

In order to mitigate the risk of burnout, employees utilize a range of coping mechanisms to manage stress. The term "coping" refers to behaviors and thoughts employed to reduce or tolerate stress (Algorani and Gupta 2023). Coping can be divided into proactive (mitigating future stressors) and reactive (addressing stressors after they occur). Coping mechanisms are consistent responses to stress and can be classified into four categories: meaning-focused, supportive-seeking, problem-oriented, and emotion-regulative coping strategies. The term "meaning-focused" refers to the use of cognitive strategies to manage the meaning of situations. In contrast to social coping strategies, supportive seeking refers to seeking emotional or instrumental support from others (Algorani and Gupta 2023). Problem-oriented approaches aim to alter the nature of stressful situations, while emotion-regulative strategies address the emotional side by reducing negative emotions (Nuetzel 2023).

The primary coping mechanism is social support, which buffers against the negative effects of stress, helping employees manage their stress levels (American Psychological Association 2024). Additionally, leisure activities such as physical exercise, cooking, or

meditation are crucial coping strategies. Exercise, in particular, releases endorphins, which reduce stress levels (Bhandari 2024).

While individual coping mechanisms are important, organizational coping systems are equally significant. These will be discussed further in Chapters 8.5 and 14.4.

3.3 Impact of Remote Working

Teleworking, or remote work, refers to employees performing their duties outside the traditional office, often from home, a trend accelerated by the COVID-19 pandemic (Beckel & Fisher 2022). The pandemic has introduced both opportunities and challenges, particularly the blurred boundaries between work and personal life (Waizenegger et al. 2020). In January 2021, the European Parliament emphasized the "right to disconnect" to protect workers' well-being, marking the first policy to address remote workers' mental health (European Parliament 2021).

As remote work grows, it’s crucial to examine its impact on employee well-being. A study by Costin et al. (2023) found that remote employees often experience burnout, marked by detachment, inefficacy, and emotional exhaustion. Lack of social connection, increased job demands, and insufficient support negatively impact job performance and satisfaction, highlighting the need for better workplace support, flexible arrangements, and regular communication.

Three theoretical frameworks help explain these dynamics. The MBI framework highlights emotional exhaustion in remote workers due to constant availability and blurred work-life boundaries (Waizenegger et al. 2020). The absence of social interaction and reduced visibility can lead to depersonalization and a lower sense of accomplishment.

Karasek's JD-C model identifies how remote work increases job demands, such as balancing work and home tasks, while autonomy can help mitigate burnout. High demands with low control contribute to stress and exhaustion, but autonomy allows for recovery and reduces burnout risks.

The JD-R model explains that when job demands exceed resources, burnout occurs (Demerouti et al. 2001). Remote work presents challenges in accessing resources like technology and social support, and constant digital connectivity worsens the impact. However, the potential benefits of remote work depend on organizational support.

To manage remote work stress, employees often establish structured routines and take regular breaks (Schmedding 2023). In response, many companies are adopting hybrid work models, combining remote and in-office work to balance flexibility with engagement (Bloom 2021). Research shows that 30% of employees would switch jobs if forced to work fully on-site, highlighting the retention risk for companies enforcing strict workplace policies (Alexander et al. 2021). Hybrid models address these challenges by reducing isolation, enhancing communication, and boosting productivity (Hancock & Weddle 2021).

4. Methodology

4.1 Qualitative Analysis

A qualitative research approach was used to study burnout, capturing the complexity and variation across different organizational structures, such as startups and large companies. Unlike quantitative methods, this approach explores personal experiences and emotional states (Oranga and Matere 2023), which cannot be measured numerically. It provides a deeper understanding of the "how" and "why" of burnout (Cleland 2017) and allows flexibility to explore new insights as they emerge during data collection (Moser and Korstjens 2018). This methodology also helps identify practical solutions tailored to individual needs within

organizations.

4.2 Semi-Structured Interviews

The qualitative study used semi-structured interviews with employees from various firms a two-week period in the last week of September 2024 and the first week of October 2024. It examines how organizational size, structure, and culture influence stress and burnout in remote work. A total of 17 interviews were conducted—nine with corporate employees and eight with startup employees. Figure 4 outlines the four interview areas and how each set of questions provides insights into burnout in remote work environments.

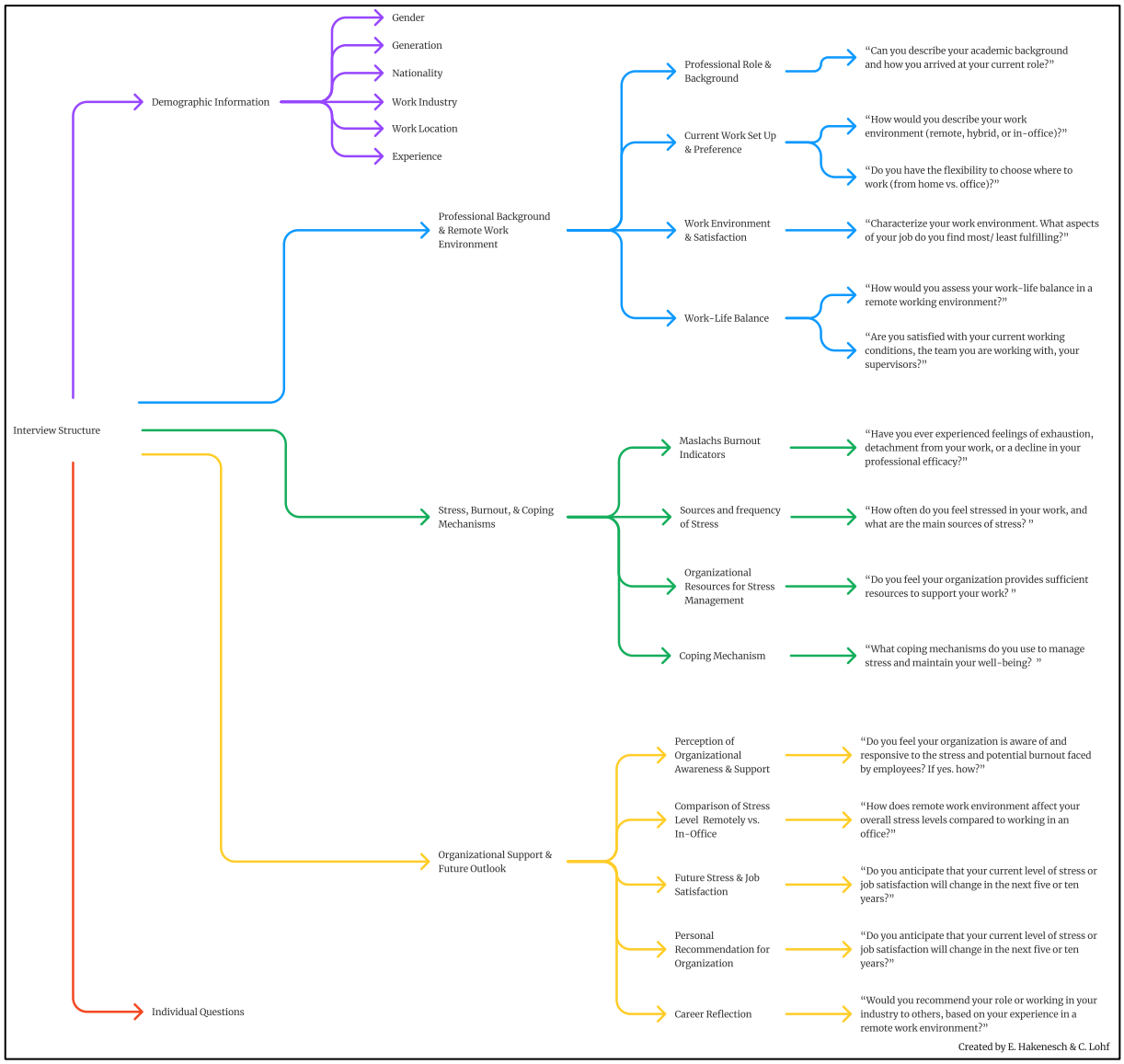

Figure 4 Logic Tree Interviews

The questionnaire guide is presented in Appendix 8 as a reference. A detailed account of the specific selection of interviewees can be found in the individual sections below. Prior to the interviews, participants were required to sign a consent form. A copy of the consent form is included in Appendix 7, as are the transcripts of each interview (Appendices 9 – 25).

4.3 Gioia Method

After conducting and transcribing semi-structured interviews, data analysis followed the Gioia Method's three-step grounded theory approach (Gioia et al., 2013). First-order concepts were derived from participants' descriptions of work environments and stressors. These were refined into second-order concepts through interpretation, incorporating existing literature on burnout and remote work. Key burnout factors in startups and corporations were identified and grouped into broader theoretical dimensions. A visual representation was created to illustrate the progression from first-order codes to aggregate dimensions, along with a diagram showing interrelations across both organizational types.

5. Results of the Semi-Structured Interviews

5.1 Similarities Across Organizations

Figure 5 presents a graphical representation of the 17 conducted interviews. The first-order codes represent the raw data in the form of direct citations from the transcripts. It illustrates the progression from the first-order codes to the aggregated dimensions. The aggregated dimensions explain how employees assess the resources and demands of their work environment and what coping mechanisms they have adopted to better adjust their work. The blue represents the results of corporations, while the green is used for startups. In the following analysis, the participants who work in corporations will be designated as "Interviews A-I," while those working in startups will be referred to as "Interviews S-Z." The interviews revealed insights into the similarities between the corporate and startup work environments, particularly regarding job resources, work dynamics, and coping mechanisms.

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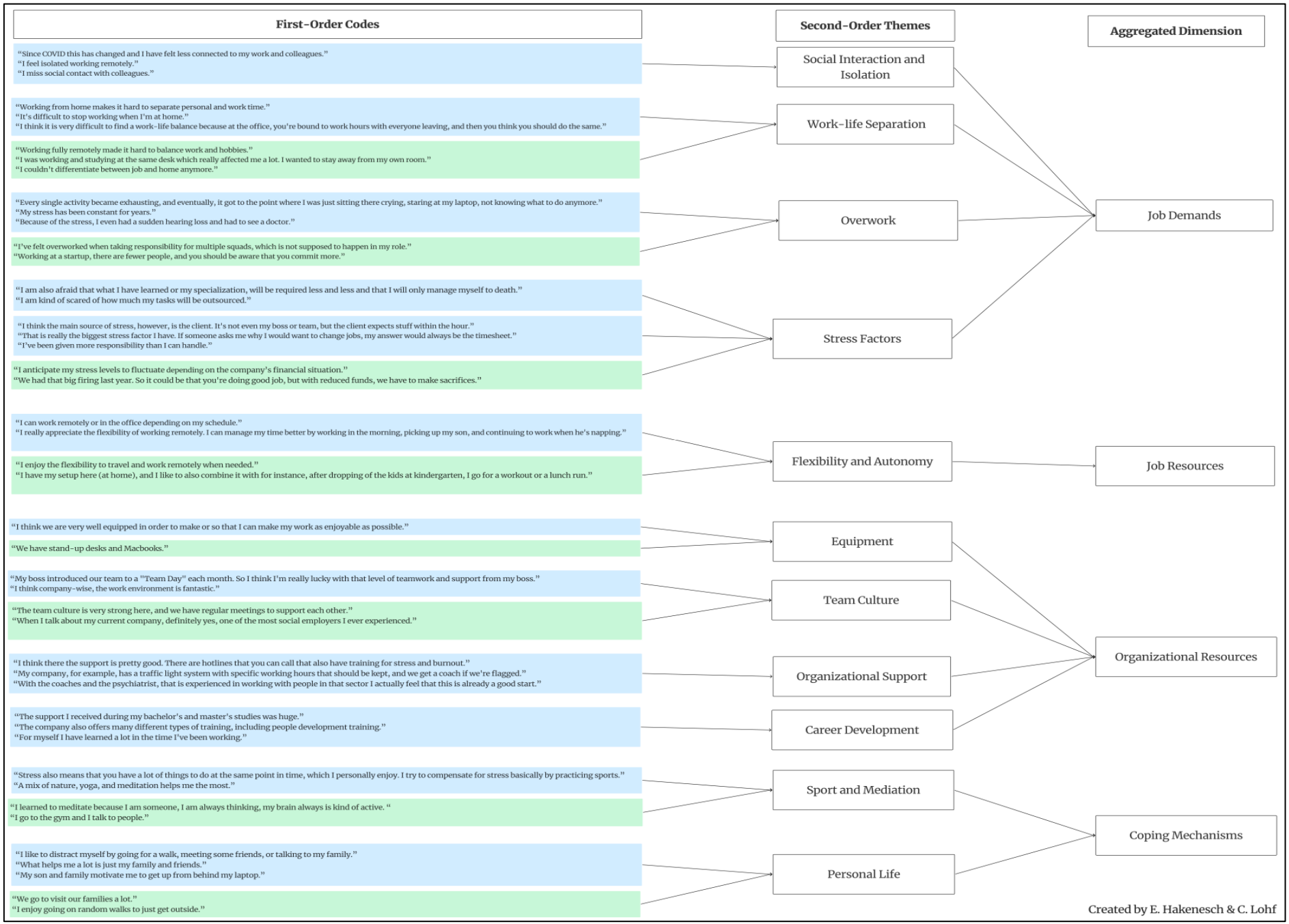

Figure 5 Data Structure

Employees working remotely may encounter three forms of distance, namely, physical, operational, and affinity related. These aspects can lead to feelings of isolation. Operational distance refers to unsuccessful collaboration due to inadequate resources, such as poor internet connectivity or technological equipment. The physical distance between employees is a consequence of their geographical separation, whether due to differences in time zones or regional locations. The third type of distance, affinity, refers to the sense of community or quality of connection between employees (Montañez 2024).

5.1.1 Equipment

In both environments, the issue of operational distance was not raised, as all the necessary technological equipment is available. Participants generally felt that there was sufficient support if technical issues arose (cf. Interviewee H). Consequently, the resources component of the JD-R theory is present to buffer job demands and enable working remotely.

We have stand-up desks and Macbooks.

Interview T

5.1.2 Team Culture

A further similarity is the importance of having a positive team culture. Both corporate and startup employees identified the presence of a supportive social environment within their teams as a key factor. For example, regular meetings were held with the objective of fostering open communication and support (cf. Interviewee A, Interviewee X).

My boss introduced our team to a "Team Day" each month. So I think I'm really lucky with that level of teamwork and support from my boss.

Interview B

However, the degree of community and, consequently, the physical and affinity distance differs between corporations and startups, as will be discussed subsequently in Chapter 5.2.

5.1.3 Work-life Separation

Participants in both settings reported better focus when working remotely due to flexible scheduling and fewer interruptions (cf. Interviewees C, U). However, many struggled with blurred boundaries, as work often took place in shared spaces like the living room table (cf. Interviewee I). The lack of a clear end to the workday, usually marked by colleagues leaving the office, further blurred work-life separation.

I usually would leave the office, come home, and eventually continue. Now, I don't feel the urge to stop and go home, and so I'm just going on, and I can't stop.

Interview A

I didn't want to do anything (...) I wanted to stay away, even from my own room.

Interview T

Others mentioned that the lack of work-life boundaries led to doing chores during the workday, as the balancing of work and other activities felt overwhelming (cf. Interviewee V).

5.1.4 Overwork

In both environments, the interviewees reported experiencing feelings of being overworked, which they attributed to long work hours and high job demands. Moreover, Maslach's core element, the feeling of exhaustion, was identified. While both environments are characterized by feelings of being overworked and exhausted, the specific sources of stress vary.

I've felt overworked when taking responsibility for multiple squads, which is not supposed to happen in my role.

Interview S

The examination of the different stressors will be addressed when discussing the differences. However, it was evident that while the stressors vary, the perception and response to stress are highly individualistic, as some individuals describe thriving under stress.

From my perspective, my professional performance hasn't lacked because I do like

stress to a certain extent.

Interview E

5.1.5 Sport, Meditation and Personal Life

Employees in both organizations use various coping mechanisms, including sports, meditation, and family support. For example, some interviewees mentioned coping with periods of elevated stress by engaging in activities like cooking with their families, exercising at the gym, or going for a run during their lunch break.

I go to the gym, and I talk to people.

Interview X

I like to distract myself by going for a walk, meeting some friends, or talking to my family. (...) Sport helps me best to reduce stress and disconnect from work.

Interview B

In contrast, Interviewee C indicated being unable to effectively cope with stress and identify effective relaxation strategies prior to becoming a mother. Coping resources help balance job demands, as low engagement in daily activities increases the risk of exhaustion (Maslach, Schaufeli, and Leiter 2001).

5.1.6 Flexibility and Autonomy

Participants from both organizations reported autonomy and flexibility in scheduling tasks. While both groups had positive experiences with remote work, corporations and startups apply these resources differently.

In corporate roles, most respondents had flexibility in work hours and location, though some were required to be in the office on certain days.

"It is frustrating when not everyone complies with the request because you hope that there will simply be an exchange and maybe talk about difficult issues or generally about how the team is doing."

Interviewee D

For instance, Interviewee G indicated being able to select work locations and schedules according to their own preferences. This is based on the assessment that the earlier hours of the workday are more productive. In the context of startups, the degree of flexibility regarding the work location is even greater, as they reported benefiting from the ability to work from various geographical locations. Additionally, within startups, there are no designated office days, given that physical offices are often lacking.

5.2 Differences Across Organizations

Figure 6 displays the interaction between job demands, job resources, and coping mechanisms across the organizational types of startups and corporations, thereby aligning with the three theories from the literature review. To create a state of equilibrium between job demands and resources, the individuals indicated utilizing different coping mechanisms and job resources to buffer demands and fulfill their needs created by job demands. The blue fields represent corporations, the green fields startups, and the white fields aspects present in both.

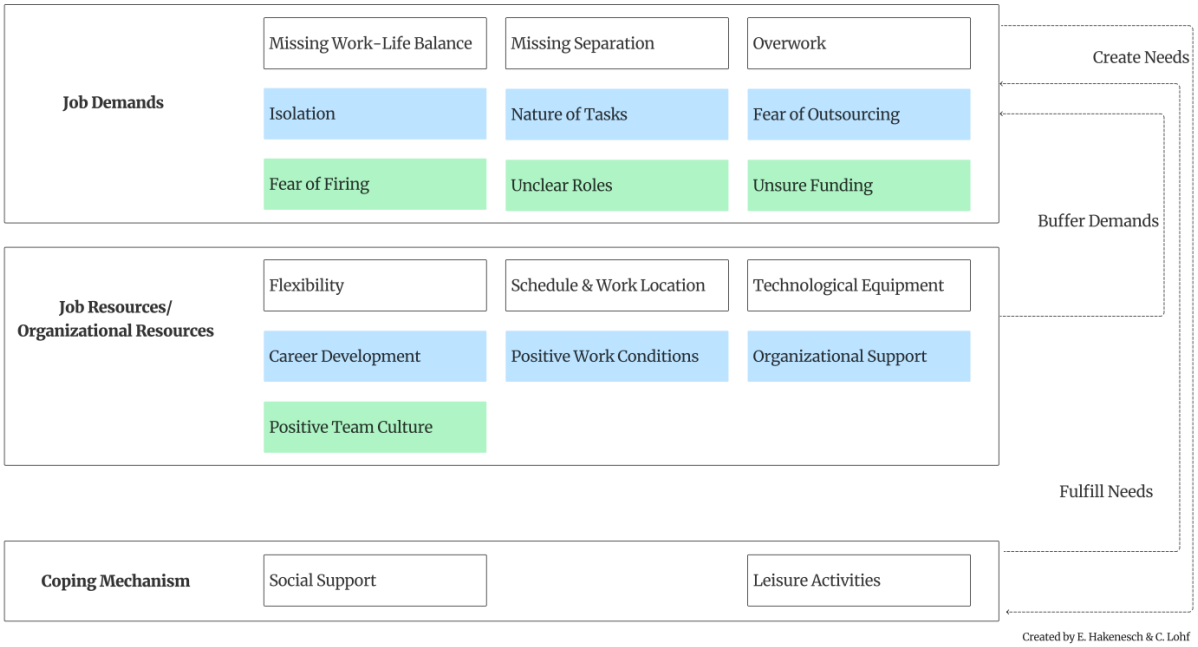

Figure 6 Interplay of Job Resources, Job Demands, and Coping Mechanisms Across Different Organizations

5.2.1 Organizational Support and Career Development

As illustrated in Figure 6, a significant distinction between the organizations is the extent of organizational resources available. In the context of corporate environments, interviewees have identified a range of support mechanisms that facilitate career development. In the context of the career development interview, participants highlighted the provision of support during their studies (cf. Interviewee B), the availability of training opportunities to enable employees to fulfill their tasks (cf. Interviewee A) or assisting employees who are experiencing difficulties with their workload or task prioritization (cf. Interviewee G).

We have coaches on the team and psychiatrists.

Interview G

Despite the availability of a range of wellness programs in large firms, many employees do not utilize these resources. As evidenced by research, over two-thirds of American employees have not utilized the provided well-being resources, citing them as either too time-consuming, inconvenient, or confusing (Bhatt, Bordeaux, and Fischer 2023). This insight was confirmed by the results of the interviews, as the majority of participants reported that they

hadn't utilized any of the available resources, and many were unaware of the specific offerings their organizations provided (cf. Interviewee C and D).

We have a lot of offers, but the time is simply missing.

Interview I

In contrast, startups often have limited resources due to their funding and size. Consequently, there is minimal emphasis placed on training and wellness initiatives. There were no references to career development or organizational support in this context.

5.2.2 Stress Factors

As previously stated, stressors differ significantly between startup and corporate employees. Corporate participants highlighted concerns beyond demanding workloads and long hours, such as the risk of outsourcing, intense competition, excessive responsibilities, and the paradox of boredom from repetitive tasks within rigid structures. Outsourcing, while cost-effective, raises concerns about diminishing expertise and shifting roles to mere management (Interview D).

The competitive environment and client demands also contribute to stress (Interviewee A, I). Interviewee I cited timesheet constraints as a major stressor, limiting working hours due to contract restrictions. Despite efforts to adhere to official work hours, doing so risks losing contracts.

Employees expressed mixed feelings about their responsibilities—some felt overwhelmed (Interviewees A, F), while others experienced boredom from structured, repetitive tasks (Interviewee I). This lack of autonomy and job variation can result in boreout, where tasks feel meaningless (Lufkin 2021). Corporate employees often perceived their tasks to be repetitive and constrained by structured procedures, whereas startup employees were required to assume multiple roles beyond the scope of their official position due to the limited

workforce and the dynamic nature of daily tasks in startup environments.

Beyond the differences in tasks, the stress factors in startups are primarily concerned with uncertain futures. The participants expressed particular concern about the company's financial situation and the upcoming funding rounds (Interviewee S, U, Z). Moreover, the prospect of an approaching funding round entails additional work in preparing pitches for potential investors. In the event that the funding is not secured, there is also a risk of job loss.

"I anticipate my stress levels to fluctuate depending on the company's financial situation."

Interviewee S

This is illustrated by the experience of one company, which underwent a significant downsizing the previous year. This event was a persistent concern for Interviewee Z. Additionally, the unstable environment has been observed to give rise to feelings of self-doubt.

5.2.3 Social Interaction and Isolation

A further distinction can be observed in the organizational structures regarding job demands. In this context, employees in large companies frequently indicate that they experience poor social interactions and feelings of isolation. The corporate work environment is frequently characterized as being antiquated, with established traditions and hierarchies. For instance, within Interviewee C, the distance to supervisors was identified as a negative aspect and highlighted a perceived lack of acknowledgment and gratitude for the work efforts.

I felt very much like a stranger.

Interview A

Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, Interviewee I characterized the team as a little family. However, the transition to remote work has significantly diminished their interactions. The practice of remote work has been identified as a contributing factor to this sentiment, with individuals reporting a decline in feelings of connection to their work and colleagues and a notable absence of personal interaction. Contrary, startups are characterized by a youthful

culture and a relatively flat hierarchy. As a result, the nature of the relationship with supervisors and other employees is altered. To illustrate, Interviewee Y described how their company employs a coffee chat function whereby all participants are randomly paired with another employee once a week to get to know one another. Such meetings may be held with any member of the organization without restrictions.

My organization is one of the most social employers. But in startups, not always because there are often inexperienced founders.

Interview W

5.2.4 Demographical Implications

In consideration of the demographic variables, age appears to be a significant factor in the context of burnout. Interviewee A, early in their career, noted the difficulty of achieving work-life balance, while Interviewee F felt unable to disclose excessive workloads.

"At the beginning of a career, when you want to get promoted, I don't think it is well seen."

Interviewee F

Office location also impacts stress, with Interviewees A and E finding in-office work helpful for setting boundaries. Stressors vary by sector; in consultancy and Big Four firms, client demands are key. Notably, while all respondents were unfamiliar with available support resources, male participants indicated they did not need them (Interviewee H). A recent article supports this, stating men are less likely to seek help and often suffer in silence (Becker 2024). In comparison, the demographic characteristics of the participants from startup companies also have an impact. Interviewee T is in the early stages of their professional career and has already experienced multiple instances of burnout. Additionally, Interviewee U disclosed that they had previously experienced burnout in a remote position and subsequently transitioned to a new company, where they have been able to advance their career while prioritizing the formation of

a family. With time Interviewee U became increasingly aware of their accumulated experience, which enabled them to identify strategies for effectively managing stress levels.

"With time I was professional and mature enough to know where my limits are." Interviewee S

13. Introduction

Unlike established corporations, startups often operate with small teams and dynamic structures, requiring employees to assume diverse roles under high-stakes and pressure conditions. These factors, coupled with both the flexibility and challenges of remote work, create a complex environment where burnout incidents among employees can increase. The research objective that is guiding this paper is to *identify the key factors of burnout and develop recommendations for startups regarding the organizational context*. Drawing on a combination of insights from the literature and first-hand experiences gathered from eight semi-structured interviews, this paper seeks to bridge the gap between the theory and practical applications. By emphasizing both organizational support and individual autonomy, the recommendations aim to support a sustainable and inclusive work environment while addressing the causes of burnout.

This paper begins with an overview of the methodology utilized to conduct the research, followed by a comprehensive literature review examining the dynamics that are distinct to startups, the evolution of remote work, and the causes of burnout within the startup context. After it investigates the qualitative findings, highlighting the themes that emerged from the interviews conducted with startup employees. Building on the insights gained from the interviews, the recommendations section offers unique, low-cost strategies that startups can implement to address the challenges of burnout, emphasizing flexibility, support, and community-building as key components of a burnout prevention strategy. Finally, the paper concludes by reflecting on the complexities of burnout and its implications for startups while offering ideas for future research.

14. Literature Review

14.1 Structure of Startups

With over 5.4 million new businesses launched in 2023, a 56.7% increase from 2019, the startup economy is experiencing unprecedented growth (Commerce Institute 2024). This

surge, driven by digitalization, remote work, and e-commerce, reflects how economic necessity and opportunity intersect, particularly after the COVID-19 pandemic (Fairlie 2022). Startups leverage remote work and technology to reduce overhead, access global talent, and optimize resources, providing a foundation for rapid entrepreneurial expansion (Global Entrepreneurship Network and Startup Genome 2021).

This review examines the unique dynamics of startups, the critical role of remote work, and strategies to mitigate burnout in such environments. Startups differ from scaleups and corporations in their flat structures, agile teams, and collaborative culture. Employees often juggle diverse roles in high-pressure, fast-paced settings, with founders frequently assuming multifaceted responsibilities. Financial constraints, reliance on venture capital, and rapid decision-making further define startup environments (Davila et al. 2003).

Scaleups, by contrast, are defined by sustained rapid growth, achieving over 20% annual growth for three consecutive years (OECD 2022). Though representing less than 0.6% of SMEs in the UK, scaleups account for half of all SME turnover, generating over £1.3 trillion in revenue in 2017 (ScaleUp Institute 2020). Their economic impact is significant, driving job creation, innovation, and competitiveness across sectors (Strengers et al. 2022).

Both startups and scaleups contribute uniquely to economic development. While startups thrive on agility and innovation, scaleups exemplify sustained productivity and market dominance, validating their role as catalysts for growth and innovation in the modern economy.

14.2 Relevance of Remote Work in Startups

Startups have embraced remote work for its flexibility, cost-efficiency, and access to a global talent pool. By eliminating the need for a physical office, startups with limited resources can allocate funds toward critical growth areas (Rosen and Forbes 2024). Remote work also enables startups to build diverse, inclusive teams with fresh perspectives while aligning with the agility required in fast-paced environments (Gartner 2020). Additionally, remote hiring

facilitates rapid expansion and supports a dispersed workforce, allowing startups to scale up or down quickly in response to market conditions or funding changes (Krajcik et al., 2023; Forbes 2019).

14.3 Causes of Burnout in Startups

Unique factors in startups contribute to burnout, including role ambiguity, heavy workloads, long hours, and economic pressures tied to inadequate compensation and continuous funding. Unlike corporations with defined hierarchies, startup employees often juggle multiple responsibilities, impacting job satisfaction and productivity (Kokemuller 2022).

Poor management is another critical factor. A Harvard Business School study found that 65% of venture capitalists attributed high-potential startup failures to management errors, such as premature promotions or high turnover (Campling n.d). Frequent organizational changes also lead to change fatigue, a collective burnout risk triggered by excessive change (Duffy and Fosslien 2022).

Additionally, startup hiring strategies often prioritize growth over employee development, resulting in gaps in training, benefits, and retention (Hresko 2024). Research shows startup employees are three times more likely to face recurrent mental health issues, underscoring the need for improved well-being initiatives (Freeman et al. 2015).

14.4 Coping Strategies in Startups

As evident by the results of the Gioia Methodology and as mentioned within the literature review, in startups the organizational support is limited. Thus, the coping mechanisms are rather based on the measures individuals can apply. Such strategies may include simple coping strategies that employees can implement in their daily lives to combat the risk of burnout. A study from the National Library of Medicine found such effective coping strategies included seeking social and emotional support, physical activity, setting boundaries from work, and practicing self-care (Maresca et al., 2022).

The JD-R Model supports these findings, highlighting that social support is an essential element in helping achieve work goals, reduce demand pressures, and foster growth and learning. Social support creates a certain "buffer effect" that minimizes the impact of demands on burnout and strain (Bakker and Demerouti 2007). Furthermore, research shows a positive correlation between regular exercise and a decrease in burnout symptoms. Not only does exercise help reduce burnout, but it has also demonstrated to reduce stress, anxiety and depression in addition to enhancing mood, productivity, and physical health (Moraes et al. 2019).

15. Methodology

To gain a deeper insight into the experience of working remotely in a startup, eight interviews were conducted as part of a qualitative study, thus allowing the exploration of each question in depth capturing a personal understanding of each interviewee's experience. Furthermore, the qualitative approach enabled to remain adaptable, allowing the questions to evolve based on the responses to capture the complexity and nuance of each participant's experience. The following figure gives an overview of the nationality, gender, departments, and work experiences of the participants. Additionally, an overview of the participant demographics can be found in Appendix 5.

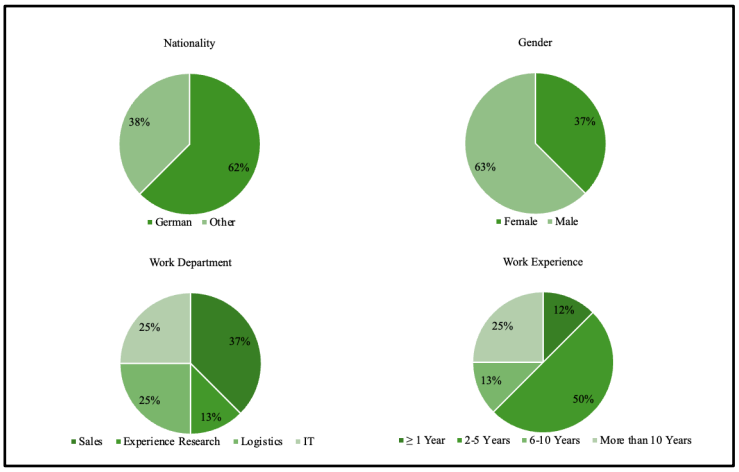

Figure 7 Demographic Overview Interview Participants – Startups

The semi-structured interviews involved participants from various departments, positions, and

levels of experience within hybrid and fully remote positions. This method provides a consistent framework for comparison while allowing flexibility for each participant to share freely (Oranga and Matere 2023). The interviews were all conducted, recorded and transcribed over Google Meets. Each transcript was then manually edited to ensure that all company names and other private data was deleted.

16. Overview Interview Results and Limitations of Startups

The interviews revealed several key themes regarding burnout in startups. One major theme was burnout triggers, which included excessive workloads, role expansion, and blurred work-life boundaries. Participants often felt overworked due to handling responsibilities beyond their roles, with remote work further complicating the separation of work and personal life.

Another theme focused on the impact of remote work. While many participants noted reduced stress from commuting and increased flexibility, others highlighted the adverse effects of unclear boundaries, which led to overwork and heightened anxiety.

Resource limitations in startups emerged as another recurring theme. Participants emphasized the lack of formal burnout prevention measures and standardized approaches to employee well-being, exacerbated by the scarcity of resources typical in startups.

Financial pressures and high expectations also contributed significantly to stress. Fundraising periods and managerial decisions during low funding phases heightened stress levels. Early-stage startups often demanded long hours and intense effort, with remote work compounding work-life balance challenges and increasing burnout risks.

Lastly, participants expressed concerns about the uncertainty of the future. Stress levels often fluctuated based on the company's financial situation and changing demands, while some emphasized the importance of personal growth and stress management to cope with external pressures.

The interview findings aligned with existing literature while providing deeper personal insights into the implications of remote work. A study by Maresca et al. (2022) supported the conclusion that environments with clearly defined roles significantly reduce burnout, underscoring the importance of role clarity even within startups. Employees can mitigate role ambiguity by establishing boundaries and incorporating wellness practices.

Certain limitations should be acknowledged. All participants were from the same startup, though they brought experiences from other startup roles to the interviews. Additionally, the 30-minute interview time limit restricted responses, and some participants worked in hybrid models, potentially minimizing the effects of isolation compared to fully remote workers. Nevertheless, all participants had prior experience with fully remote work, which informed their perspectives.

17. Recommendations for Startups

As previously indicated in the referenced research, the phenomenon of burnout in remote working environments has emerged as a significant challenge, particularly in startup environments where resources are often constrained, as frequently emphasized in this paper. While strategies to mitigate burnout already exist for startups, they frequently center on the individual's responsibility rather than on initiatives from the organization. Startups, however, are uniquely positioned to implement low-cost, innovative strategies that proactively support employee well-being. Based on these findings, the following initiatives are designed to not only counter burnout but embrace engagement, flexibility, and physical and psychological wellness. Notably, the recommendations apply to employees working in hybrid or on-site environments, providing a holistic approach that is adaptable to all working environments.

A persistent theme in the interviews was the stress caused by overwhelming workloads and ambiguous roles, which is characteristic of startup environments where employees frequently assume multiple responsibilities. Addressing these triggers requires a deliberate

cultural shift to normalize and empower employees to take breaks and manage their daily tasks. Introducing an empowering break culture through explicit policies and management reinforcement can make a significant positive change. Employees should feel supported in taking regular, short 10 – 15-minute breaks throughout the day, not only for physical rest but also to recharge mentally. Startups should make this mandatory, given that without measures being mandatory many would find reasons to not adopt the initiatives, preventing any change from happening. This cultural reinforcement combats feelings of guilt for taking breaks and fosters a sustainable work rhythm. Startups could consider adding daily stretch breaks, meditation, and mindfulness exercises where team members can go through a virtual routine together. Studies have shown that stretching and movement can elevate serotonin levels, improving mood and reducing stress (Ahantke 2023). Additionally, offering a "PTO Buffer"- small, flexible chunks of time off- could provide employees with the option to recharge as needed. For instance, allowing an hour off during stressful periods can be a highly cost-effective way to alleviate exhaustion without the need to use vacation days. Similarly, implementing flexible meeting-free blocks on designated days or during specific times throughout the day ensures uninterrupted deep work periods, enabling employees to focus and reduce the mental load of constant virtual meetings.

Boundaries are easily blurred between work and personal life. Without a clear separation, employees often feel perpetually "on," leading to heightened stress levels and exhaustion. Encouraging employees to establish virtual commute rituals can help create a psychological boundary between work and life. Simple routines such as a short walk, a meditation session, or even a designated time to reflect at the start and end of each workday, can signal the transition into and out of work, fostering mental detachment from work responsibilities during non-working hours. To reinforce these boundaries, startups should introduce no-send zones for emails and messages, where communication is severely restricted

outside specific timeframes. For instance, the regulation could be that employees can't access e-mails between 07:00 p.m. and 08:00 a.m. Such strategies mitigate the pressure to remain consistently available and respect the employees' personal time. By creating clear expectations around communication, startups encourage employees to disconnect, protecting their mental well-being. Again, it is important for such measures to be mandatory, as otherwise, employees might be tempted to work around recommendations given the heavy workload or the pressure to perform.

Startups often operate with limited resources and, therefore, can make formal burnout prevention initiatives seem unattainable. However, several innovative, low-cost strategies can be effectively implemented. For example, conducting an asynchronous week, a so-called flexible week experiment, once a quarter would allow employees to work at their own pace and in their most productive time zones by minimizing meetings and deadlines. This strategy is particularly useful for global teams, as it reduces the strain of scheduling across multiple time zones, fostering a sense of autonomy and balance. Furthermore, with the advancements made in artificial intelligence (AI), implementing technology such as stress-aware task prioritization tools, such as Monday.com, ClickUp, and Wrike, offer another possibility to combat burnout. AI-powered tools can analyze task loads and provide recommendations on prioritizing tasks during high-stress periods. Paired with automated time-off calendar blocks, such strategies encourage employees to take breaks or allocate uninterrupted focus times. These solutions balance the need for structure with the employees' autonomy to adapt their schedules. Mental health support can also be offered through mental health credits for wellness apps like Peloton, Wellpass, and Exhale. These credits allow employees access to mindfulness tools, yoga sessions, or virtual therapy tailored to their personal preferences. This solution not only provides scalable support for mental well-being but also reflects a commitment to the individual's self-care. To further enhance the team spirit, managers can encourage employees

to create pairs and hold one another accountable within a given period of time.

The interviews also emphasized the impact of workload fluctuations and the importance of fostering personal development. To address this, startups could introduce innovation days for passion projects. During this period, employees can dedicate time to exploring ideas or initiatives that ignite their intrinsic motivation. This strategy not only alleviates stress from routine tasks but also nurtures creativity and engagement, counteracting repetitive tasks or pressure of important work. Similarly, peer-led skill-sharing circles provide a platform for employees to share stress management tips, time-saving tools, or productivity hacks. These biweekly sessions build a sense of community and collective learning, fostering a supportive team culture that buffers against burnout.

Incorporating some of these recommendations aligns closely with the conclusions drawn from the interviews, reflecting a nuanced understanding of burnout in startups. These strategies are not only cost-effective, scalable, and tailored to the specific challenges of remote work, they also enable startups to prioritize their employees' well-being with minimal financial investment. These strategies capitalize on the potential of creativity, culture, and community to address burnout and foster a healthier, more inclusive, and more sustainable work environment. Furthermore, these strategies facilitate the alignment of individual accountability with organizational support, thereby fostering a healthy work culture and a comprehensive framework to mitigate burnout in remote work.

18. Future Outlook

Future research should explore the long-term effectiveness of the proposed strategies and examine their applicability across different startups, industries, and cultural contexts. Therefore, to test the burnout strategies, tracking employee well-being, productivity, and retention over time could provide valuable insights into the durability and success of these recommendations. Additionally, exploring the applicability of these strategies as startups grow

into scaleups or larger companies could reveal unique challenges and adaptations that are required at different growth stages. This includes examining the integration of advanced technological tools, particularly AI, which presents both ethical considerations and potential benefits for workplace practices.

Addressing the complex challenge of burnout in remote startup environments requires careful consideration of individual and organizational factors. The interviews conducted highlighted the unique pressures faced by startup employees, thus creating specific demands that organizations need to tackle. The solutions proposed in this paper illustrate that even with limited resources, startups having the ability to create impactful change.

19. Conclusion

Burnout in remote work requires attention to both individual and organizational factors, irrespective of organizational size. Burnout, shaped by numerous stressors, lacks a universal solution. Research reveals significant disparities in employee demands and resources across organizations, often linked to exhaustion, depersonalization, and reduced professional efficacy. Common challenges include poor work-life balance and pervasive exhaustion, with startups facing additional stressors like job insecurity, funding uncertainty, and undefined roles.

Startups can mitigate burnout through innovative yet resource-conscious strategies, such as fostering a "break culture," scheduling meeting-free blocks, and implementing "no-send zones." These initiatives emphasize flexibility, empowerment, and mutual support.
Remote work, while offering flexibility, also brings risks like isolation and blurred work-life boundaries. Organizations face the challenge of balancing flexibility with team cohesion. Hybrid work environments encourage interaction, supporting psychological safety, employee motivation, and knowledge sharing while maintaining autonomy. Companies may initially provide incentives for office attendance, but over time, employees may rediscover satisfaction in shared routines.

Burnout cannot be entirely eliminated, but organizations must foster supportive environments where employees feel valued and confident discussing challenges. As generational values shift towards prioritizing employee well-being, firms must raise awareness about burnout and its symptoms to align job demands with resources and create a motivated, resilient workforce.

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List of Abbreviations

Abbreviation	Meaning
a.m.	ante meridiem
AG	Aktiengesellschaft (engl. Stock corporation)
AI	Artificial Intelligence
BKK	Betriebskrankenkasse (engl. Company health care insurance)
CEO	Chief Executive Officer
cf.	confer
COVID-19 pandemic	Corona Virus disease 2019
DAJEB	Deutsche Arbeitsgemeinschaft für Jugend- und Eheberatung (engl. German working group for social context)
EAP	Employee Assistance Program
e.g.	for example
et. al	et alia
EY	Ernst & Young
Gen	Generation
GmbH	Gesellschaft mit beschränkter Haftung (engl. limited liability company)
HR	Human Resources
IG-Metall	Industriegewerkschaft Metall (engl. Metalworkers' Union)
IT	Information Technology
JD-C	Job Demand-Control

JD-R	Job Demand-Resources
KPI	Key Performance Indicators
MBI	Maslach Burnout Inventory
MS Teams	Microsoft Teams
n.d.	no date
NIH	National Institutes of Health
OECD	Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development
p.m.	post meridiem
PTO	Personal Time Off
SME	small and medium-sized enterprise
U.S.	United States
UK	United Kingdom
US$	US-Dollar
Ver.di	Vereinte Dienstleistungsgewerkschaft (engl. United Services Union)
WHO	World Health Organization

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Appendix Startups

Appendix 5: Overview of Startup Interview Partners

Date of Interview	Generation	Nationality	Work Industry	Work Location	Experience in years
Interview S-Monday, September 23, 2024	Millennial	German	IT	Hybrid	3.5
Interview T-Wednesday, September 25, 2024	Generation Z	Turkish	IT	In-office	2
Interview U-Thursday, September 26, 2024	Millennial	German	Logistics	Hybrid	10
Interview V-Thursday, September 26, 2024	Generation Z	German	Logistics	Remote	2.3
Interview W-Wednesday, September 25, 2024	Millennial	German	Sales	Hybrid	17
Interview X-Thursday, September 26, 2024	Generation Z	German	Sales	Remote	2
Interview Y-Wednesday, September 25, 2024	Generation Z	Greek	Sales	Hybrid	<1
Interview Z-Thursday, September 26, 2024	Millennial	Swedish/ Polish	Experience Research	Remote	11

Appendix 6: Overview of Startup Recommendations

Theme	**Problem**	**Recommendations**
Burnout Triggers	• Excessive Workload & Role Expansion	• Empowering Break Culture: create a policy that explicitly tells employees to take short, regular breaks. Breaks improve productivity. Reinforcing this culture empowers employees to take breaks without guilt, helping to prevent exhaustion. • PTO Buffer: if feasible, allow employees to take an hour or so off when they need a quick recharge. Offering small, flexible chunks of time off can be highly cost-efficient, reducing burnout without needing to allocate additional vacation days • Flexible Meeting-Free Blocks: designate meeting free blocks on specific days or during certain times of the day where employees can focus on deep work or a personal recharge. This helps employees better manage their time with fewer distractions.
Impact of Remote Work	• Blurring of Boundaries • Work-life Balance	• Virtual Commute Rituals ○ Short morning / evening routines to start and end the day, helping to set boundaries and mentally transition in and out of work • No-Send Zones for emails and messages: Setting time zone policies (ex: no emails after 7pm or before 8am) to create boundaries and reduce the pressure of always being available
Resource Limitations in Startups	• Lack of Formal Burnout Prevention Measures	• Asynchronous Week Experiment: Once a quarter, try a flexible “asynchronous week” where meetings and deadlines are minimized, allowing employees to work in their most productive time zones, at their own pace. Especially effective for global teams, where team members have the freedom to balance work with life. • Stress-Aware Task Prioritization tools: there are a variety of AI-driven tools that help analyze workload and employee interaction data to recommend a daily task prioritization list. These tools can help identify low-priority tasks during stressful periods, reducing the feeling of being overwhelmed. • Automated “Time-Off” Nudges and Calendar Blocks: Scan for employees who haven’t taken time off recently and encourage them to set focus blockers etc to encourage breaks and uninterrupted work time while still respecting

		the autonomy of employees to modify their schedule as needed. • Mental Health credits for Wellness Apps: Some startups already offer Wellness Apps so offering "mental health credits" that employees can use to gain access to mindfulness tools, or virtual therapy sessions etc and customize their self-care based on personal preferences is a step towards supporting employee mental well-being.
Future Outlook	• Workload Fluctuations • Personal Development	• Innovation Days for Passion Projects: Give employee dedicated "innovation days" where they can take a break from usual tasks and work on an idea or project that they are passionate about. This can help them feel empowered and engaged, helping mitigate burnout from repetitive or high-pressure work by fostering intrinsic motivation • Peer-Led Skill-Sharing Circles: organize biweekly skill sharing sessions where employees teach each other tools or hacks that they find useful. These can be anything from time management, stress reduction, or productivity hacks → Builds a culture and sense of community

Appendix Group Part

Appendix 7: Consent Form

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this interview as part of our research for our master thesis on Burnout in Remote Working Environments. The purpose of this interview is to gather valuable insights and data that will contribute to our thesis research.
Before we begin, we would like to outline the terms of this interview and seek your formal consent.

Terms of Agreement:
1. Voluntary Participation: Your participation in this interview is entirely voluntary. You have the right to withdraw from the interview at any time, without providing a reason and without any negative consequences.
2. Confidentiality: Any information shared during this interview will be treated with strict confidentiality. Your identity will remain anonymous, and any personal information that may identify you will be excluded or disguised in our thesis.
3. Recording: With your permission, this interview may be audio recorded to ensure accuracy in our data collection. These recordings will be used solely for research purposes and will not be shared outside the research team. You may request that the recording be stopped at any time during the interview.
4. Use of Data: The data collected from this interview will be used for academic purposes, including the completion and defense of our thesis. We may also use this data in future academic publications, presentations, or reports, but your anonymity will always be maintained.
5. Duration: The interview is expected to last approximately 30 minutes. You are free to pause or stop the interview at any time.
6. Informed Consent:

By agreeing to participate in this interview, you confirm that:

- You have been informed of the purpose of the research and the nature of the interview.
- You understand that your participation is voluntary and that you can withdraw at any time.
- You agree to the use of the data as outlined above.

Please indicate your agreement to participate in this interview by signing below.

- I agree to participate in the interview: Yes/No
- I agree to the recording of the interview: Yes/No

Interviewee Signature: Researcher Signature:

Date: _____ Date: _____

Appendix 8: Overview Questionnaire

1. Can you describe your academic background and how you arrived at your current role?

2. How would you describe your work environment (remote, hybrid, or in-office)? If both, how many days per week do you work in the office vs. remotely? Which do you prefer, and why? Do you have the flexibility to choose, or does your employer determine it?

3. What aspects of your job do you find the most fulfilling? What aspects do you find the least fulfilling? Characterize your work environment.

4. How would you assess your work-life balance in a remote working environment?

5. Do you feel professionally fulfilled? Are you satisfied with your current working conditions, the team you are working with, your supervisors?

6. Have you ever experienced feelings of exhaustion, detachment from your work, or a decline in your professional efficacy?

7. How often do you feel stressed in your work, and what are the main sources of stress?

8. Do you feel your organization provides sufficient resources to support your work?

9. What coping mechanisms do you use to manage stress and maintain your well-being?

10. Do you feel your organization is aware of and responsive to the stress and potential burnout faced by employees? If yes, what measures are in place to support employees?

11. How do you think the remote work environment affects your overall stress levels compared to working in an office?

12. Do you anticipate that your current level of stress or job satisfaction will change in the next five or ten years?

13. What changes could be made to your role or company practices that would benefit professionals, especially in managing stress and avoiding burnout?

14. Would you recommend your role or working in your industry to others also based on your experience in a remote work environment? Why or why not?

Appendix 18: Transcript Interview Partner S

Part 1: Professional Background and Remote Work Environment

1. Can you describe your academic background and how you arrived at your current role?
Interview Partner S: *So basically, my professional career started after my Abitur where I just started as basically a trainee in a bank, I did the very classic bank trainee role. I did that for two and a half years. I also worked full-time for nine months, then as a bank advisor, and then decided to move on to university. I then started my bachelor's degree in Reutlingen. This was basically a combination of two years in Germany, and two years in Dublin, Ireland. The degree it's called international management which is a Bachelor of Science in business and after I have done some internships during the studies. And after the university, I was offered a job in Ireland at Company XYZ. I started working there for three years and then afterwards, I decided to make a step into product ownership and move to another startup which unfortunately, when bankrupt after a couple of months and then moved over to Company XYZ in Munich as a product owner.*

2.1 How would you describe your work environment (remote, hybrid, or in-office)? If both, how many days per week do you work in the office versus remotely? Which do you prefer, and why? Do you have the flexibility to choose when you work from home versus in the office, or is it determined by your employer?
Interview Partner S: *So I would consider myself hybrid for two reasons. So my reason number one is, I'm primarily at the office. So I'm spending at least four or five days in the office in Munich. However, that might depend on my personal plans. Sometimes I'm an entire week from somewhere else. I'm really using the flexibility of hybrid working. So I'm not by default working from somewhere else, but by default, I'm working from the office, but I'm making use of remote working when I want to do to whatever reasons. However, my majority of my work still results of people not being physically in the office. So even though I am at the office, working with people around me and that, communicate and social and individual stuff in the office. My actual working partners as a product owner and my squad, for example of developers and QAs, they are all sitting in remote locations. So my entire working style is I would say remote by default so enough everything needs to be working in remote setup even though I still appreciate the office presence,*

2.2 Do you feel that this flexibility to choose from when if you work at home or in the office or is that more determined by your employer?

Interview Partner S: *No, I'm deciding this by myself.*

3. What aspects of your job do you find the most fulfilling? What aspects do you find the least fulfilling? Characterize your work environment (for example do you work mostly alone or in a team)
Omitted

4. How would you assess your work-life balance in a remote working environment?

Interview Partner S: *It's good, I would say I really like hybrid environments where there is a focus on being in the office. However I also enjoy that we don't have to come to the office. So for myself, for maybe just the context a bit better. The reason why I really enjoy remote or hybrid working, is because my girlfriend and me, we travel a lot. Our families, they live in the northern part of Germany, so, traveling to our parents, it's not that easy. So when we want to visit them, we usually do it for this entire weekend of what maximize the time we have. So what then usually, do we arrange our remote days in a way that we can maximize the time of our families. Or if we want to travel somewhere that we arrange our remote days, it's like this. And for me personally, this gives me a great flexibility and improves basically the time which I can spend on my personal topics. And also, for example, my girlfriend, she's a horseback rider so when she needs to do something with the horses or something needs to be done at home. And I can just choose whenever we stay at home, and I think that it's a great flexibility because many things we do today would not work if we had a stricter office policy.*

Part 2: Stress, Burnout, and Coping Mechanisms

5. Do you feel professionally fulfilled? Are you satisfied with your current working conditions, the team you are working with, your supervisors?

Interview Partner S: *I do, this is the job I always wanted to do and I'm very glad that I have reached the position and the role and responsibilities I'm doing now, which I always desired. And generally, yes, to all of them very satisfied. Great team. Obviously, they can always be things to improve, but it's natural things of being. Overall I'm very satisfied.*

6. Have you ever experienced feelings of exhaustion, detachment from your work, or a decline in your professional efficacy?

Interview Partner S: *That's a tough question. So, in work efficacy I would say no because this goes against what I believe in. No. Maybe talking about my professional career especially, if I do something like I'm staying 100% behind it and I do it. And if I feel that I don't want to do something anymore, then I stop doing it. This is the reason why I stopped being a bank adviser because I didn't feel that this is the right path for me, going forward and then I quit it early enough before my efficacy drop because I was feeling that I was not driving anymore and if I keep doing this I'm not doing the performance I want to and put the effort into which I want to. This was also the same with my previous role. I was very happy with my previous role and when I joined at Company ZYX as a technical expert, and I went to program manager role. I was very happy with that but all also, this didn't fulfill me at some point anymore and so I went over to product management, like I do now. And that's the moment that I'm the happiest. But I've never felt my work efficacy is dropping. Speaking, in terms of if I ever feel higher pressure also, for example, in the last quarter, where I needed to take the responsibility for both product squads because one product owner was just quitting and then I had to take responsible for both squads. Which by design, product owners are not supposed to do this. I felt overworked yes, and this was the time where I was really feeling where I worked a lot and worked too much. I noticed that my efficacy is dropping, that I still want to try do everything, that I was still very bought into the company. And it was that I still wanted to complete the challenge because I know it's the right thing for the company,*

7. How often do you feel stressed in your work, and what are the main sources of stress?
Omitted

8.1 Do you feel there are sufficient resources provided by your organization to support your work (e.g., technology, emotional support, training)?
Interview Partner S: *Emotional Support, yes, definitely. Training is a little bit up to me, but product management training in general, is very complicated topic because it's a very complicated area. Obviously, we don't have an unlimited budget for the high-class product management training stuff, which I would, of course, hope for, but it is unrealistic. But the opportunities, I'm getting a great. And in terms of work environment, yeah, I mean for startup environment I think it's a very positive environment. We really focus on all the individual growth that everyone can get its share and make sure that everyone kind of feels heard and on their career path independently. So overall, I think I was very satisfied with the conditions I'm currently giving*

8.2 Okay, so just to summarize, you feel with the limited resources Company XYZ as a startup has, that they definitely fulfill those needs?

Interview Partner S: *Yeah, I would say so. Obviously, there are stuff to improve, but we always need to keep in mind that we are working with very scarce resources. We are not like Volkswagen, who have millions of euros coming out of some drain that just be to collected and distributed. I think for the stuff we do; I think we're doing a great job, providing a great work environment.*

9. When you are stressed, what coping mechanisms do you use to manage stress and maintain your well-being?
Interview Partner S: *So especially in the last quarter, I learned to meditate. This is something that I started with. Because I'm someone, I'm always thinking, my brain always is kind of active. And when there's the point where there are too many tasks, which I cannot fulfill every task even with a lower quality, this is where I was really struggling with, because I never had this before. I was not really used to this kind of situation. This was also the first time in my life where there was actual responsibilities involved. There is no second net, there is nobody who can really help me. I mean there are people who can help me, yes, but I am the person in charge and I'm supposed to do and that was like a little bit harder for me. Meditating really helped me a lot to just calm down my thoughts, reorganize my work and just taking some time for myself. Then also obviously in terms of organizational, delegating, getting rid of work and also prioritization. That is also something which I learned harder during those times saying more no. I'm saying things straight up "I know that this is important for you and know that this is for our client, but I don't have time so we can do it." And saying this straight up and close the topic so you don't even take the problem home, This was some of the things which helped me really get along. I'm not the talker, I don't talk then about this. I'm then getting quieter. I'm becoming then quieter and doing this, the things for myself.*

Part 3: Organizational Support and Future Outlook
10. Do you feel your organization is aware of and responsive to the stress and potential burnout

faced by employees? If yes, what measures are in place to support employees? (e.g., flexible schedules, mental health days, communication protocols.)

Interview Partner S: *Yes, but no. I always have to feeling that my superior or my manager is concerned about my wellbeing and he's asking how I am doing, if there's too much work, and so on and so forth. But that's the general approach we are taking. Number one, you are very much dependent on who you are working with. So I'm lucky that I have a manager who really take care about it. So it depends obviously from person to person it can widely differ. I know that the experience does vary in Company XYZ because it's so people dependent. That might be a challenge for the company because you need to have good managers who are able to cope with it? We don't have any company-wise mechanisms which help us to understand how the general will being of us is. I mean, yeah, we have quick checks but that's more on a professional company performance organizational level but on a personal level, I would say If you had the wrong manager, at Company XYZ and you have the wrong role, you get burned out. For me, I was professional and mature enough to know where my limits are in the last quarter. But if you had another product owner, with a different manager, this person might have burned out. Yes, and because it's also a little bit to the nature of the startup. There is always more work in which we could compete and actually can compete in. That's the natural situation of a startup. And if you are not able to cope with this yourself to a certain extent and that your manager, doesn't do it for you, then you're going to burn out. That's just a matter of fact unfortunately because we are not big and large enough and professional enough, to have systematic copying mechanisms which help someone to help outside of his management line.*

11. How do you think the remote work environment affects your overall stress levels compared to working in an office?

Interview Partner S: *I think there are two answers to this. It's good bad. So, the good one is that for me, remote work is less stressful. There's less noise around me, there are less people talking to me, I can more focus on my work. However, I'm also less involved during those times. Which, for example, for me also raises my stress because I have fear of missing out. On the other hand. in terms of work ethics, it can also be bad. Because you really need to make sure that people recognize your work, which can be stressful, because your work is not visible by default. So, for example, if you're sitting in front of a laptop for eight hours a day in your office and you are only in the meeting room and everyone sees that you are busy. Nobody would assume that you are not busy. But if you own in home office, people don't see how you work. Maybe you work eight hours, maybe work four. Nobody knows. Maybe you're just efficient of getting your work done or ducking away. We don't know. I think that can be also stressful to that extent. So I think there's a pro and con to both. However, at least I think that the hybrid version, I think the mix things, very important. You need to be at home. I think the remote work from home is very nice at least to focus. To really switch off, to really don't get distracted. But you also need time in the office, I mean the social aspect is something completely different than of course, which you need to have. Also on the professional level, I generally prefer working with people in the office especially when it comes to working with my developers, which unfortunately is not the case because they are all in remote locations. Which also gives me something feeling from the opposite side. So I don't know if they in currently focus on the right*

things. I assume that they do because I trust them but I don't know it because I can't see it and I generally only believe things that I can see. Even though I trust them. It's also something where I would say it makes life more stressful for me if other people work remote because I cannot see what they are doing without actively distracting them. If you just do one, I think it's stressful, and if you do the other one, also in the modern times, where hybrid work becomes more of a standard, I would say, working only from the office, especially with now, open spaces and no assigned desks, and so on and so forth. I think that also working from the offices is stressful to a certain extent, especially when you consider commuting and everything.

12. Do you anticipate that your current level of stress or job satisfaction will change in the next 5 or 10 years? Why or why not?

Interview Partner S: *Number one, it would definitely change because we are working in a startup. As soon as the next money rolls in things are going to change rapidly. That's just a nature of the company I am in. But I bought into so I don't have a problem with this. Obviously, it's also for me as a senior product owner, I'm at the forefront of everything happening. So everything which changes on the company's strategy level and direction I'm one of the first one to change. But for me personally, I think that also stress and also workload, will definitely go up again and also go down again in the future. There will be no phase where you just have a straight line of how much you work and how much you do at least not in the role, which I am currently in, which I'm also striving for the future.*

Part 4: Job and Career Reflection

13. In your view, what changes could be made to your role or company practices that would benefit professionals, especially in managing stress and avoiding burnout?

Interview Partner S: *I mentioned this before and I would come back to this. All of the stress burnout, this should be not measured, especially in management lines. Your mental well being in general should not be determined by your manager. Especially in professional or even bigger companies this is also the case. If you have the wrong team, or the wrong manager your mental health is going to suffer. I saw this in the past, especially when I worked back in a bank, where I frequently switched the branches during my traineeship because what's just how it worked, you just were eight weeks and one branch and we moved to another one. My mental health drastically changed between my different bosses basically. Because some make you more stressed, some make you less stressed. Some make you more stressed because you don't learn anything. Some make you less stressed because you learn so much or just the right amount. Like this is in everything in every role at the same. And I think this is something where else Company XYZ and in general companies need to learn that you need to find a way to manage your mental health of your employees outside of your direct management line, because the direct management line always has different concerns. I mean by the end of the day especially when it comes to Company XYZ, it's very difficult, again, we are startup, scarce on resources. If we fail, everyone goes down. It's always hard and we should make sure that we make long and sustainable plans. Have long-term strategies where people are also not avoiding stress, but be prepared for stress. If I know that this is a stressful quarter, I can plan for it. I can also adjust my personal life around, right, because if I have an eight-hour stressful day, I'm not going out in the evening partying, and another eight days of work. So this is also something*

which also helps I think. Giving people a perspective especially in a startup because in a startup everyone knows that stress strategy and everything is changing and it's a wave and not like a straight line and give people a good perspective on what they can expect, that they can plan accordingly.

14. Would you recommend your role or working in your industry to others, based on your experience in a remote work environment? Why or why not?

Interview Partner S: *So I already recommended some people for other product owner roles in Company XYZ. So I'm not the guy who often recommends people because I'm always concerned for both sides. So I would say yes. So I would advise everyone to work in the startup at least once, because I think it grounds you because I'm coming from big companies. I worked in a Sparkasse Bank. Right, it's corporate as it gets. I worked at a different company, which is kind of like a hybrid, which is technically, big tech company, but still has kind of startup vibes in going into it. Then worked at some smaller startups and it really changes your perspective on how the world works and how you also perceive things. And I would always recommend someone even though I know it's not for everyone and not, everyone should stay in startups for entire time. And generally, I mean, product management, in general is you need to have certain interests to become a product manager. But if you feel like, product manager or product owner is a great role, where you can move a lot of things, were have lots of responsibility, and if this is the right thing for you, and it's a lot of fun and it can only recommend it.*

Appendix 19: Transcript Interview Partner T

Part 1: Professional Background and Remote Work Environment

1. Can you describe your academic background and how you arrived at your current role?

Interview Partner T: *Currently, I study my master's degree at TUM and my department is informatics for the last two years. In the beginning of my master degree, I actually started to working as Hiwi assistant at university. So my first one and a half year was like that being Hiwi assistant so software and engineering related and afterwards. It was fully remote job basically. So afterwards. I wanted to change it. And now last six months, I work for Company XYZ as IT and media.*

2.1 How would you describe your work environment (remote, hybrid, or in-office)? If both, how many days per week do you work in the office versus remotely? Which do you prefer, and why? Do you have the flexibility to choose when you work from home versus in the office, or is it determined by your employer?

Interview Partner T: *Currently, I work, onsite, I visit almost every day. In the beginning, we decided that because I work as IT and I have to be in the office to help people, but it was also my preference. As I mentioned to you previous, I was working fully remotely because of that, I struggle to balancing my Study and hobby. Because I'm informatic guy, my hobbies are also computer-related. So, I struggle to separate those. So that's why if I will work, I want to change my location. So now because of that, I work in office on onsite all the time.*

2.2 Do you have the flexibility to choose when you work from home versus in the office? Is this determined by your employer?

Interview Partner T: *I have flexibility. Definitely. But it's still better to be in the office. But yeah, I mean, most of the cases, I don't have to be in the office to do some stuff, but anyway, I still want to visit office.*

3.1 What aspects of your job do you find the most fulfilling? What aspects do you find the least fulfilling?

Interview Partner T: *Currently, I work as IT and I always thanks to that am able to connect with people, ask them couple questions or they connect me and ask me a couple questions and I help them. So thanks to that I can get social a little bit so that's a really good part of my job. And I don't feel like it's really stressful job to be honest. So maybe that's the second thing I really like. And yeah, maybe these two things I can say.*

But maybe what I don't like even though I really like visiting office, sometimes it kills the flexibility. So for example mini trips or something like that to visit my family but instead, I'm going to office. So those kinds of things, yeah, maybe I can say this. But it's anyway, my preference to visit office.

3.2 Can you characterize your work environment? For example, do you work mostly alone or in a team?

Interview Partner T: *I'm mostly working alone. My team is basically two people. I just have*

my supervisor and beginning of the week or end of my working week we just getting some updates feedbacks, and that's it.

4. How would you assess your work-life balance in a remote working environment?
Interview Partner T: *As soon as I enter the office now I feel I need to work. It's kind of strange because maybe office has library effect on me. So when you see working people or study people, I want to work more or I can easily start to work, so it's kind of like that. So that's why I prefer this on-site thing. Thanks to that actually, I separate my work and life balance so it definitely helps to me.*

Part 2: Stress, Burnout, and Coping Mechanisms

5.1 Do you feel professionally fulfilled?
Interview Partner T: *Yes, my work is easy. So I think I can do much more complex tasks. But anyway, I feel like, even though when I study, I work and I improve myself, so that's why I feel professionally fulfilled.*

5.2 Are you satisfied with your current working conditions, the team you're working with, your supervisor?

Interview Partner T: *Yes. Definitely.*

6. Have you ever experienced feelings of exhaustion, detachment from your work, or a decline in your professional efficacy?
Interview Partner T: *For this job, definitely not or not yet because I'm kind of new, maybe, just six months. But I told you first one and half here. I was working fully remotely and it was really hard to get this life and work balance and I had burnout a lot because of that. Because I have to do something else rather than work but I was feeling I was working instead of studying or doing everything on same desk, really affected me a lot and I burn out. I didn't want to do anything even playing computer games on our social life or something like that. I wanted to stay away. Even my room just go some random walk instead of watching movie on the desk or something like that. And that was the reason I quit that job and switched to this on-site job.*

7.1 How often do you feel stressed in your work?
Interview Partner T: *Sometimes I work as IT. So sometimes I have literally nothing to do but sometimes I have a lot to do. So it's always depends on problems in the company. So sometimes I have to, solve a lot of problems in short period of time. So then I have a little bit stressful but even though I'm relaxed, I think not super stressful in general.*

7.2 For your previous role that you were saying, would you say that the main sources of stress were like, again, you said that you couldn't detach from your work versus private life?

Interview Partner T: *Yes maybe that's more interesting. Yes that's definitely one reason I couldn't separate them. I was working as Hiwi assistant and during semester finish doing my exam period, basically Professor always ask, "You have to finish this task until this period!" and they always conflicted with my exam period or something like that. And that's why I was*

extra stressful. Let's say, studying, is my personal life, my previous work also pressuring me to finish things at same date. I really struggled and burn out, and I quit finding without any job so that kind of burnout. Yeah, and what I really like right now, I can talk with people, I can at least see them. But previously I was working fully remotely. So I saw nobody and that's also really change thing.

8. Do you feel there are sufficient resources provided by your organization to support your work (e.g., technology, emotional support, training)?

Interview Partner T: *Yes, definitely. Every two week we have one on one. So it's basically emotional support and they give me enough hardware. I have MacBook pro as which is cool. But it's -- related. I don't know if I should say or not, but they don't give you money for lessons such as UDEMY or COURSERA, so it could be better because I'm student I am also interested in these kind of things.*

9. When you are stressed, what coping mechanisms do you use to manage stress and maintain your well-being?

Interview Partner T: *I walk a lot when I am stressed and talk with myself, I guess so just go on a random walk. I go nowhere. I mean, okay, that's maybe a little bit, much more personal. So my previous working environment, affected me really bad so that's why I got some therapies to feel better. So I can say maybe I got three to four therapy sessions just because my anxiety level increased, so I was always feeling "Hey I have to do something but I don't have time." And that's why I started to skip my hobbies and stuff, and that's why I had couple therapy session to make things much more better. I think I can say this.*

Part 3: Organizational Support and Future Outlook

10. Do you feel your organization is aware of and responsive to the stress and potential burnout faced by employees? If yes, what measures are in place to support employees? (e.g., flexible schedules, mental health days, communication protocols.)

Interview Partner T: *I guess, definitely. They always try to help me. Whenever I have problem, I can directly reach my supervisor. And even for example today, there was a little bit problem on my calendar, so I talk with HR and we fix it for example. So yeah. I think definitely, they help me. But maybe interesting thing. So I directly go there and talk. If we chat via Slack, it will take much more longer probably to understand everything. So, yeah, maybe I can say this. So I think face to face talk always advantage to solve a problem. So, I like it.*

11. How do you think the remote work environment affects your overall stress levels compared to working in an office?

Interview Partner T*: First, but the other interesting thing, maybe before my experience, I had six months internship and it was hybrid in a company. So, I had hybrid environment experience to like that. So my personal experience is if you work remotely on that day, you even struggle to wake up from the bed. So you always say "Okay I can sleep maybe half an hour more maybe before". I like watching movies, for example, maybe I can start day watching a movie, then I can start to work and I'm getting always those kind of ideas. So I started to procrastinate my*

work little bit until end of day. And because of that, my work is always on my mind which increased anxiety. So that's the real problem. Working remotely if you manage this, if you wake up directly, I think it's good thing. If I don't have any separate room at home, I think if you have separate working environment at home, I think you can do this but if you don't have, you really struggle to separate your work and life experience at home and in the end, getting those kind of procrastination problems. And that increase your anxiety level little bit and it makes you unhappy in the end. Plus, if you have some organizational problem, I had previously conflicting date. Those kinds of things then and my previous job was a little bit chaotic so I had no supervisor. Really there if I struggle, I had nobody to ask, I needed to improvise those kind of problems like organization problems. If you have those kind of problems then it become much more challenging on remote environment, I think.

12. Do you anticipate that your current level of stress or job satisfaction will change in the next 5 or 10 years? Why or why not?

***Interview Partner T**: I think it will change but maybe it's much more personal. I personally believe, in my current role and I personally believe if I will just become a worker, it will decrease a little bit because right now studying and working are to different things. I have to separate my time and balancing this also a little bit stressful. So I think it will decrease at least a little bit but it depends on environment though if it's good environment like my current company, I think it will decrease, I hope I won't work something chaotic, so I think it will decrease.*

Part 4: Job and Career Reflection

13. In your view, what changes could be made to your role or company practices that would benefit professionals, especially in managing stress and avoiding burnout?

***Interview Partner T:** So, I personally think I may be not correct person for this question. Because currently I work as IT but previously I was working as a software engineer. I think I will continue as software engineer rather than being IT Guy. That's why I'm not sure, but maybe that could be interesting. I felt then I was a software engineer I had a lot of deadlines and I struggled to manage those deadlines, but then currently being IT, I don't have that much deadline. So thanks to that, I have less stress. Of course, I have to solve problems immediately but, I think deadline itself kind of pressure for me so maybe I can say this. So, I noticed this during last five months or something like that.*

14. Would you recommend your role or working in your industry to others, based on your experience in a remote work environment? Why or why not?

***Interview Partner T:** I definitely don't recommend fully remote working. If you have, of course, some short time plan, like work and travel a little bit, then maybe it's okay. But I think you should definitely work at least hybrid environment. Just need to go to office. More people, be friends with them and things to that you can solve work a little problem easily much more faster I think. So, that's why I think I can definitely recommend on my current situation.*

Appendix 20: Transcript Interview Partner U

Part 1: Professional Background and Remote Work Environment

1. Can you describe your academic background and how you arrived at your current role?

Interview Partner U: *Okay, so I started kind of traineeship, a program we have in Germany so it's based on school and working mixed together for three years. And I had a completed vocational training (Abgeschlossene Berufsausbildung). And then I worked for one year in the hotel and then afterwards, I decided to study again, and then I make the kind of year Further trainee for hotel management and then also my bachelor thesis. Afterwards, after my bachelor thesis, I started working At a trade, fair center from Munich and working for an international department. So we made both concepts for international companies and then I also traveled there a lot. And then, of course, 2020 covid came, and so events didn't take place anymore. And then around half year later, I joined the company which was also fully working remotely in the end. And so I had a hundred percent home office job. And there I worked as a project manager for different projects. They were focusing on supporting women in different industries are also making some jobs, very interesting. maybe also something in the automotive industry for women. So that's not just only male people working there. And then this company was not so good because I worked there 100% remotely. And in the end I decided to quit the job and then I searched for a new one and ended up being at Company XYZ three and a half years. And since then, of course, the first beginning was hard because Covid was still present, but it was not fully remote anymore. So that was a mix of home office and in the office.*

2.1 How would you describe your work environment (remote, hybrid, or in-office)? If both, how many days per week do you work in the office versus remotely?

Interview Partner U: *I would say it's hybrid, so it's mixed, but yeah, most of the time I would say, I'm working from the home office or two days in a week, I go to the office and three days I'm in the home Office. So, depending on the meetings appointments, because I'm also not living in the city center of Munich anymore and, that's why it's very good to have the flexibility.*

2.2 Which do you prefer? Do you have the flexibility to choose when you work from home versus in the office, or is it determined by your employer?

Interview Partner U: *Yeah, it's not 100% flexible because we're going to customer facing department. So, of course, and most of the during day available, also for the team members. But still a little bit more flexible than other team members but for both office and home office it's the same.*

3. What aspects of your job do you find the most fulfilling? What aspects do you find the least fulfilling? Characterize your work environment (for example do you work mostly alone or in a team)

Interview Partner U: *That's a good question. Fulfilling I would say to have the flexibility, where I want to work in the end because also I could work some from somewhere else, a few weeks, a year, I'm also doing a kind of workcation. But also working with people but also working from the office. also instead having my calm at the Home Office because when I*

focus on very strategic things, then I really prefer not to be disturbed by someone coming to my desk and asking." Hey, by the way here I have another question". And not fulfilling yet, that's actually something only in regards to office because we do have an open space and a lot of people really come to your desk and ask some question and you can be fully in some task where you need to think about calculate numbers or something. And then you're disturbed and that's something what I really don't like. So sometimes I really put some earphones in my ears to not be disturbed. Because that's what I really don't like about open spaces. I do see the advantages but I cannot make myself friends with open spaces. So, it's not so my personal preference.

4. How would you assess your work-life balance in a remote working environment?
Interview Partner U: *So for this job, I do have the work-life balance but maybe I just go back to the job where I didn't have work-life balance. So that was one point why I quit the job, because I didn't have the work life balance anymore. So I worked really long days, so I started sometimes at 7:30 and worked until seven pm in the evening and in between. And so also my former boss was also super pushy because for example, I just started at eight and then she was 10 minutes later "Yeah, did you heard already the email" for our higher boss and did you already send it out? And I was like, okay the day hasn't even started yet. Also this company was, also wants to take your full availability of the whole day. So also in the evening, "Can you do that" in the morning? So you really needed to shut down everything, do not go on your phone when they call you. And so, that was something also with the 100% remote job, which I didn't like, and maybe not all companies are that way. But I think people cannot differentiate anymore between job and home. They quickly do something. "I know I still do that".*

Part 2: Stress, Burnout, and Coping Mechanisms
5. Do you feel professionally fulfilled? Are you satisfied with your current working conditions, the team you are working with, your supervisors?
Interview Partner U: *Yes, I would say yes. Yeah.*

6.1 Have you ever experienced feelings of exhaustion, detachment from your work, or a decline in your professional efficacy?
Interview Partner U: *Yes, in the very first beginning year at Company XYZ we were less people and lots to do. We had customers who always asked for more and more because yeah, of course, we were in the starting points of software and cannot push something back, and we're like, "Yeah, of course, we can do that." There were definitely some situation where I also challenged myself. "Is that the right job for me?". So it was also very exhausting. So I remember a few situation where I really was, at that point. Yeah, okay. "Is that really the right environment for me?"*

6.2 You mentioned especially because I'm also focusing more on the startup aspect, Do you feel that because as you mentioned at the beginning you were fewer people and if you're working at a startup there's just more responsibilities you have to take on and try and please your customer as best you can then and you have your set ways that you've done for the last 20 years. Do you feel that had an impact?

Interview Partner U: *Yeah. Yeah, I would say because of course, your last people but a little bit I wouldn't say you should not how you say that in the right way but if you're starting at the startup with a few people, then you should be also a little bit of aware that you commit a little bit at some point and that works sometimes a little bit longer of course. At this startup everybody was the looking and watching that you're not doing so many overall working hours, but yeah. And It's definitely something different because when I worked at the trade fair, it was like that. So my eight hours I've done my job for today. So that's good because there are 10 more people and when you're less people than of course you're working differently.*

7. How often do you feel stressed in your work, and what are the main sources of stress?
Interview Partner U: *I am not so stressed anymore. So I also changed my mind also worked on that a lot. There are some situations when there is a lot of tickets on going. And also, if a merchant is really, angry, without a reason that I'm not stressed, I'm actually getting angry because I see all of you super stressed. and that these are the points where I'm like, okay, "today is really bad day". And yeah, only when I also know that I have a lot to do and the operational day is also super full but I need to submit something to X or to Y and then I have my deadline. I'm like, "Okay now I need to calm down, focus. Okay, what can I do?". But then I'm also communicate a lot and say, "Hey, I cannot make that line. It will be one day later just for your information."*

8. Do you feel there are sufficient resources provided by your organization to support your work (e.g., technology, emotional support, training)?
Interview Partner U: *Yeah. yeah.*

9. When you are stressed, what coping mechanisms do you use to manage stress and maintain your well-being?
Interview Partner U: *So first of all, during the day when I'm working, I write down my tasks. Prioritize a little bit or then I go through and say, "Okay, that's something what I can do in the next two days. That's nothing very important for today". Or what I also learned or teach myself directly because then to set clearly the expectations directly also to colleagues when someone asked me," Can you do this reporting for me?" Then I tell them "Okay, I can do that. But when do you need it?" And when they say "Until tomorrow and say I cannot make it, you have to wait to another day". So that I also give myself the time if it's not super urgent.*

Part 3: Organizational Support and Future Outlook

10.1 Do you feel your organization is aware of and responsive to the stress and potential burnout faced by employees?
Interview Partner U: *Yes, so all our leaders, I would say if we also have the feeling that someone out so I just can speak up for myself. But if I have to feeling that the team member is super stressed and then I cut them out and I say, "Hey what can we do to reduce your stress?". But yeah, so we are definitely aware and no one wants to the other one to have a burnout or something. So mental health is a important thing.*

10.2 What are some measures that are in place to support employees? For example, are you

able to have flexible schedules? May be a mental health day is their communication, protocols?
Interview Partner U: *No, we don't have something and yet probably it will come. But yeah. No.*

11.1 How do you think the remote work environment affects your overall stress levels compared to working in an office?
Interview Partner U: *That's really hard to answer. So I think it's always depending on the leaders. So how people manage the remote working and for this company, I would say they try to do their best and doing something like Coffee chats with the donut function. So that also people from Croatia, get in touch with the Munich people or from Serbia or somewhere else. So that's actually super nice and when we meet each other, other also non virtually and it's also super relaxing.*

11.2 Do you feel that remote work affects your stress levels differently compared to when you're in the office?
Interview Partner U: *No, no. Of course, what I described before that you get more disturbed. So I sometimes also reschedule my tasks so that I do important non strategical things, sometimes not in the office because I feel more productive than in the Home Office.*

12.1 Do you anticipate that your current level of stress or job satisfaction will change in the next 5 or 10 years? Why or why not?
Interview Partner U: *Yes, I would say, I don't know why but when I look back how stress I was at the beginning of my career and now I think it's turning. Because when you work on yourself, then you get less stressed because other things getting more important. And of course for myself, work is also important. But yeah now focusing on growing my family or something, then you get at some point or about your health when you have your health issues, then you're at some point. Yeah. Okay. My work is important but I'm not saving lives in the end. That's what I say, sometimes to team members, "Okay, we can do that tomorrow because you're not saving a life with that request today." So, Yeah, so I would say it's getting less depending on how they could economics, develop of course, but yeah.*

12.2 Do you feel like working at a startup? I mean, we're always looking for the next funding round. Do you think that could kind of come into play when anticipating your stress levels or job satisfaction in the next two years?

Interview Partner U: *In job satisfaction definitely. So stress I would say that's also something personal and you need always work on, of course, if the company makes pressure and something then and that's not. But you can also work on your personal development, a lot in regards to stress.*

Part 4: Job and Career Reflection

13. In your view, what changes could be made to your role or company practices that would benefit professionals, especially in managing stress and avoiding burnout?
Interview Partner U: *I would say the things that you also ask before, so maybe some stress technique workshop or sometimes prioritizing tasks. That's something I would say that I think leaders can give or teach their team members, but also that everyone gets the kind of and when they're starting at the company or in between a kind of health day or a health workshop, just to manage their stress a little bit.*

14. Would you recommend your role or working in your industry to others, based on your experience in a remote work environment? Why or why not?
Interview Partner U: *For this company, yes, for the other one, no.*

Part 5: Individual Questions:
15. If you don't mind me asking one extra question because you did tell me also about the other company. So what are some aspects that kind of contributed to at least less mental well-being, or maybe even close to burning out? Was it you mentioned points of the lines being blurred between work and home, the company or supervisors Not supporting or respecting those boundaries? Were there any other aspects that came into play?
Interview Partner U: *Yeah, so the bosses were kind of narcissist. They put a lot of pressure on you and also were not handling feedback. So I get feedback to my boss and I know that it did not end up at the higher level of this company. And for example, my sister also worked for this company and for example, they didn't talk to her anymore when she gave once feedback or something for four weeks. So I think it also was hard because all of us were working remotely, there was a kind of office but also our bosses were not there frequently. And so we're kind of like a Co-working Spaces. Yeah, so I think those points ended up that this company was also not managed very good.*

Appendix 21: Transcript Interview Partner V

Part 1: Professional Background and Remote Work Environment

1. Can you describe your academic background and how you arrived at your current role?

Interview Partner V: *So I did a bachelor's degree and business administration and within that I had to do some mandatory internships. So I did an internship at Company XYZ where I'm currently working and after the internship I got offered the role of a working student remotely and I stayed there for a year. Then I stopped working for Company XYZ because I wanted to do a gap year in between Bachelors and Masters, so that the gap year with different internships. And then I started my master's degree last year. And with that, I started to work at Company XYZ again in the same team and remotely.*

2. How would you describe your work environment (remote, hybrid, or in-office)? If both, how many days per week do you work in the office versus remotely? Which do you prefer, and why? Do you have the flexibility to choose when you work from home versus in the office, or is it determined by your employer?

Interview Partner V: *It depends for my current situation as a student. I prefer fully remote because I wouldn't have the time to go to the office, first of all, because of the location, but in general, even if the company would be in Lisbon, I would prefer to work remotely. But speaking of my experience and internships, I generally prefer to work in the office because I like the location change and I like to meet the colleagues. But I also noticed that it depends on my living situation because usually as a student, my living situations usually one room or something and I have no office at home and I think if that will be the situation, it would also be different. And I just cannot stand being in the same room the whole day. but I think preferably I like the most flexibility. So I like having the option of coming to the office and I will do that often, but I also like to have the option to work from home. In my case, it's a generally flexible. If I would be Munich, I could go to the office but since I'm not a Munich, it's kind of determined by the location.*

3. What aspects of your job do you find the most fulfilling? What aspects do you find the least fulfilling? Characterize your work environment (for example do you work mostly alone or in a team)

Interview Partner V: *I don't know whether that's for me its fulfilling but I like the team. That's pretty much the thing I like the most about the company. My colleagues, especially the working students. So, I like to chat with them and I feel very comfortable around them. And I think, by now, since I'm part of the company for that long, because I'm in that situation. So I don't seek for any challenges and I find it fulfilling that I'm quite comfortable at what I'm doing. I know the company, the product and all my tasks and there are not so many questions and that's relaxing I would say but if I would work full-time, that would be a different thing. And the least fulfilling I find it really boring to be honest. It's not my area. It was my area of interest, it changed over the time. It's not so much my area of interest anymore and specifically the tasks we are doing. It's very repeating and for my position, it's okay. But generally it's very boring. So it's not fulfilling my need. Many of, I don't know, learning curve and stuff like that. And in terms of tasks is pretty much only alone because, the type of tasks. But of course, sometimes we*

talk about the topics and among the team within the colleagues. But in general, it's no real teamwork.

4. How would you assess your work-life balance in a remote working environment?
Interview Partner V: *Not so good. I would say first of all because in general I have too much workload due to working and studies. And then because it's fully remote I think oftentimes it gets mixed up. So sometimes I actually use my working hours to relax I'm watching YouTube videos. Because I'm tired from studying and then I try to do both at the same time working and relaxing and that's not ideal of course. Or I try to work fast and then save some time to do some household chores, or something. So,* yeah, t*hat doesn't really help because I would prefer to have to have a clear distinction between work and free time. And that is often not the case.*

Part 2: Stress, Burnout, and Coping Mechanisms

5. Do you feel professionally fulfilled? Are you satisfied with your current working conditions, the team you are working with, your supervisors?
Interview Partner V: *Yeah, it depends in generally, no definitely not, but since it's my position, it's fine because I don't have the brain capacity for anything more complicated. But in terms of just looking at the professional part, no, absolutely not. Yes, I think in terms of that, I have nothing to complain.*

6. Have you ever experienced feelings of exhaustion, detachment from your work, or a decline in your professional efficacy?
Interview Partner V: *Yes, I would say so, I mean, generally, I'm motivated in terms of my work because mainly I'm scared that they will suspend in my contract, and I need to work. I try to perform well in order for them to keep or to follow in order for them to have the need to keep me. But it really varies sometimes, especially when I'm stressed for uni or something, work is not my priority and I have less motivation. I'm like, it's not that necessary to do more tickets today. I could do more, I could work faster, but I'm like, really why should I, it's just a job. I'm at home. No one can control it that. So yeah, sometimes not all the time, but sometimes I have those feelings.*

7. How often do you feel stressed in your work, and what are the main sources of stress?
Interview Partner V: *Before the works again, it's the complicated situation of working student and being a student because, as sometimes I'm stressed, but it's not because of work, it's because of the general stress. But specifically looking at my work and my tasks at Company XYZ. I would say most of the times I'm not stressed because the workload is quite manageable but there are times phases where I think the whole team has a lot to do because that many requests. So for example, this week is very chill but there are other weeks where there's quite a lot to do and we have maybe less colleagues in the team because someone is not available and then I have phases where I feel stressed before, because I feel like I have so many tasks assigned. I don't know how to finish it, especially within the limited of time because I'm not there the whole*

day I'm only there, four hours or something, so I'm like, I don't know. I have so many urgent things. I don't know where to start with the end, and it's not manageable and then I'm a bit stressed or If I know for example, that I haven't answered for a long time to something and that could be a problem, or I'm scared that I'm doing something wrong. And then, I'm also a bit stressed or maybe not stress, it's more being anxious about doing something wrong.

8. Do you feel there are sufficient resources provided by your organization to support your work (e.g., technology, emotional support, training)?
Interview Partner V: *I think they do provide quite a lot, as a CS you cannot really use everything. For example, they have a development budget which would be nice in order in order to improve I don't know to learn more learning curve, etc. But in my position I don't have that or they have a Well pass in Munich where you can book certain things also for me is because I'm not Munich and my position it's not a notifiable where can I make use of it? And so, yeah, I don't but I cannot blame the employer because I think that is a difficult thing to change. In terms of technology, it got better for the first half. I had a different laptop and that was quite annoying because it was not so pleasant to work with and that changed So, now I'm happy with that and I kind of complain about the technology, but that was a thing that annoyed me.*

9. When you are stressed, what coping mechanisms do you use to manage stress and maintain your well-being?
Interview Partner V: *I try to organize my day and to have some kind of rhythm within the day, which is hard for me. I'm not that good at that but I try to go to bed the same time and wake up at the same time or something like that. I try to prioritize for example, going to the gym, And also even things like cleaning or something, because I feel better when my apartment is very clean. And in the past sometimes I prioritized my work or my studies over that. And now, since a while I kind of changed that I prioritize cleaning or going to the gym before doing anything else. And I feel like that sometimes helping sometimes not, but yeah, that's pretty much. The only thing I do I think there could be a lot improvement.*

Part 3: Organizational Support and Future Outlook

10. Do you feel your organization is aware of and responsive to the stress and potential burnout faced by employees? If yes, what measures are in place to support employees? (e.g., flexible schedules, mental health days, communication protocols.)
Interview Partner V: *I think that's also the difference between working part time and full-time. I don't know how it would be as a full-time employer. I think I would say that they're more aware as for part time. I sometimes, feel they are not that aware of what else we have to do. I sometimes feel like they don't have That much in mind, that it's only a part-time thing and we have actually a full-time thing going on next to it. sometimes that's forgotten about sometimes, I think, but in general, as an organization since they offer discounts for gym and Team events, etc. I feel like they are in general considering it and aware of it.*

11. How do you think the remote work environment affects your overall stress levels compared to working in an office?

Interview Partner V: *It depends on the day. As I said, I would prefer an hybrid model where I have the choice and I would probably go more to the office and that could reduce my stress because I have this location change and that helps me on the other side, there are certain days where you have a doctor's appointment or something and then it would be super stressful to go to the office. And then it's would actually reduce the stress to just be able to be at home jump into the next call directly after because I'm at home. Yes, so it really depends on the day and on the situation, it can increase the stress. But the stress really depends on the situation.*

12. Do you anticipate that your current level of stress or job satisfaction will change in the next 5 or 10 years? Why or why not?

Interview Partner V: *In the next five or ten years, I would say Probably yes, because I will change the job. And so depending on that job it will be much higher. Hopefully not especially having a first time full-time job that's probably for a while will be more stress and more pressure but on the other side since I don't have this double work anymore with uni and part time job. I think and I will be also more experienced and maybe also, I approve my time organization and everything, so hopefully within the five next five or ten years, it will be reduced a little or I will be able to manage it better. On the other side then maybe I don't know family obligations will increase or something like that so it's really hard to predict I would say.*

Part 4: Job and Career Reflection

13. In your view, what changes could be made to your role or company practices that would benefit professionals, especially in managing stress and avoiding burnout?

Interview Partner V: *In general, I don't know whether that up directly applies to our team, or is it more general? Or is it very Because in general I feel like oftentimes the problem for stress and burnout and stuff like that is too much workload or too much time pressure. So I feel like in many teams or in many areas and organizations, it's just a matter of having more people in the team for the work or having managing the tasks better among the people so everyone has equal amount of work and stuff like that and can support each other better because I think that's the main problem. It's just too much work for one individual person, oftentimes. Or to strict notice deadlines. I think that's The point started because, of course, as an organization, you can provide some nice benefits for having us or something, but if you have too much work, that's not going to help. It's just the drop on top. And so, yeah, starting at the amount of work I think is the most important.*

14.1 Would you recommend your role or working in your industry to others, based on your experience in a remote work environment? Why or why not?

Interview Partner V: *Yes, especially my part time job. I did in the past that I would recommend it to others because since it's remote and since it's a very flexible and for me, at least, that's the most important criteria for part time job and that fulfills it. And so I would recommend that to other students who are looking for part time jobs and have the same situation as me so no time to go somewhere and they need the flexibility. they cannot work to full days in the office per*

week or something. I would recommend it because for that specific situation, it's a good job.

14.2 Do you feel like working at a startup has some kind of impact on your remote work environment? And on your stress management and burnout potential.

Interview Partner V: *I think generally it could because of her, I've heard from many startups where the workload is like crazy people work over hours so much but for Company XYZ and specific it within our team s. It is not as bad. it doesn't feel so start up anymore. It was different in the beginning though, in my first time Company XYZ. For example, during my internship where I worked full-time over hours were also normal which is not anymore, so that changed. So it's not that much the startup you think of anymore but it could definitely. And I think also oftentimes in startups, there's a lot of pressure and a lot of uncertainty also, what also increases stress? So that's for example, what I have still since there were some layoffs last year, that were at Company XYZ. And since then, I feel even more insecure about my job and that adds, of course also stress because yeah, I'm kind of stressed to perform better and also scared of losing the job, which adds stress. and It can happen on bigger companies as well, but probably the startup is a bit more risky and types of that. So yeah, that's stress.*

Appendix 22: Transcript Interview Partner W

Part 1: Professional Background and Remote Work Environment

1. Can you describe your academic background and how you arrived at your current role?

Interview Partner W: *I don't have any academic background. I just did middle school (Real Schule in Germany, and after that, I started an apprenticeship in the hotel industry. Which I broke up because I thought I will become a professional sportsman. So in a hotel, you work on a weekend. So this was not my final profession and by accident I arrived in a small startup in Ulm which was in the tech SaaS industry for logistics and started my second apprenticeship there which I also finished, which is called Kaufman für Bürokommunikation. Then, I was really just doing an easy job at it, was called Maybe Nowaday Customer service. So, this is how it started. And then after three years, when I finished my apprenticeship, I got this to switch into the project management department. So, I was a project manager or after sales manager, how it was called there. As the company was growing quite rapidly,I got the chance I think one or two years later to take over a team lead and build up the whole project management department. And then after complaining too much about the sales, guys always selling some stuff we could not deliver, the founders took the decision that I should do sales to prove how to do it better. So this is finally how I ended up in sales and from then starting for the DACH market so, Germany, Austria Switzerland, then being responsible for it was called Century Europe. Then finally, I ended up in the global sales team and at the very end of my sales career, I was leading a global system of 80 people in the company. Until I did a kind of management position to buy a new company like a merchant acquisition, then we did a joint venture, so it was really launching a new product. So it was called, partner manager. And then after that, I left my company after it was 12 years or something, I have been there and then I joined a new company again log tech sales as a managing director to build up the European market. At a different company. I did this for approximately three years. So building up a team from 18 to more than 100 people in several countries in Europe and leaving after three years. And then I incorporated my own company which is focusing on advisory and interims management for startups and scale-ups. And this is also how I ended up at Company XYZ because a couple of years ago, I met X, our founder at Company XYZ on an event. I had regular contact with him and as he saw that I'm focusing now in my new role to support founders and startups, he asked me, if I don't want to join Company XYZ as an interim head of sales. And this is what I'm doing at the moment.*

2.1 How would you describe your work environment (remote, hybrid, or in-office)? If both, how many days per week do you work in the office versus remotely? Which do you prefer, and why? Do you have the flexibility to choose when you work from home versus in the office, or is it determined by your employer?

Interview Partner W: *I would call it hybrid because on the one hand, I have a home office, which is really a separate room in where I'm living. Then I have a rented desk in a shared office directly in Ulm City Center which is the working space where investors and startups are also based for networking and not just being alone. Then one to two days a week I'm in Munich here in the Company XYZ office. And for the rest of the week, depending on projects or whatever,*

I'm traveling in mainly Central Europe, for projects, events, meeting people. So very hybrid I would say

2.2 Which do your prefer or is this current model what you prefer?
Interview Partner W: *It's the current model because I think always being every day in the same office with being mandatory office stays it would take me the flexibility. So I appreciate the flexibility and really decide what makes sense. I also appreciate, I have two kids, we have a dog at home, so I also appreciate the possibility just to work at home, the one or the other day as well as being in a shared office to widen my network exchange experience with investors and startups as well. And without traveling it would not be possible so for me to Munich, it's a two-hours train ride so it's not really a travel in my opinion. So I really need to have the travels to the big cities across Europe. Also an international environment, so really to enjoy what I'm doing. I would say*

2.3 Do you have the flexibility to choose when you work from home versus the office, or is this determined by your employer?
Interview Partner W: *No I am flexible. The only dependency I have this when I'm booked for a meeting, of course on site where I have to commit on a date, then for sure. But for the regular work, I would say I'm 100% flexible.*

3.1 What aspects of your job do you find the most fulfilling? What aspects do you find the least fulfilling? Characterize your work environment (for example do you work mostly alone or in a team)
Interview Partner W: *Most fulfilling for me, is An international environment. So Ulm is in the region of Swabian. I could not imagine working for a Swabian company only talking in Germany, only with German people and just having a very small horizon. So this is what makes fun most like to really have global supply chains with international people in international language with different cultures and working with these people, is really the most fulfilling experience for me. The less fulfilling that's very hard to say because if it doesn't fulfill me meanwhile as I'm self-employed, I'm just not doing it. So, there is nothing I really do not appreciate, or I hate. Maybe I don't like it to work with people and sometimes it's happening which are not open for change. Let me call it like this. And there are always people who doesn't want to change or move forward or whatever. So this is what I sometimes, do not really appreciate if the people in my environment who doesn't want to change and then usually, I also skip these kind of projects or relationships or however, I call it.*

3.2 For my thesis I'm focusing also more of a startup aspect in my partner's focusing on corporate. But you just mentioned is that when people are not open to change, do you feel like that is a different experience that you have with startups, that people are more open to innovate and change and be flexible? Or would you say that's not related?
Interview Partner W: *Maybe there is a light or slight tendency to startups that they might be more open for change. I would say this difference is a disruptive way of working. I have the*

feeling that startups are much more disruptive, in the how they think the mindset then compared to corporate companies, I would say. But of course also the willingness to change might be a bit more open and startups, but it's not like a black and white difference I would say

3.3 Can you characterize your work environment? Do you work alone of in a team?
Interview Partner W: *Mainly in a team*

3.4 How big is your team?
Interview Partner W: *It differs, but I would say when I do advisory projects it's just like the founder team. So usually a team of two to three people, I work with and when I work more in the coaching and in terms phase here, I do for Company XYZ as well. I would say the team is between five to 15 people. I usually work with*

4. How would you assess your work-life balance in a remote working environment?
Interview Partner W*: I would say It's like this hybrid model for me, is the perfect balance because I don't like the term work life balance because it would mean that work is not part of my life. So for me, it's important to have a life life balance if you will. So, and I love to work sometimes during the holidays because I can't turn my brain off and flexibility of the hybrid model, gives me the flexibility to perfectly match the business I'm doing with private activities I'm doing. When I need a massage, I could do it every time at 3PM because I'm flexible and I can decide if I want to pick up my child from the kindergarten I can do so when I want and sometimes I prefer more to work in a Munich office or in a Berlin office with other people. So I would say, this hybrid model enables a certain flexibility, what I really appreciate, because I do not like my private life more than the business life and the other way around, it's the perfect balance between both which makes it special for me.*

Part 2: Stress, Burnout, and Coping Mechanisms
5.1 Do you feel professionally fulfilled?
Interview Partner W: *Yeah*

5.2 Are you satisfied with your current working conditions, the team you are working with, your supervisors?
Interview Partner W: *Semi because of course, when I work in a setup, it Company XYZ, for example, there is a certain legacy, you have certain structures. I don't agree with all the structures we have at the moment, but what I appreciate in the environment I'm working with is that there is an open-minded manager I am reporting to. So at least I can report, I can share my opinion and we currently work on solutions and it's the willingness or the being open-minded to change. So therefore, it's okay but it's not a perfect environment. I'm working with the question is if a perfect environment is possible but I would say it's fulfilling it's inspiring and I love challenging environments because then you have still potential to improve.*

6. Have you ever experienced feelings of exhaustion, detachment from your work, or a decline in your professional efficacy?
Interview Partner W: *Yeah. I would say, yes. And it was mainly on the one hand due to a lot of*

*work. In general, I don't have an issue with a lot of work and I would also say that I'm very stressed resistant, but it turned out to me that every time when I don't see, a deeper meaning, or a real sense behind what I'm doing that, I'm getting frustrated. Maybe not depressive, but it goes into a direction of Why the f***? I'm doing this because it totally makes no sense. But I have to do it because somebody said, I have to do it. So this frustrating and then of course it's not satisfying at all. that's one thing. And the other thing is when you see that your work is not changing anything because at the end, this is like the engine for me. This is my motivation that I have the ability to change and to move things forward. And when I see that, I'm working a lot, but there is no progress and there are no results for me. This is as very exhausting that sometimes you are asking yourself, Is there a difference? If I just do nothing or if I work my ass off and of course, that's frustrating especially when you work, I don't know. I had weeks with 80-90 hours a week, traveling around the world and working my ass off. And at the end, there was thank you for your efforts, but we are not going to do it all this exhausting after a couple of weeks.*

7. How often do you feel stressed in your work, and what are the main sources of stress?
Interview Partner W: *Meanwhile, it's quite good. Of course, I'm regularly stressed, especially when I feel I'm all of control or I'm in control of other hands. By example, if I realize them, I missed the point in time, to, for example, manage my calendar so others are just taking slots booking meetings into my calendar. And it's totally like destroying the way how I wanted to work today or this week or whatever. So then it makes me really stressed because I know that I can't manage or I have to deal with it and cancel the meetings. And then I have to justify myself and blah blah. So this is a bit stressful for me and to cope with that. And the second thing where I'm sometimes stressed is, And I'm always working in an environment where we have direct contact with clients or with customers, or with prospects. When they are playing very heavily on the role, "Hey, you are the supplier, we are the customer, you have to do what we say", and then this is sometimes it's getting better. So I also have since seven years, I have a coach on my side, I regularly work with and also improve to be more stress resistant and just to see things like that on a more rational level, I think that's very important, but still sometimes it triggers me of course, when there's a customer and saying, "Hey, this is your issue. You don't make your issues to our problem" and I more appreciate work on the same eye level and in a respectful way with each other and that stress me out sometimes. Yeah.*

8. Do you feel there are sufficient resources provided by your organization to support your work (e.g., technology, emotional support, training)?
Interview Partner W: *And yes and no. Yes. If you also request, ask, or actively push for it? And no if you don't ask for it. I think and that's very important. It's like in Germany we say "Bring und wohlschuld". You cannot enter an environment and expect that everything will be delivered to you. It's also your responsibility to think about it to check to let me say proactive suggestions to ask and request and push for changes. What you need in your environment or in your ecosystem to be more successful or whatever. But since now I had the experience that if I really come with a valid request, which is well thought, then there is a support in the organization*

also to help me out here. Yeah.

9. When you are stressed, what coping mechanisms do you use to manage stress and maintain your well-being?

Interview Partner W: *I would say there are two or three main difference approaches, the one approaches to hear extremely loud music and to work out. The second thing is fresh air have a walk or run with the dog. The issue is that I'm stressed off that I'm losing the relation and I'm running only one direction and then I realize that I have to return as well. But's the second option. The third option is and that's a very bad one where I'm working at is just to be alone in a very silent environment where I don't want to have any disturbance and I just want to be for myself. And the best case I have a good book. I can read in worst case there is a bottle of wine left. So this really depends and this is something I still have to work on.*

Part 3: Organizational Support and Future Outlook

10. Do you feel your organization is aware of and responsive to the stress and potential burnout faced by employees? If yes, what measures are in place to support employees? (e.g., flexible schedules, mental health days, communication protocols.)

Interview Partner W: *When I talk about Company XYZ, which is my main client, I would say, definitely yes, one of the most social employers I ever experienced. When I think about the startup and scale-up environment, I would say, not always because these are often inexperienced companies, founders. If you provide certain support in the environment that costs money, and money is always a difficult topic in very young companies. So I would say in the startup and scale up industry it's tough and it really depends. At Company XYZ, it's a clear yes.*

11. How do you think the remote work environment affects your overall stress levels compared to working in an office?

Interview Partner W: *I would say that working in home office might enable you to be more efficient. That would mean that you do the same amount of work in less hours than it would be a great contribution to your work life balance, if you want to call it like that. But I think the reality ends up more in the direction that if you only work in a home office and you don't have that exit possibilities to let the work done, just to have a couple of coffee for five minutes, with a colleague face to face. Then I see a big risk and I think that's the bigger part of the portion, a big risk that you work too much that you are more stressed, that you can't maybe turn off your brain as an employee because you always have the chance just to open the laptop and let's go. And therefore I think it needs to be very well balanced and you need a lot of self-discipline if you are working 100% remote in a home office.*

12. Do you anticipate that your current level of stress or job satisfaction will change in the next 5 or 10 years? Why or why not?

Interview Partner W: *Yeah, it's a tough question. Five to ten years and I hope that the environment will change. My personal plan is In the age of 40, that was always my plan, that I have a certain Financial setup that I can afford to work, maybe 10 to 20 hours on a self-*

employed base a week and just do one or two very great projects with companies, I love or whatever. So, I never want to be retired, I always want to work, but for me working, doesn't mean that I have to have a 40 50, 60 hour weekend or to be always stressed. You can be also stressed, if you only work 15 to 20 hours, if you really have to think things through, you have deadlines whatever and to certain amount of stress is very important for me. It's like a healthy stress. I would say because without the stress, sometimes it's hard to motivate yourself if you're only working in a remote environment. So I think sometimes it's good to have a certain amount of certain pressure to keep motivated if the stress is not getting too high. So I hope that in the future, I will still have very positive stress to stay motivated to get things done. But I hope I'm able to manage my life with a bit less working hours and only great projects. Sounds more like a dream than a plan, but this is my plan.

Part 4: Job and Career Reflection

13. In your view, what changes could be made to your role or company practices that would benefit professionals, especially in managing stress and avoiding burnout?

Interview Partner W: *And a kind of concept. I heard a couple of weeks before is leader tandems. And I think that could be an interesting approach. So instead of having a full-time manager, who is in reality, not working 40 hours, but more like 50, 60 hours It could be an idea to hire for example two part-time employees based on a I don't know, 25 to 30 hours a week. And that's one thing that could How should I say split jobs or tasks on more shoulders. That would also give the possibility because in every job description, there are tasks you are good at it, or where you have a talent in and things which are not. And if you choose a tandem in a wise way, that it can be combined on a certain level, but also that you have different directions. That certain tasks can be done by that person because they are better than that. And the other one better in some other stuff, I think that could be very smart and you're opening the job pool for more persons because then you give mothers a chance to reenter after they give birth, for example. Because at the moment this is still in my opinion, a very, very big gap. We have to bring mothers back into a job because very often the availability is limited to a part-time job and then they are automatically out for leader roles. I see it with my wife as well and I think be a big change. On the one hand, from a social perspective, but on the other hand also on an efficiency perspective because I believe that the outcome of two brains working 60 hours together would be more efficient than one brain working 60 hours on their own. I did put something in my previous company where I was managing director, not for leader role, but for the office manager role, I had two mothers and they were fully flexible and there was enough work for 40 hours a working time and they were both employed on 20 hours and they're both a responsible for office management and it perfectly worked fine. I believe it was much more efficient. Maybe it's a bit more expensive if you hire two people on for 20 hours, instead of having one person on 40 hours, but the higher grade of efficiency was definitely worth it. And it's also good, to be honest for the mood, if you have a higher or more diversity in the teams instead of only having males, in the sales department, for example, which is a very heavily dominated department by males and, so I believe we do the same by Company XYZ. So instead of one full time, SDR which is quite often a male. We have now, two, part-time girls, for example, which are doing the master thesis on the side and I think it's the right way to be more open-minded. I'm not sure if*

this is the one or the only way, but I think it could be one of the ways to be disruptive of it here.

14. Would you recommend your role or working in your industry to others, based on your experience in a remote work environment? Why or why not?

Interview Partner W: *It depends on what you like to do. If you want to have a very stable environment and having a typical nine to five job. And I think it's very important to have these kind of people. But then the environment or the job I'm doing, would not be the right on. Because every day, my job looks different. The challenges are always different. You have to travel a lot, which can be also very exhausting very long days, not sleeping in the own bed, but every night, a different hotel bed, and something like that, my wife hates business trips, for example, I love it. So, it really depends, I would say on the preferences, but if you are, let me say a normal employee and you love challenges and you are motivated. Even if you don't like to travel a lot, I would say the startup or scale up companies in the log tech, environments are a perfect environment to self-develop and to grow and to have a very good time.*

Appendix 23: Transcript Interview Partner X

Part 1: Professional Background and Remote Work Environment

1. Can you describe your academic background and how you arrived at your current role?

***Interview Partner X**: So, I'm currently doing a bachelor's in business administration. Before having this part time position, I had another part time position in marketing. And I did freelance work where I sold a consulting service for social Employer branding and launching advertising campaigns to get applications together. I was writing or I was setting up advertising campaigns to get applications for companies and those two were more on the marketing side for the freelance purposes, to get my Freelancing sold. I needed to do sell it. And so I started selling it and I realized Hey this is kind of harder than I expected. And so the next step for me, was to look at how professionals are selling their stuff. To learn how to sell.*

2. How would you describe your work environment (remote, hybrid, or in-office)? If both, how many days per week do you work in the office versus remotely? Which do you prefer, and why? Do you have the flexibility to choose when you work from home versus in the office, or is it determined by your employer?

***Interview Partner X**: I would say remote. To get to know the people there and for the first month, I wasn't the office quite often. At the moment, it's more of a remote position*
I would say working remotely. But I'd like that having the option to be able to go to the office to meet people.

3. What aspects of your job do you find the most fulfilling? What aspects do you find the least fulfilling? Characterize your work environment (for example do you work mostly alone or in a team)

***Interview Partner X**: For me it's working with a team. The people at Company XYZ and I like the people and the working culture. The thing that I dislike most is a commuting, I have quite a distance because the metros were not working correctly, I would have needed to commute two and a half hours per trip. So, five hours of my day would have been spent commuting and that's not very viable. So, that would have sucked and in general, the worst thing about me getting to the office is commuting because at the moment I still have to commute for about an hour to one and one half hours each way. So three hours of my day is just spent commuting. And it's a lot greater if it worked remotely and I can just spend the time on basically anything. I guess 20-30% of my time is spent working in a team.*

4. How would you assess your work-life balance in a remote working environment?

***Interview Partner X**: Working remotely has definitely improved my Work life balance compared to when I was regularly going to their office in Munich, I had the two to three hours less time each day. And this is just time that you can spend on regeneration and social activities and all that stuff. So it is greatly improved.*

Part 2: Stress, Burnout, and Coping Mechanisms

5. Do you feel professionally fulfilled? Are you satisfied with your current working conditions, the team you are working with, your supervisors?

***Interview Partner X**: I like that at the moment about 60% of my time is worked as focused on making the sales process and the lead generation process better. So at the moment, I'm not focused on sales as much as I'm focused on making the process better. So I like, working on the process, but I also like doing the regular outbound. So, I like what I'm doing but I'm looking forward to doing bigger tasks and having more responsibilities.*

6. Have you ever experienced feelings of exhaustion, detachment from your work, or a decline in your professional efficacy?

***Interview Partner X**: Not in this position. The company I worked for before had a different culture and the team lead I was assigned to she was to the daughter of the CEO and she had no prior experience managing people. And she wasn't very professional. She had no idea about the stuff, she was trying to manage. And as so expectation management with her, was really hard. The whole communications didn't work out as good as they could have been because she wasn't very proficient in the digital age. Because she wasn't very proficient and she had a deficit in her management skills, the environment was more stressful than it needed to be.*

7. How often do you feel stressed in your work, and what are the main sources of stress?

***Interview Partner X**: At the moment, I'm not too stressed because of many more working remotely before. Commuting was a big stress factor, I was on a workcation last week so I was working from Majorca And I didn't have Wi-Fi there, so I had to go to cafes and restaurants to be able to use the Wi-Fi. And it was kind of annoying, not having a good workplace and a desktop setup properly.*

8. Do you feel there are sufficient resources provided by your organization to support your work (e.g., technology, emotional support, training)?

***Interview Partner X**: Yes, I think we might even be doing too much in terms of meeting for culture building but I guess because we're doing love it, the cultures awesome.*

9. When you are stressed, what coping mechanisms do you use to manage stress and maintain your well-being?

***Interview Partner X**: I go to the gym and I talk to people.*

Part 3: Organizational Support and Future Outlook

10. Do you feel your organization is aware of and responsive to the stress and potential burnout faced by employees? If yes, what measures are in place to support employees? (e.g., flexible schedules, mental health days, communication protocols.)

***Interview Partner X**: I think the colleagues are looking out for each other. I don't know about the management. I have bi-weekly calls with my Head and it's great. We're talking about, all sorts of stuff. And I think that's a great thing. So he can keep checking in the mood and how*

people are and take us time to talk to people if they're not very well responsive or if they Behavior is kind of weird and I think company takes care of that or the management.

11. How do you think the remote work environment affects your overall stress levels compared to working in an office?
***Interview Partner X**: Definitely decreases the stress level. For me, the time spent commuting is very stressful because you're cramped into a closed space with lots of people, you don't know to meet very stressful. And you can spend time that is very stressful. And replaced with time that is actually regenerating and fun. (Taking commute out of the equation) I think the office can be more stressful, especially if you have to do deep work or focused work. because if I want to do debug or focus work at home, I just like no slack and disable messaging and then I can focus in the office then people come by and talk to you and that can be distracting.*

12.1 Do you anticipate that your current level of stress or job satisfaction will change in the next 5 or 10 years? Why or why not?
***Interview Partner X**: With increased responsibility it may rise. On the other hand, at the moment, I'm Juggling between the part time position, and the regular students thing. And I think that's also stress factor. So I think it I don't know, might change with having responsibility over people that might change things.*

12.2 Do you think working at a startup or potentially in the future working at a startup has in implication in this or do you think that it's not a factor?
***Interview Partner X:** I think startup culture at least for me it's less stressful compared to other working cultures.*

12.3 Why is that?
***Interview Partner X:** The people in the startup world, they're trying to grow on a personal level, the companies are young and people Do not have as much private burdens that they will take with them to work and they have private issues that will lower their mood. And when you're in contact with a lot of people that have bad mood all the time, it will Rise, your stress level. And I think because people encounters are younger they have a different outlook on life compared to other organizations.*

Part 4: Job and Career Reflection
13. In your view, what changes could be made to your role or company practices that would benefit professionals, especially in managing stress and avoiding burnout?
***Interview Partner X**: I think the company already does a lot of it, like having meetings that are just to build culture just personal meetings, having workcations having very clear communication about goals and deadlines and expectations. Open communication is big thing. Having regular chats and meetings to discuss between the employee and his supervisor. Also get together on Thursdays. I think the all hands meeting where you just share lunch and share stories and have fun.*

14.1 Would you recommend your role or working in your industry to others, based on your experience in a remote work environment? Why or why not?
***Interview Partner X**: Yes, For me, I have a great setup at home. I have standup desk that I can change the height. I have a big monitor. I have microphone. I have a What is called? Like something. That's a microphone. I have a very good chair. That's economical and they even have my whiteboard there. I have My homeworking setup is better than most office setups. Because I spend a lot of time here, so I like it to be nice. And so for me, I spent a lot of time in a great office environment where can customize it and individualize the setup and I can create a better setup than in the office.*

14.2 Is this all from Company XYZ or is this the investment you made into your home office?
***Interview Partner X**: That's my personal home office. The only thing that is from Company XYZ is the mouse and the laptop.*

14.3 Do you feel that working in a startup has any implications or impact when it comes to your remote work stress levels, burnout?

***Interview Partner X**: I think the startups are more likely to adapt, new technologies and new working models compared to very well established old school companies. Probably outweighs it, but I had to be honest I have never worked at a big corporation. So for me this is less responsibility than I used to have, so it's very relaxing.*

Appendix 24: Transcript Interview Partner Y

Part 1: Professional Background and Remote Work Environment

1. Can you describe your academic background and how you arrived at your current role?

Interview Partner Y: *I studied economics before, and I think it's called economical psychology in my bachelor. After I finished now, I'm studying and continuing with my master, I hope it's called this in English and that's why I started working at this role because it's hanging together with my master.*

2.1 How would you describe your work environment (remote, hybrid, or in-office)? If both, how many days per week do you work in the office versus remotely? Which do you prefer, and why? Do you have the flexibility to choose when you work from home versus in the office, or is it determined by your employer?

Interview Partner Y: *I would say its hybrid. it's both office and at home. I'm now mostly at the office four days, at least at the office in one day is at least their home office, but I think it's going to change a little when I'm here for longer.*

2.2 Okay, so this is more just and you. Getting into your role figuring everything out. Just in general, I don't know if you also already have experience maybe from a previous job that was also hybrid which do you prefer and why?

Interview Partner Y: *Before I worked, two years and it was not hybrid. I had to go every day to work, hybrid was not possible. And I have to admit that I definitely prefer the hybrid because, they're a lot of benefits into it. Also when you're sick or when you have to do something in between, it's way easier. And also, the way to go to work. Yeah, it's pasta when you just work from home. Yeah, and I definitely like that way more.*

2.3 Is this very determined by your employer?

Interview Partner Y: *Yeah. Yeah.*

3.1 What aspects of your job do you find the most fulfilling? What aspects do you find the least fulfilling?

Interview Partner Y: *Of course, I'm in sales. So what is really fulfilling is when the customers answer back or send me an email and want to book a meeting that's quite fulfilling I would like and yeah, of course. When you don't get any response at all yeah, I would say that's less fulfilling. That's the theme I'm struggling with right now when a customer does not answer. And yeah, I would say that's a less fulfilling. And also, what's really fulfilling at the office like the whole company vibe, it's really cool. Hang out with the people. I was like to come to the office, it's a pretty nice office. Yeah. I would say that's another really cool feeling. And the dog policy.*

3.2 Could you characterize your work environment? A little bit more, for example, do you work mostly alone or in a team?

Interview Partner Y: *I would say the main work I'm doing it by myself, but it's an open space environment. So I'm always sitting with my team and I mean we chat in between when I have*

questions, so I ask them directly and yeah, it's a pretty chill and really nice environment, I would say.

4. How would you assess your work-life balance in a remote working environment?
Interview Partner Y: *I would say its pretty beneficial and I also have It. Okay now I would say its not very good work life balance because I just started to be honest. But I think it's mostly because I have to get into the job but otherwise I think that it's definitely going to get better. Because of a hybrid that you're flexible and you can work at home and also in the office I can just organize my working hours by myself and that's also pretty nice for my work life balance. Like going in the morning to the gym and not afterwards so you're really motivated from the beginning, it should happen at some point.*

Part 2: Stress, Burnout, and Coping Mechanisms
5. Do you feel professionally fulfilled? Are you satisfied with your current working conditions, the team you are working with, your supervisors?
Interview Partner Y: *Yeah, in general. Yes. 90%.*

6. Have you ever experienced feelings of exhaustion, detachment from your work, or a decline in your professional efficacy?
Interview Partner Y: *Stress, of course also anxiety, especially also concerning previously but also now Yeah, of course.*

7. How often do you feel stressed in your work, and what are the main sources of stress?
Interview Partner Y: *In general, I would say not so often, but let's be honest, it's for sure once or twice a month. I would say it's mostly because of maybe a full day, having a lot of meetings or having deadlines that I have to accomplish and sometimes it's like, you have a lot of meetings. You can't have a lot to do and I think that's the most stresses me out.*

8. Do you feel there are sufficient resources provided by your organization to support your work (e.g., technology, emotional support, training)?
Interview Partner Y: *Yeah, 100%. I mean we have a tables and can be regulated, you can stand, you can sit and then this quite a really good because what it's also, pretty exhaust, since, sitting all that in front of her laptop. So it's good to stand in the office. Also, you have opportunities here to go to different gyms for less price which Company XYZ is supporting and in general they try to make an environment that is pretty involved in sports and everyone's motivating each other. So I think these are some of the aspects that I really motivating and helping.*

9. When you are stressed, what coping mechanisms do you use to manage stress and maintain your well-being?
Interview Partner Y: *What I like to do is, for example, to do list. I just write my text down and prioritize what is the most important that I have to do until when. So I have overview of everything. I also like to take a deep breath and have five minutes for me to just calm down and just say, "Okay, everything's gonna work out at the end" or I just work longer until it's finished.*

I'm just like, I commit and say, "Okay, I need to get this done, so I'm not getting stress." I just need I don't know two hours longer and then, that's right.

Part 3: Organizational Support and Future Outlook

10.1 Do you feel your organization is aware of and responsive to the stress and potential burnout faced by employees? If yes, what measures are in place to support employees? (e.g., flexible schedules, mental health days, communication protocols.)

Interview Partner Y: *Yeah, I would say. 100%*

10.2 What measures do you feel are in place to support the employees to avoid this?

Interview Partner Y: *I would say definitely that we are flexible with a time. We don't have like a specific timeline where you can work or where you have to work. And also working remotely, it's like a plus because if you have stuff to do at home and just stress out, you can just work from home and it's regulated. And also sport events and general events, that Company XYZ is doing to prevent this. I think they also had in the past some kind of training for the employees, so they can handle stress better or learning coping mechanisms. And yeah, I would say these are some of the measures that really help dealing with stress.*

11. How do you think the remote work environment affects your overall stress levels compared to working in an office?

Interview Partner Y: *I think the stress level gets lower. As I said before because you can plan your day and easier, you are more flexible like if there is something going on at home, you can just work remotely. Or if you're on the way and have a meeting or going somewhere, you can just work on the train for example. That also happens to me once, I forgot to send an email or something and I just could do it from home. So, I didn't get stressed at all, because I had this opportunity. Way more, relaxed.*

12.1 Do you anticipate that your current level of stress or job satisfaction will change in the next 5 or 10 years? Why or why not?

Interview Partner Y: *I guess it will change probably. Yeah, I would say that it could get more as I want to get to higher position. I want to have more responsibilities in the future, so I think that's automatically common with more stress, but I think that I will handle it and also Company XYZ helps to handle that. So I don't think that's going to change drastically. I would say.*

12.2 Do you feel that working at a startup that has some kind of effect to this. So again anticipating your current level of stress or satisfaction in the next few years.

Interview Partner Y: *Yeah, definitely. I think that they take more responsibility for their employees and they look at helping to get the stress handled. So yeah. Also for comparison to the place maybe I worked before because it was pretty old, they didn't take responsibility at all. They don't have new technology for example and the stress level was way higher and was not a startup.*

Part 4: Job and Career Reflection

13. In your view, what changes could be made to your role or company practices that would

benefit professionals, especially in managing stress and avoiding burnout?
Interview Partner Y: *I think that some kind of trainings would definitely help. As I said, I don't know if they really have that but hearing from a professional what you can actually do, that really helps. I think something like that would be great. Otherwise the option to work from home, I mean it's already given but I think that's always a good way to prevent stress. And in general, here, it's like you have the opportunity to also take a break in between, we have a breaking rule. I think this flexibility and for here for the future, maybe some kind of trainings would be cool.*

14.1 Would you recommend your role or working in your industry to others, based on your experience in a remote work environment? Why or why not?
Interview Partner Y: *Yes, 100%. I think it's very beneficial and it's a pretty cool from the environment from the art of working and I would recommend it. I think most of them would also like that.*

14.2 And just out of curiosity, you mentioned this previous role that you had. Is there some things that company did that kind of didn't try and avoid the stress and burnout from employees that maybe, for example, your current company does differently? So you mentioned that for example they had really old technology maybe even also company culture. Are there some aspects that kind of really stood out to you, where you feel like they really didn't support in stress levels and burnout that maybe is done differently?
Interview Partner Y: *Yeah, I mean for example, they didn't have separated roles. I was a working student, but I actually worked as if I was full-time there. So I had almost the same responsibility as one of the 40 hours employed colleagues. And I mean, that was really stressful because I had to do the same work, but in 20 hours, and I mean, here they have it. You have specific roles, everyone has specific roles and it's actually working. And there they didn't have it. And what was also a bit stressful was that there the time was fixed. You had a chip where you entered and when you gone you had to hold the chip up and clock out and for me it was like okay I shouldn't make more than 20 hours. I had to have these 20 hours. And here It's more like, "Okay, you can, handle your time as you want. If you need more okay, it's your fault let's say or if you make the same work but in less hours , then that's beneficial for you. And I think that's also something that prevents stress because I am less anxious. I have to do this task, but I can't go over the 20 hours. It's like, okay, if I need one hour more, it's no big deal. Because next week, I can work one hour, less.*

Appendix 25: Transcript Interview Partner Z

Part 1: Professional Background and Remote Work Environment

1.1 Can you describe your academic background and how you arrived at your current role?

Interview Partner Z: *I have a masters in psychology with a specialization in psychotherapy and a post-graduate degree in user experience, research and design. The way I arrived was actually not a straight path. During my studies, I was still believing, I would pursue a career in psychotherapy. I briefly worked in that area as a working student, intern at a mental health hospital. At that time it was also during my studies, since I was good in photography and filmmaking, I got a side job in the advertising industry. I did that for two years, so I worked as a photographer during my studies for mainly head & shoulders and Pantene products. And then I started thinking after I completed my studies "How can I use my psychology skills better?" and "Where can I fit in my interest in technology". That's where I identified this somewhat new area of the user experience, design and research. I applied for a couple of jobs but got to declined since I didn't have any experience with it straight out of university. So I decided to do a postgraduate degree in specifically that and that also gave me the contacts in the industry. Then that was in Poland, I started working for Company ZYX as a Junior UX designer. I did that for half a year because then I moved to Munich where I started working in a design agency. So I started working, full time and this was Pre-covid, so everything was hundred percent in office. And as in consultancy, you tend to work many hours evenings and so on and was working for a lot of big corporations such as company as well as some medical companies such as company and some Med tech companies, and I did that for two agencies. I did that for seven, eight years and then two years ago, exactly, I joined Company XYZ.*

1.2 Okay, exciting, very nice. So is Company XYZ your first startup?

Interview Partner Z: *That I'm a in-house employee, yes. I was basically put into startups, where I worked for, let's say a year before. But that was, as a consultant.*

2.1 How would you describe your work environment (remote, hybrid, or in-office)? If both, how many days per week do you work in the office versus remotely? Which do you prefer, and why?

Interview Partner Z: *Currently it's I would say more remote even though I'm 10 minutes away from the office. Because first of all, I love the flexibility. My wife works in the office, my kids are in the kindergarten so I have, my castle for myself. And since I am a team of one and actually, most of the people that I would work with, except for the head of product are remote. So I have my setup here, and I like to also combine it with for instance, after dropping off the kids* at the kindergarten, I go for a workout or a lunch run. So I actually very much like this, the more remote setup.

2.2 Very nice. Were you able to choose this flexibility? Or was this determined by your employer?

Interview Partner Z: *So I think it was important for me and I did actually ask for it it and it was never a problem. I asked if it would be okay because we do go to Portugal in all of August and I was working from Portugal. And in the future, I would also potentially want to even stay*

longer in Portugal. So it was important for me that it's would be possible to have this hybrid set up.

3. What aspects of your job do you find the most fulfilling? What aspects do you find the least fulfilling? Characterize your work environment (for example do you work mostly alone or in a team)

Interview Partner Z: *So, I very much like this interviewing process. I like somewhat the preparations of it. In terms of structuring, okay, "what do we really want to understand?" And how to get there. Part of my job is also to bring the product team into a more user-centered framework. So, I work with the product owners on, and I build up workshops, where I help them with the ideation process and so on. So I think that's the most enjoyable. It's much about connecting with people, even though it's not physical. But also making order from the mess. So, I think I'm good at if you have lots of noise and I'm pretty good together with the methods, I use to identify the signals there. The things I don't like but I guess that's a standard answer. There's this admin work of setting up interviews, of things to being too vague in terms of finding out. II'm good with things being vague but sometimes when there's too much fog and there's not a clear direction. Then I have the feeling that time is more wasted. And that's, of course, I want to have the time when I feel that my time creates an impact. I've had for instance, an example, one of tasks that I did last year with the hopes of building up a little research panel by cold contacting, the e-commerce businesses on LinkedIn. And that was a very tedious process, that didn't become very fruitful so, but that's, I guess obvious. If you spend a lot of manual work with little affects and value.*

4. How would you assess your work-life balance in a remote working environment?

Interview Partner Z: *Very good. And I think that has been also one fantastic part of being part of Company XYZ that I can do good work and at the same time have created a balance, that makes me happy. With having, in a way multiple jobs because, I am a father as well, which is also not only time consuming but it takes a lot of energy even though it's very rewarding. So I usually try to finish up my work before 5:00. Of course, if I have to extend I find some room where I have privacy but in usual circumstance, when my kids come I can still kind of your work and do these "easier" tasks such as admin tasks that I'm not necessarily bothered by having back background noise. So that's very rewarding because in consulting you would finish up work at 7:00 then commute back home. It's also a different. I joked with my old ex colleagues that we worked together were like an extension of university because It was occasionally tough, lots of fun and playing around as well. And now, I'm more, let's say focused, maybe that's also why I am okay with working from home because there's no distractions for me. Of course, it's nice to talk to, colleagues in the office but I do see that certainly two hours are taken away on the chit chat, which is nice, but in the phase of life that I'm currently in, that energy, I want to dedicate on things which are higher on my value list.*

Part 2: Stress, Burnout, and Coping Mechanisms

5.1 Do you feel professionally fulfilled? Are you satisfied with your current working conditions, the team you are working with, your supervisors?

Interview Partner Z: *Yes. Yes. I've already had my career crisis.*

5.2 Okay, but it's nice to know that you are in a better position now. You've already mentioned this but just again so you are satisfied with your current working conditions and you're sure you're I mean teammates, I believe you've mentioned that you work by yours by yourself but your other colleagues and everything your team. Are you satisfied with your current working condition?

Interview Partner Z: *Yes, I think if you've had the experience of working in different places, you're sometimes not aware of how lucky, you are when things are actually, as for me, for instance, currently good.*

6. Have you ever experienced feelings of exhaustion, detachment from your work, or a decline in your professional efficacy?

Interview Partner Z: *Absolutely. Exhaustion, but it was usually before, so when I was more of a consultant where I'm going on a one and a half month trip, with my colleague across the US, doing user research, and innovation work where we finished days at 10:00, start them early. And do it to the point where you almost feel like having a nap in your meeting room. When you have to, take flights at six am and then come back the same day. Yeah, and there's no kind of, possibility to rest, in between. I have had situations where I went into the toilet to have a micronap basically. But that's why I'm saying, people are also not for instance, at Company XYZ, they're sometime not aware how it can be. And that's I'm saying it was a good school, that's how it is a little bit and university as well where you kind of push your limits. And a burnout, I do lots of introspection. So I'm pretty good identifying when things are, let's say if I'm on the process of being a bit lost, to detect that.*

7.1 How often do you feel stressed in your work, and what are the main sources of stress?

Interview Partner Z: *It's more of like an internal character issue, that I have. Occasionally I have the feeling that maybe I'm not good enough, maybe I'm gonna get fired. But if I look at, all the signs, there's nothing to signify it. But on one hand, it's good to be self-critical to push yourself forward and I know that. I have this issue and it's also led me to be better and I constantly be better. But I have each week I'm thinking or maybe I'm gonna get fired even though there's no indications to it and everyone is happy. But it's this especially if we think you said that you're focusing on startups. It's also something where we had that big firing last year. So it could be that you're doing good job, but with reduced fund funds, we have to make sacrifices. So, maybe that's a thing and yeah, in my head but I know that…Yeah it's I think it's a combination of imposter syndrome with also some sort of, because it's difficult to assess "Okay, how good am I?" Because I constantly want to push myself forward. So it's finding that level.*

7.2 And do you think that the startup environment because it Company XYZ is such a new company. I mean, we just celebrated five years and also just not being able to measure that in that sense, you think it comes in with the startup or is that irrelevant?

Interview Partner Z: *if I think maybe age, less, but more profitability. Yeah, because things are*

good after a series investment. But then the closer you are to running out of money, that's when everyone is more stressed and also making potentially irrational decisions. So I guess that's more connected to money. And if we look at today, the economics especially the tech scene which it's more difficult to raise capital in 2024 than it was in 2015.

8. Do you feel there are sufficient resources provided by your organization to support your work (e.g., technology, emotional support, training)?
Omitted

9. When you are stressed, what coping mechanisms do you use to manage stress and maintain your well-being?
Interview Partner Z: *I think there are certain tools that I use for meditation; I've been a daily meditator for the past 15 years. I journal. Not every day, but I do like more or less regularly. That helps me see the bigger picture, to zoom out and see myself not in the problem, but from above. Exercises is a fantastic one. If I have a cross fit workout at 8:00 AM, I feel like I'm dying because of physical exhaustion, that's already a win for the day. Then a little nap and that's another thing, I love having a nap after lunch. And that's also something that I would feel very awkward to have in the office. So here I basically go to the couch here and have it like a 15-minute nap and I'm like a new person.*
Interviewer: *Yeah, that's a very big benefit from remote work.*
Interview Partner Z: *Yeah, but Google has the sleeping pods and so on but yeah, there would say still there's somewhat of a barrier there. Then I think it to conclude this. I also see in order to have a healthy life, you have to see your life a little bit you have multiple pillars, that keep you intact and so you can't put everything into work because then when work fails, a big part of your identity is questioned. So, I really try to ensure that I distribute my identity in both relationships, being a good husband, being a good father, being good friend, reaching out to friends. I like photography and filmmaking. So I do have that hobby. I'm still working starting to write a blog but I never find the time for it. But to distribute basically my identity in multiple ways because then if someone like I've had, in previous works, situations, where people were insulting me. So, if too much would be focused on that world, that could destroy me. But if it's not, then I see, okay, he's having a bad day or he has some internal pressure from other stakeholders. Yeah, but that's also something you have to constantly kind of balance that and sometimes it's, 50% of your time is I still value work very much and together with my wife, it's a big part of our world even though we're parents, is still doing a good job.*

Part 3: Organizational Support and Future Outlook
10. Do you feel your organization is aware of and responsive to the stress and potential burnout faced by employees? If yes, what measures are in place to support employees? (e.g., flexible schedules, mental health days, communication protocols.)
Interview Partner Z: *Yeah. I noticed one thing, which, for me, really stood out. That one time in the beginning, especially I was working late, it was 10:30 pm. on something that I wanted to get done for the next day. So it was the asynthesizing a lot of interviews and getting somewhere and then suddenly my manager, so head of product, writes me on slack "Don't push yourself too hard". And for me, that's kind of was a very normal thing that yet, sometimes you have more*

pressure, some days, I'm kind of feel I'm done at four. Other days. I have way more and then it's okay for me to work in the evening or on a Sunday evening to get you stuff done. Then that's also what I joke with my wife is that when we have these gold processes. If I compare to the consulting times, it's like, I would get what I do in three months, I would be told to do this in one month. And when I do put too much stuff, because I plan my quarter, my manager says remember, it's just three months and so on. So I think that's the healthy approach, I guess if you were burned out you can talk to HR but yeah, I have thankfully not needed that.

11. How do you think the remote work environment affects your overall stress levels compared to working in an office?
Omitted

12. Do you anticipate that your current level of stress or job satisfaction will change in the next 5 or 10 years? Why or why not?
Omitted

Part 4: Job and Career Reflection

13. In your view, what changes could be made to your role or company practices that would benefit professionals, especially in managing stress and avoiding burnout?
Interview Partner Z: *I think about what causes stress is either human element so someone else that you work with in a meeting, some kind of a stakeholder, even at Company XYZ. Some promise or discussion direction, disagreement that can cause stress that you take home and think about before you go to sleep. And another point is the amount of work and meetings. I believe that within the amount of work and meetings there's still a lot that you can be shaved off while not affecting the overall value. I think that there's a lot of work that is less impactful but, needs a lot of attention. So, if you first of all, identify those low impact tasks, or give it to someone else for whom it will be bigger impact, it's okay to leave more room. Because I feel especially when you do hard work you also need the buffer time to focus. You can't put a blocker for one hour and expect that the moment you start, you will be able to do the hard work. But if you reserve the whole day for that single task, your brain will be in a better state to do the* harder work. But if you look at the calendar of some team members, they're in crazy amount of calls and the questions do they really have to.

14. Would you recommend your role or working in your industry to others, based on your experience in a remote work environment? Why or why not?
Omitted