

Group Part

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BURNOUT IN REMOTE WORKING ENVIRONMENTS – CORPORATIONS

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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 is an occupational phenomenon that has been identified by the World Health Organization (WHO) as a syndrome resulting from chronic, unmanageable workplace stress. This phenomenon has become a significant factor in remote and hybrid work settings (World Health Organization 2019). Despite the fact that the topic of burnout has been the focus of interest for almost 50 years, it remains a significant concern with 77% of professionals indicating burnout in their current roles, and more than half having experienced it on more than one occasion (Pham 2023). Moreover, 58% of respondents indicated that their daily stress levels were "completely overwhelming," with nearly half reporting that their stress levels were so high that they were unable to function effectively (Wiens 2024). This demonstrates the necessity to address burnout as a pivotal workplace issue.

The shifting expectations of different generations have further increased the importance of addressing burnout. Generation Z and millennials in particular, who are predicted to make up over 70% of today's workforce by 2030, have introduced new expectations regarding their work-life balance (Mainga 2024). 38% of these generations have terminated their previous employment as a result of burnout, thereby emphasizing the importance of fostering supportive work environments (Deloitte 2024). As a consequence of this generational shift in today's market, organizations are confronted with significant challenges in prioritizing employee well-being as a key element of their employer value proposition. The work environment has become a crucial determinant of organizational attractiveness, with the success of a company being reliant upon the contributions of its employees, including the collective feelings in relation to their role. Additionally, a positive emotional state tends to enhance productivity (Ali et al. 2014).

The COVID-19 pandemic constituted a further significant transformation of the work environment, compelling employers to transition to a fully remote working model. Prior to the

global pandemic, 3.6% of the United States workforce reported working full-time remotely (Beckel and Fisher 2022). During the pandemic, this figure reached a peak of 70% and, as of 2024, it has stabilized at 27% for fully remote workers, with the number of hybrid workers increasing by 25% in the period prior to the pandemic (Vox Media 2024). Although remote work offers employees numerous advantages, including enhanced flexibility, it also presents certain risks. These include the blurring of boundaries between work and personal life, as well as feelings of isolation, which can increase the likelihood of burnout, with 69% of remote workers experiencing elevated burnout levels (Haan 2023).

The effects of burnout impose human and financial costs, thereby representing a significant global public health concern. Organizations face the expense of recruiting, onboarding, and training new employees, in addition to the costs associated with turnover and staffing shortages. A study conducted in the United States revealed that the economic burden of untreated mental illness in the workplace amounts to \$3.7 trillion annually (Pham 2023). Furthermore, there are notable human costs, including an increased risk of workplace errors, difficulties of isolation as well as depression (Garcia 2024). In light of these observations, it is imperative that organizations implement proactive strategies to identify, mitigate, and prevent burnout among their employees. This study examines the dynamics of burnout, with an emphasis on remote and hybrid models, and aims to provide actionable insights for organizations seeking to cultivate supportive work environments.

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 firms can implement to address employee burnout, considering the specific characteristics of their size and organizational

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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 working world has undergone substantial transformations in recent years, driven by technological advancements and global crises such as the COVID-19 pandemic. These developments have contributed to an increase in remote working arrangements (Waizenegger et al. 2020). The practice of remote work has become a significant aspect of the modern workplace, particularly in response to the demands of younger generations, who increasingly expect a hybrid working environment from their employers (Deloitte 2024). The advantages of remote work are numerous and include flexibility and the opportunity to concentrate on work. However, this literature review and the conducted interviews aim to examine whether remote work presents an increased risk of burnout among employees.

The objective of this literature review is to provide a comprehensive overview of

burnout, with a particular focus on the development of the various theories and their potential causes and effects. A comprehensive overview will be achieved by drawing on the theories of psychologist Christina Maslach, namely the Maslach Burnout Inventory (MBI), exploring Karasek's Job Demand-Control (JD-C) model and the Job-Demand Resource (JD-R) Model. These models provide valuable insights into the interrelationships between job demands, job control, and resources and their influence on employees' burnout experience, particularly in the context of remote work. Understanding the underlying cause is essential for the interpretation of subsequent interview results and the development of intervention and recommendation strategies for big companies and startups. While the literature review is essential to support further research and provide a comprehensive theoretical overview, the interviews will later demonstrate whether the practical experiences of employees align with the theoretical 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” (Mayou 1987).

3.2.1 The Maslach Burnout Inventory (MBI)

Building on Freudenberg's work, Christina Maslach developed the most well-known and widely used model to diagnose burnout almost simultaneously (Malesic 2022). Christina Maslach, a prominent figure in the field of burnout research, developed a more structured model of burnout, thereby marking the beginning of a scientific perspective that focuses on research and theory (Schaufeli and Buunk 2002). Maslach defines burnout in three dimensions: a state of emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and reduced personal accomplishment in the workplace (Maslach and Leiter 2007).

The dimension of exhaustion is marked by feelings of being overwhelmed and the depletion of one's own emotional and physical resources. Individuals feel exhausted and drained without a source for replenishment, resulting in a lack of energy to cope with the demands of daily life. This component of exhaustion represents the fundamental individual stress dimension of burnout (Maslach and Leiter 2007). The aspect of depersonalization refers to a cynical and negative attitude and emotional state regarding one's work. In response to excessive emotional exhaustion, cynicism may develop and manifest as indifference towards the work being performed and the people receiving it (Edú, et al. 2022). Cynicism displays the interpersonal dimension of burnout (Maslach and Leiter 2007). The third symptom reduced personal accomplishment, pertains to individuals who assess themselves negatively. This dimension concerns both their dissatisfaction with themselves and their job accomplishments, representing the self-evaluation dimension of burnout (Maslach, Jackson, and Leiter 1997). The

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three dimensions tend to be related, as individuals will not remain cynical over extended periods. Instead, they either experience a breakthrough or begin to perceive themselves as ineffective (M. P. Leiter and Maslach 2015).

In contrast, job engagement is characterized by employees who exhibit high energy, high involvement, and high efficacy. Work engagement is a crucial factor in fostering employee well-being, as indicated by the presence of feelings of vigor, dedication, and absorption (Schaufeli et al. 2002) , and has a material impact on employee productivity (Ali et al. 2014).

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

The discrepancy between an individual and their job can be caused by a lack of resources, conflicting personal values, or too heavy a workload (M. P. Leiter and Maslach 2015). This lack of control over workload and expectations is consistent with the JD-C model by Karasek. The JD-C model is a well-known and widely cited study in the field of occupational stress (Kain and Jex 2010). The model presents a framework that identifies two key job characteristics as determinants of the psychological work environment: job demands and job control. Job demands are used to describe the workload associated with a particular role and have evolved to encompass a broader range of factors, including role conflicts, task requirements, and emotional and physical demands. Job control refers to the degree of autonomy and decision-making authority individuals possess in their work. The four different groups of perceived work environments that result from varying levels of job control and job demand are high and low strain jobs as well as active and passive jobs (Dessers, De Kort, and Hootegem 2016).

Low-strain jobs entail tasks that are not highly demanding, coupled with substantial autonomy and flexibility in decision-making. However, the degree of control available may exceed what is required, potentially limiting motivation and learning. In contrast, high-strain jobs are characterized by complex and demanding tasks with minimal control, which can lead

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to significant psychological stress and health issues due to the imbalance. Situations in which the demands of the job align with the level of control are classified as either active or passive. Passive jobs represent low demands and control, which often result in monotonous, routine tasks that lack sufficient challenge and opportunities for growth. Contrary to this, active jobs are characterized by high control and demand, allowing employees to determine the manner and timeframe in which tasks are performed. Such roles facilitate learning, motivation, and enhanced professional commitment. The JD-C Model suggests that high-strain jobs are more likely to cause stress-related health issues (Arrow A), whereas active jobs are associated with the fostering of motivation and learning opportunities (Arrow B) (Gameiro, Chambel, and Carvalho 2020).

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

Similarly, the JD-R model provides a framework for understanding the impact of job demands and job resources on employee well-being and performance. This model was developed to address both the positive and negative aspects of work, allowing for the examination of physical, psychological, social, or organizational aspects of a job that require sustained mental or physical effort and may result in certain costs, such as exhaustion and stress (Bakker and Demerouti 2007). The job demands component is the parallel to those described in the JD-C. The second component of the JD-R model is that of job resources. Such resources comprise the physical, psychological, social, or organizational aspects of the job that support personal growth, goal achievement, and the reduction of job demands (Bakker and Demerouti 2007). Examples of such resources include social support, which may take the form of positive feedback as well as opportunities for growth, organizational support and autonomy. These resources are essential for reducing the effects of demands while also fostering a motivating and engaged work environment. The JD-R model comprises two key processes: the Health Impairment Process (Burnout Pathway) and the Motivational Process (Engagement Pathway)

(Bakker et al. 2014). The Health Impairment Process occurs when the demands of the job exceed the resources available to the individual, resulting in strain 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.

The Motivational Process arises when adequate job resources contribute to both the intrinsic and extrinsic motivation among employees, thereby enhancing their engagement and performance (Bakker et al. 2014). When resources are sufficient, employees demonstrate elevated levels of job satisfaction, engagement, and performance.

One of the key strengths of Bakker and Demerouti's (2007) JD-R model is its flexibility, which allows for adaptation to a variety of contexts and applications. The model is not limited to a specific industry or occupational category. This quality allows the model to be dynamic and adaptable to a variety of different contexts. By concentrating on the prevention of burnout, organizations can utilize the JD-R model to identify excessive demands and inadequate resources, thereby enabling the design of effective interventions to prevent 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" is defined as the behaviors and thoughts that are employed to reduce or tolerate external and internal situations of stress (Algorani and Gupta 2023). Coping can be divided into proactive coping, which pertains to strategies employed to mitigate future stressors, and reactive coping, addressing a reaction following stressors. The way individuals respond to stress is defined as their coping style or coping mechanism. These coping mechanisms present a rather consistent response to the management of stress. Moreover, these coping mechanisms can be classified into four categories: meaning-focused, supportive-seeking, problem-orientated, and emotion-regulative coping strategies. The term "meaning-focused" describes the utilization of cognitive strategies to manage the meaning of situations.

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In contrast with social coping strategies, emotional or instrumental support from the social community is sought (Algorani and Gupta 2023). Problem-orientated approaches seek to alter the nature of stressful situations, while emotional regulations address the emotional side by reducing the intensity of negative emotions associated with the problem (Nuetzel 2023).

The primary coping mechanism is social support. Research indicates that receiving social support, irrespective of the source (e.g., coworkers, friends, or family), can buffer effectively against the negative effects of stressors, thereby assisting employees in managing their stress levels (American Psychological Association 2024). Furthermore, the implementation of leisure activities, such as physical exercise, cooking, or practicing meditation, represents a crucial coping strategy. Exercise causes the release of endorphins, a chemical that reduces stress levels (Bhandari 2024). While individual coping mechanisms are significant, organizational coping systems are equally important. The coping mechanisms within different organizations will be discussed in greater detail in Chapters 8.5 and 14.4.

3.3 Impact of Remote Working

The term “teleworking,” or “remote working,” as it is commonly known, refers to an arrangement whereby employees undertake their duties outside of the traditional office setting, typically from home or other remote locations (Beckel and Fisher 2022). Due to technological advances, remote work has been around for a long time, but its importance and frequency has increased dramatically since the COVID-19 pandemic. This has created opportunities and challenges for organizations and workers alike. One such challenge is the need to navigate the increasingly blurred boundaries between work and personal life (Waizenegger et al. 2020).

In January 2021, the European Parliament passed a resolution underscoring the significance of workers' right to disconnect. This resolution emphasized the importance of employees disconnecting from work in order to protect their physical and mental health and well-being (European Parliament 2021). With this policy, the European Parliament ensures

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workers' right to disconnect. The right to disconnect refers to employees' rights to disengage from work and try to eliminate, for example, communication outside of their working hours. Although the "Working Time Directive" has existed since 1998 and sets out, for example, the required minimum daily and weekly rest periods, this is the first agreement to consider the well-being of remote workers (Eurofound 2021).

As remote work becomes an increasingly significant aspect of the demands placed on employers, it is imperative to address and examine the impact of remote work on employee well-being. A study conducted by Costin et al. (2023), analyzed the impact of the pandemic on remote work burnout. The primary findings of the study indicated that employees who work remotely frequently experienced professional detachment, inefficacy, and emotional exhaustion. The absence of social connectedness, when coupled with increased job-related demands and inadequate organizational support and resources, had a considerable negative effect on job performance and satisfaction. To address this issue, the study emphasizes the necessity for enhanced workplace support structures, flexible work arrangements, and more regular communication (Costin et al., 2023).

In order to gain a deeper understanding of these dynamics, it is possible to apply the three theoretical frameworks utilized in this paper to the context of remote work, beginning with MBI. Remote workers frequently report feelings of emotional exhaustion associated with balancing work and personal life in the same space, as well as having the constant availability that is expected with digital communication (Waizenegger et al., 2020). The absence of social interaction can intensify feelings of depersonalization. Additionally, remote workers may perceive a reduction in their sense of accomplishment due to the diminished visibility that is inherent to remote work. It is more challenging to demonstrate contributions or receive prompt feedback from managers or supervisors in a remote work environment.

Karasek's JD-C model helps highlight the inherent complexity that remote work

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introduces into the process of balancing job demands and job control. In remote work environments, the job demands are often higher, for example, in balancing work tasks and home responsibilities. However, this can be moderated with an increased level of autonomy. When there is a lack of distinction between work and personal life, remote workers may experience a considerable level of demands without the necessary control over their time to recover. This can be mitigated by providing remote workers with autonomy over their tasks, which in turn reduces the risk of burnout.

In the context of remote work, access to resources can be challenging, especially when it comes to technology, social support, and a clear structure. Furthermore, the lack of clear work boundaries and the constant digital connectivity can have a detrimental impact. The JD-R model indicates that when the job demands exceed the job resources, burnout occurs (Demerouti et al., 2001). The potential benefits of remote work for employees include the ability to manage personal and work responsibilities. These advantages depend on the level of support provided by the organization.

Although many of the applied coping mechanisms are similar, there are some notable differences in the context of remote work. Taking regular breaks, for example, is crucial to prevent the blurring of boundaries. Thus, when working remotely to cope with stressors, employees attempt to establish a structured routine to follow strictly (Schmedding 2023).

In response to the above-mentioned challenges of remote work, many firms are transitioning towards hybrid work models, entailing a combination of remote and in-office work. Therefore, the advantages of both work environments are combined (Bloom 2021). Research conducted by McKinsey indicates that companies have adopted flexible work arrangements to address these issues, as evidenced by the fact that 30% of employees have stated that they would switch jobs if they were forced to work fully on-site. This highlights the potential retention risk for companies that intend to enforce strict workplace policies (Alexander

et al. 2021). Furthermore, over 50% of employees indicate a preference for working from home three or more days per week. As firms adapt to these preferences, hybrid models are emerging as a viable way to capitalize on the advantages of remote work while reducing its disadvantages, such as communication barriers and feelings of isolation, while increasing engagement and productivity (Hancock and Weddle 2021).

4. Methodology

4.1 Qualitative Analysis

To study the phenomenon of burnout a qualitative research approach was applied. This allows to capture the complexity and the variations that exist due to different organizational structures, such as those found in startups and large companies. The chosen methodology enables the exploration of experiences as the emotional state (Oranga and Matere 2023).

4.2 Semi-Structured Interviews

The qualitative approach is evaluated through semi-structured interviews with employees from various firms. The interviews were conducted over a two-week period in the last week of September 2024 and the first week of October 2024. The research focuses on two main categories of organizations, namely startups and big companies to examine the impact of organizational size, structure, and work culture on experiences of stress and burnout experiences in remote work environments. We conducted a total of 17 semi-structured interviews, comprising nine interviews with employees working in corporations and eight in start-ups. Figure 1 depicts the four areas of the interview and shows how each set of questions leads to valuable insights about burnout in remote work environments.

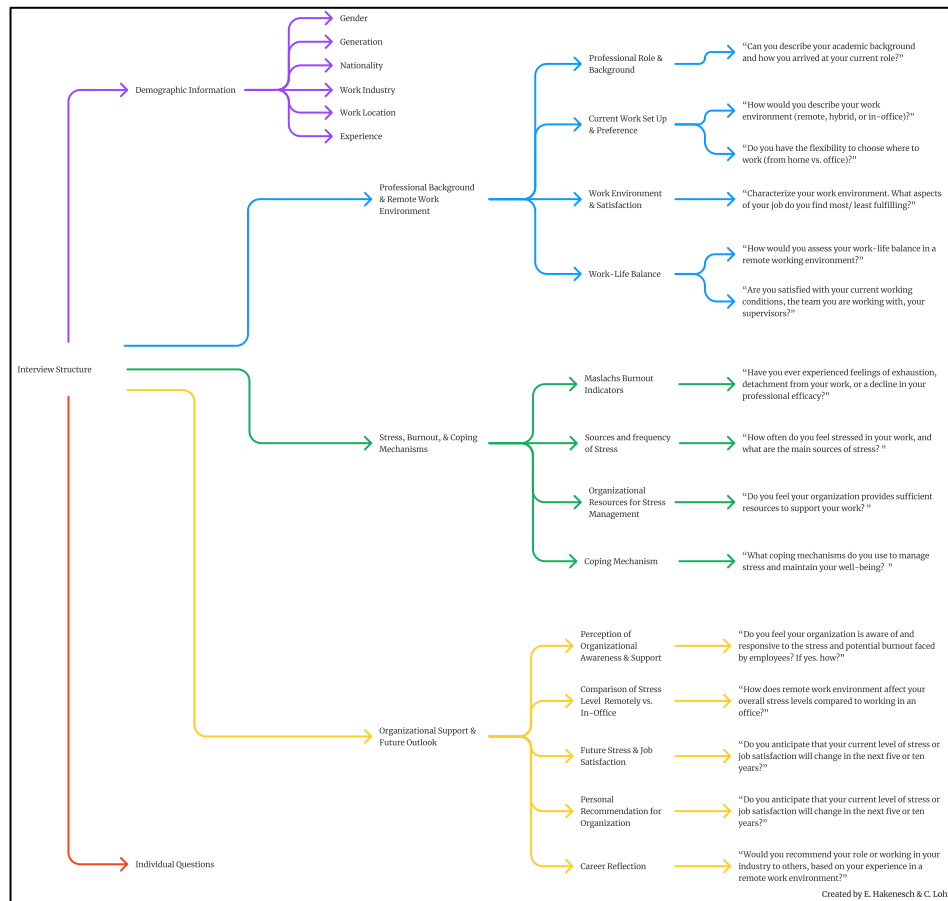


Figure 1 Logic Tree Interviews

The questionnaire guide is presented in Appendix 8 as a reference. Prior to the interviews, participants were required to sign a consent form. A copy of these is included in Appendix 7, as are the transcripts of each interview (Appendices 9 – 25).

4.3 Gioia Method

Following the collection of data through the previously described semi-structured interviews and transcription thereof was the analysis using the Gioia Method. The data analysis was conducted in accordance with the three-step process (Gioia, et al. 2013). The first-order concepts were built by analyzing the transcribed interviews. These concepts were transformed into second-order concepts through an interpretive process considering both the participants' responses and existing literature on burnout and the effects of remote work. Categories relating to primary factors contributing to burnout within startups and big companies were identified and gathered into broader theoretical dimensions within the two organizational structures.

5. Results of the Semi-Structured Interviews

5.1 Similarities Across Organizations

Figure 5 presents a graphical representation of the 17 conducted interviews. The blue represents the results of corporations, while the green is used for startups. 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. Employees working remotely may encounter three forms of distance, namely, physical, operational, and affinity related. 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 identified the presence of a supportive social environment within their teams as a key factor.

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.

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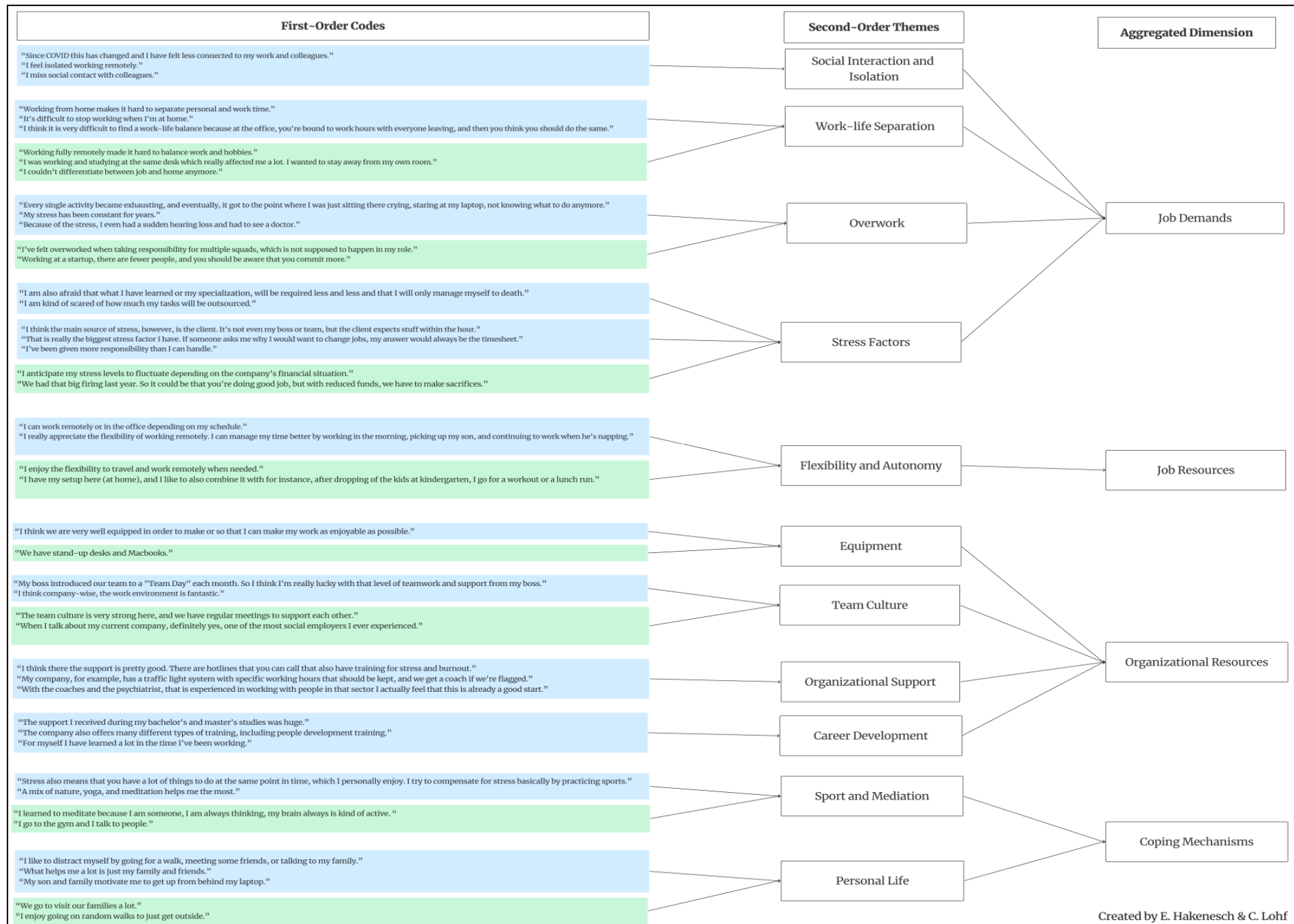


Figure 2 Data Structure

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5.1.3 Work-life Separation

In both organizational settings, participants indicated that they were able to maintain higher levels of focus and concentration when working remotely (cf. Interviewee C). This is attributed to the autonomy to schedule their work in a manner that suits their needs and to work in silence without interruptions (cf. Interview U). However, both reported the issue of blurred boundaries when working remotely, thereby confirming the lack of control as described in the JD-C. In this context, a significant number of respondents identified an absence of clear separation between work and personal space as a major challenge, with problems attaining to the office being the living room table (cf. Interviewee I). Moreover, the absence of a structured end to the workday, which is typically marked by colleagues' departures from the office, leads to a lack of separation between work and life.

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.

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

Interview E

5.1.5 Sport, Meditation and Personal Life

In order to address the issue of overwork or exhaustion, employees in both organizational types utilize a variety of coping mechanisms to fulfill their needs. Such activities include 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 like to distract myself by going for a walk, meeting some friends, or talking to my family.

Interview B

In contrast, Interviewee C indicated being unable to effectively cope with stress and identify effective relaxation strategies prior to becoming a mother. Consequently, the resources serve to mitigate the demands of the job, thereby facilitating a state of equilibrium. Individuals exhibiting low levels of hardiness, as evidenced by low involvement in daily activities, are more likely to experience exhaustion and consequently face an elevated risk of exhaustion (Maslach, Schaufeli, and Leiter 2001).

5.1.6 Flexibility and Autonomy

In consideration of the job resources, the participants from both organizations indicated degrees of autonomy and flexibility by being able to schedule tasks individually. While autonomy and flexibility are important resources that can assist employees in coping with demands, there are notable differences in the way corporations and startups apply these resources. Ultimately, both groups reported positive experiences with remote work, particularly in terms of flexibility and autonomy. In the context of corporate employment, most respondents indicated that they possess considerable flexibility in determining their work location and work hours. However, a subset of individuals reported that their employers mandate their presence in the office on designated workdays.

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.

Interview D

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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 3 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.

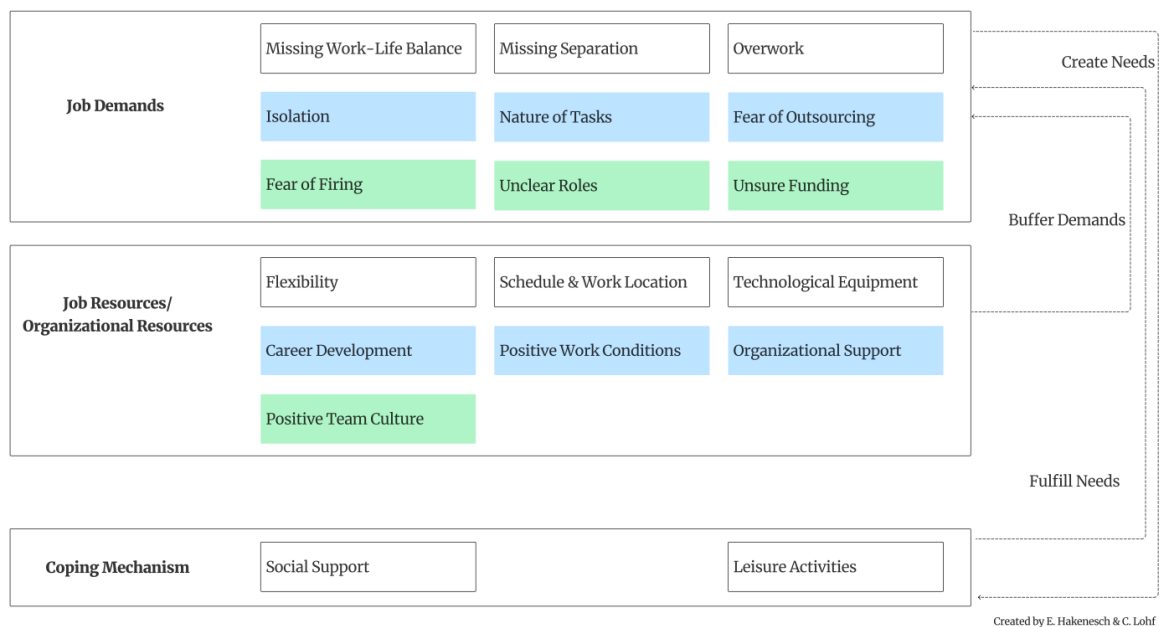


Figure 3 Interplay of Job Resources, Job Demands, and Coping Mechanisms Across Different Organizations

5.2.1 Organizational Support and Career Development

As illustrated in Figure 3, a significant distinction between the organizations is the

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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, the stressors experienced by startup and corporate employees differ significantly. The participants working in large corporations identified several significant stressors, in addition to demanding workloads and lengthy work hours. These included concerns about the potential for their tasks to be entirely outsourced, the competitive work environment with clients demanding varying requirements, being assigned excessive responsibilities, and the contradictory experience of boredom due to repetitive tasks and clearly defined procedures. In large corporations, the outsourcing of tasks is frequently employed as a means of enhancing

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cost-effectiveness and reducing the burden of work in the domestic market. While this represents a means of streamlining the work process, it also presents the following concerns:

Due to more outsourcing, our expertise will be needed less, and we will increasingly become some kind of extended arm, where we will only manage and organize.

Interview D

Other participants, such as Interviewee A and I, indicated that the primary stressors are the competitive environment and clients' demands for responses within an hour. Interviewee I, for instance, indicated that the timesheet represents a significant source of stress, as it allows for the allocation of only partial working hours. This is due to the restrictions imposed by the contract, which limit the number of hours that can be assigned to a certain mandate. Moreover, even if the company were to attempt to adapt to the official working hours, it would not be feasible, as doing so would otherwise result in the company losing the tendering process.

With regard to the tasks and responsibilities assigned to them, the participants in the interviews held different views. Several respondents, including Interviewee F, expressed feelings of being overwhelmed by new information and tasks. Similarly, Interviewee A indicated having responsibilities beyond their capacity to handle. Nevertheless, the hierarchical and bureaucratic structure with predefined scopes also results in employees experiencing limitations in their autonomy and a sense of boredom while working, as tasks are often repetitive and follow clearly defined procedures, therefore limiting the opportunities for employees to change their tasks and approaches (cf. Interviewee I). While feelings of being overworked are dangerous, so too are feelings of boredom, as they lead to a lack of job satisfaction, as evidenced by Interviewee B. Boreout is defined as a state of boredom that ultimately results in the perception of having meaningless tasks and jobs that lack intrinsic value (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.

Interview 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

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.

6. Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic has resulted in a significant increase in both awareness and burnout rates, particularly within large corporations. In the context of these elevated demands and the challenges that emerge from the organizational structure, a total of 6.8 cases of work incapacity resulting from an official burnout diagnosis have been recorded, representing a new overall peak (Radtke 2024). The American Psychological Association estimates that workplace stress costs the U.S. economy more than \$500 billion dollars, with 550 million workdays each year being lost (Moss 2019). Consequently, numerous companies have declared their intention to invest significant resources in addressing the well-being of their employees. Companies with more than 20,000 employees have, on average, allocated approximately US\$11 million per year to enhance the health and well-being of their employees (Bhatt, Bordeaux, and Fischer 2023).

In light of the accumulating evidence indicating that the organizational context exerts a significant influence on perceptions of stress levels and burnout, this paper examines the impact that corporations have on burnout levels, the impact of remote work arrangements, and the extent of resources and organizational support provided. To this end, this work paper commences with an elaboration of the methodology, which is then followed by a review of the published literature on the subject. To assess the degree of resemblance between the literature and reality, interviews were conducted, and based on the findings, recommendations were formulated. Although burnout has been extensively studied, there is a lack of research examining the influence of company structures and the perceptions of employees captured through qualitative studies.

7. Literature Review

7.1 The Organizational Structure of Corporations

At large companies (1,000+ employees), 46% of employees report feeling stuck in their jobs, and nearly half (47%) report feeling burnt out. In comparison to smaller firms, employees

of large companies have reported higher levels of feeling burnt out (Cromidas 2024). In determining the classification of a firm, the primary factors considered are the number of employees and either their turnover or the balance sheet total. In the European Union, a firm is considered medium-sized when it has less than 250 employees and an annual turnover of at least € 50 million or a balance sheet total of € 43 million (European Commision n.d.). A large company is defined as an organization with substantial financial resources, the capacity to operate on a broad scale, often on an international level, and employ more than 250 people (OECD, n.d.). In the following discussion, the terms "corporations" and "large companies" are used in a general sense to include a range of large companies regardless of legal form.

Large firms typically have a hierarchical structure with multiple management layers that separate various functions and divisions, coordinating complex organizations. This structure leads to clearly defined roles and responsibilities but also involves strict and formal processes with lengthy communication channels (Cassis 2000). Drawing on the Maslach Burnout Inventory (MBI), the Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) model, and the Job Demands-Control (JD-C) model, this section explores key organizational contributors to burnout in large firms.

7.2 Causes of Burnout in Corporations

During global crises like the COVID-19 pandemic, the financial resources have enabled corporations to maintain operational stability, pay salaries, and implement remote work arrangements, thereby fostering a sense of security among employees in comparison to smaller organizations (Budelmann 2023). However, the presence of high-performance expectations and hierarchical structures, which are typical of corporate environments, has been linked to elevated stress levels, communication challenges, and feelings of isolation, especially in remote work settings. Consequently, this may result in emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, or a decrease in efficacy, the symptoms of burnout (Gabriel and Aguinis 2022).

According to the JD-R model, the likelihood of burnout increases when job demands,

such as workload, exceed the availability of resources, including managerial support or flexibility. A study has revealed that 52.7% of employees have considered resigning due to emotional exhaustion and feeling overwhelmed by managerial expectations (Lam et al. 2022). Stagnation and frustration are also common in the presence of micromanagement in big corporations (Barnard-Bahn and Le Pertel 2023). Inadequate reward systems, both intrinsic and extrinsic, can give rise to feelings of unfairness and a lack of achievement, leading to frustration. Depersonalization often arises, particularly when there is an absence of recognition, which is a common issue in hierarchical structures where individual contributions are frequently overlooked. In highly competitive environments, such as those observed in the “Big Four”, the competitive environment is often more intense, given the pyramid-shaped organization chart (Organ and Bottorff 2024). Employees may avoid discussing issues out of fear it will hinder their career advancement (Beau and Jerman 2022).

The bureaucratic nature presents additional challenges, as it ensures centralized decision-making. Research has identified six areas of work life, namely workload, control, reward, community, fairness, and values, each of which is significantly impacted by the organizational structure (M. P. Leiter and Maslach 2003). The domain of control is often lacking due to the hierarchical environments with clearly defined roles (Organ and Bottorff 2024). This leads to slower responses to changes in the work environment and to feelings of emotional exhaustion as employees feel a lack of the capacity to drive change (Maslach, Schaufeli, and Leitner 2001). These typical processes often result in narrowly defined procedures and a lack of innovation and decision-making (Cassis 2000). Although standardization facilitates efficiency, the rigidity of procedures constrains creativity, leaving employees to perceive their roles and tasks as being repetitive, which can ultimately lead to disengagement (Adesakin 2023). The rigidity also limits employee voice, reducing innovation and diminishing autonomy (MAO and MAO 2023). In contrast, small firms are characterized

by a flat hierarchy with employees performing different tasks (Organ and Bottorff 2024).

7.3 Remote Work Context in Corporations

The size of the company is a significant factor in determining the adoption of remote work, with approximately one-third of employees in large firms in Germany working remotely, compared to only 13.1% in small businesses (Bocksch 2024). As outlined in the “Six Areas of Worklife” theory, the community domain, referring to the quality of social interactions and support within the workplace, represents another crucial factor (M. Leiter and Maslach 2004). The nature of remote work often constrains interactions, thereby hindering the formation of meaningful relationships, resulting in isolation, particularly when employees lack the support of supervisors (Montañez 2024).

Research indicates that working remotely can lead to increased productivity (Barrero, Bloom, and Davis 2021). However, an excess of work and the lack of clear boundaries between one’s personal and professional lives can contribute to stress. Approximately 39% of corporate employees reported feelings of exhaustion due to the prevalence of an “always-on” culture (Microsoft 2021). Many feel compelled to remain online beyond conventional hours, resulting in a 28% increase in after-work hours since 2020 (Microsoft 2022). This persistent excessive workload contributes to a disruption of a satisfactory work-life balance. Companies like Volkswagen AG, have introduced policies, including the “right-to-disconnect”, which prevent non-management employees from accessing e-mails outside of work hours (Henshall 2021).

The management of employees in remote locations within large corporations presents several challenges, including the assessment of both employee well-being and productivity. A study revealed that 54% of managers express concerns about the potential for productivity declines in remote work environments (Microsoft 2022). Additionally, they identified the challenge of detecting burnout without personal interactions like changes in body language (Cohut 2020). The aforementioned concerns are compounded as 54% of managers’ report

feeling out of touch with their employees (Microsoft 2022).

Despite the flexibility offered by remote work, numerous corporations have attempted to persuade employees to resume in-office work. This transition is driven by concerns regarding team collaboration, company culture (Tsipursky 2023), and the utilization of office spaces, as many are currently unoccupied (Goldberg 2023). In response to employer feedback, approximately 80% of companies are adopting hybrid models that require employees to return to the office at least three days per week (Cross, Dillon, and Reeves 2023).

7.4 Coping Strategies and Interventions in Corporations

As causes of burnout in large firms are deeply embedded within the organizational structure, addressing them can be a challenge. Many companies have implemented coping mechanisms that impact employee well-being. Research suggests that companies can expect an average return of £4.70 for every £1 invested in mental health programs depending on the intervention stage. The highest returns can be seen in proactive interventions such as awareness campaigns (Hampson et al. 2024).

In Europe, large corporations have several coping strategies at their disposal, such as the mandatory establishment of work councils, which are subject to different thresholds for the number of employees and support employees by negotiating issues like work-life balance (Oesingmann 2015). Furthermore, they have HR departments focusing on employee well-being, which serve as a point of contact for information on health resources, stress management programs, and training opportunities. In accordance with the German Dismissal Protection Act, employees are protected through the provision of a notice period. Furthermore, in the absence of a "good cause," employees may not be dismissed (Bundesministerium, n.d.).

In the context of corporate environments, well-being offerings frequently exhibit notable similarities. In the US, corporate training expenditure reached its peak in 2023, with \$101.8 billion (Statista Research Department 2023). This reflects how companies view

development as crucial to maintaining employee satisfaction and reducing stress. Although corporate well-being programs are widespread, with nearly 85% of U.S. employers, for instance, offering workplace wellness programs, the efficacy of these initiatives varies as burnout rates have continued to rise (Croft, Parks, and Whillans 2024). For example, 62% of Generation Z employees have indicated a preference for enhanced career development support (Montañez 2024). A study also revealed that of the participants who have experienced at least one mental health-related symptom, only 27% used workplace resources and instead used self-help techniques like yoga or relied on friends and family (Pandey et al. 2022). This indicates that despite substantial financial commitments, a considerable number of employer-led initiatives aren't utilized and thus ineffective.

7.5 Specific Coping Strategies of Robert Bosch GmbH

In addition to the semi-structured interviews, an interview was conducted with a certified mental health coach employed by the Germany-based automotive supplier Robert Bosch GmbH. The company has approximately 430,000 employees, operates in 60 different countries, and is the largest automotive supplier in the world (Robert Bosch GmbH n.d.). As a member of the IG-Metall union, Germany's dominant industrial union, Bosch can be considered a representative example of the other firms in the same industry, including the Mercedes-Benz Group, Porsche AG, and others, as well as those of unions like Ver.di. The objective of the interview was to gather data on concrete examples of prevention measures applied. The following section provides a detailed account of the insights gained through the interview with an employee from Bosch.

Associate counseling has a long history at Bosch, with the company offering such services for over a century. These services address a range of issues, including stress or burnout and addiction or other illnesses. In the year 2023, Bosch has documented approximately 20,000 activities within those domains, representing a 12% increase compared to the preceding year.

The consultation topics have seen a notable increase in inquiries pertaining to recovery support, resilience counseling, and stress-related issues. In 2023, 37 internal social consultants, four external social advisors, one Bosch Management Service, and six service providers were responsible for supervising Bosch employees throughout Germany. The primary focus is on preventive measures, as they adhere to the principle that prevention is more effective and efficient. An employee of Bosch BKK endorsed this preventive approach, since in countries such as Germany, measures taken in the event of illness are either covered by health insurance or are required by law once the sick note from the doctor is available. Bosch has consolidated its health offerings under the umbrella slogan "befit – for more vitality". They can be classified into the following dimensions: health promotion through prevention, provision of internal and external contact persons, and company-sponsored healthcare insurance Bosch BKK. A selection of the first category is presented in the following table.

Medical care	Physical Offers	Mental Health	Healthy Diet	Work Organization
• Individual health advice • Vaccinations • Health checks • Cancer screenings	• Programs like "befit-16" • Sport and yoga offerings	• Coaching • Info sessions • Self-assessment test • Program for employees with risk of burnout	• Info sessions on balanced nutrition • Health-conscious options	• Ergonomic workplace for working from the office and remotely

Table 1 Overview Health Management Robert Bosch GmbH

Among the internal contacts are associates, residual counseling, medical services, including the company doctor, and the healthcare insurance. External partners include, for example, the DAJEB Online Counseling Guide, a search engine for locating counseling centers, or the Leibniz Institute for Resilience Research. Moreover, Bosch provides company reintegration program for employees who have been unable to work for a minimum of six weeks due to burnout or other health-related issues.

8. Methodology

To gain a deeper comprehension of the underlying causes of burnout and the associated

coping mechanisms in corporations semi-structured interviews were conducted. The interviews took place via MS Teams and were recorded and transcribed. The interviews involved nine participants, of which 67% were women.

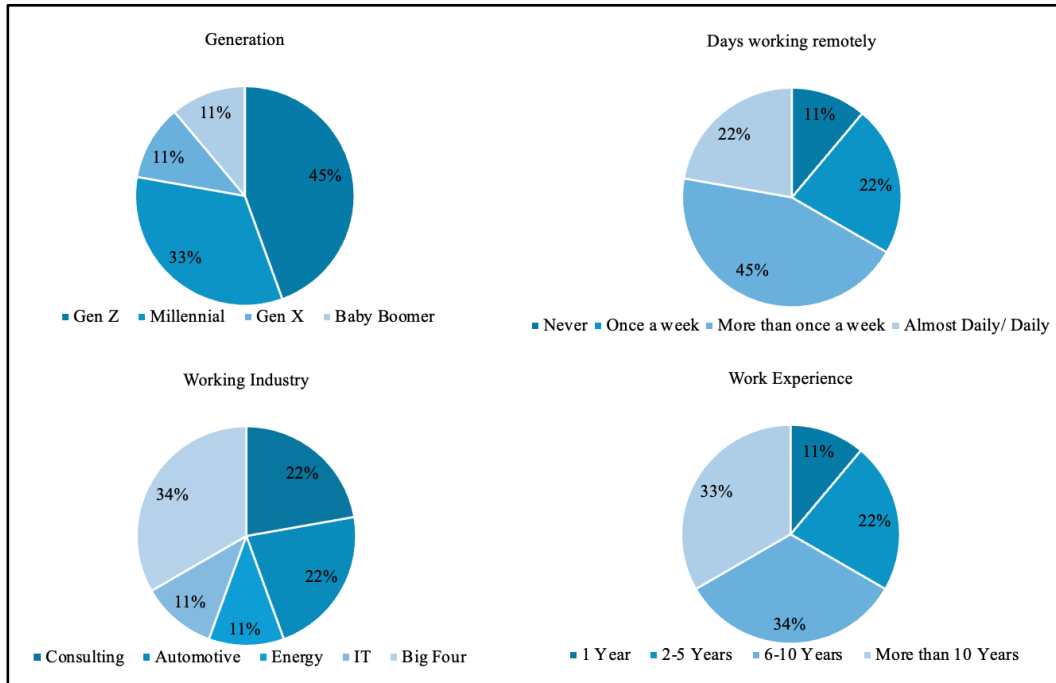


Figure 4 Demographic Overview Interview Participants – Corporations

The participants were selected through my professional network established through current and past work experiences, and other professional interactions. Each participant was approached on a voluntary basis, thereby ensuring their willingness to share their experiences openly. This approach allowed for the collection of a diverse range of perspectives from individuals working in different sectors, with experience in both corporate work environments and remote work settings. Several factors need to be considered within the research, including demographic variables such as age, sex, or different hierarchical levels, as these influence expectations and demands (Maslach, Schaufeli, and Leiter 2001). A description of each interview participant is provided in Appendix 1.

In addition, as mentioned above, an interview was conducted with an expert from Robert Bosch GmbH to gain a deeper insight into the concrete measures taken by an exemplary company.

9. Overview Interview Results of Corporations

Job-related burnout can be classified into the following three distinct categories.

Under-challenged burnout	Happens when jobs are perceived as boring or unfulfilling, leading to a feeling of lack of motivation or being stuck (Interview B, D).
Neglect burnout	Occurs when an individual experiences lack of support or feels unable to meet placed expectations (Interview C, F).
Overload burnout	Develops when an individual engages in excessive work for an extended period, leading to feelings of exhaustion (Interview A, I).

Table 2 Overview Types of Burnout (Howell 2023).

In order to identify the most appropriate coping mechanism, it is essential for firms to determine which type or combination of burnout they are experiencing (Wilding 2023). The interviews showed signs for all three types of job-related burnout. In addition, the participants also indicated a lack of awareness of the existing offerings and a perception that the measures didn't align with their personal preference (cf. Interview H, I). Moreover, an issue was the sense of isolation and the absence of a team culture, particularly among those who had been working remotely (cf. Interview C). In accordance with the neglect burnout, a further common issue was the lack of managerial training in emotional intelligence, as well as a limited ability to recognize when things are unwell or the capabilities to create environments in which the participants are open to sharing their worries and feelings (Interview E, F). It is crucial to underscore that the stressors and specific measures employed to address burnout vary depending on the characteristics of the individuals involved, such as age, team structure, and job level. As previously mentioned in the combined section for an entry-level professional, a significant stressor is the fear of admitting struggles, as this is believed to hinder job progression (cf. Interview F). In contrast, at the management level, a primary stressor is the concern about not identifying when subordinate personnel are struggling (cf. Interview E). A more detailed analysis of the interviews can be found in the combined part.

10. Recommendations for Corporations

Companies need to distinguish between coping and prevention methods. Coping

strategies may include the implementation of wellness programs, such as yoga, the provision of financial assistance for gym memberships, or the allotment of additional days off for employees. Nevertheless, this does not alter the fundamental stressors or the nature of the work environment. While these strategies may contribute to an improvement in employee well-being, they ultimately fail to address the underlying issues that contribute to stress in the workplace (Mills 2021). The following recommendations are based on an organizational-level analysis. However, the individual level is equally significant because, regardless of the quality and comprehensiveness of the company's offerings, they are ineffective without employees prioritizing self-care and possessing intrinsic motivation when contemplating their occupational responsibilities. While individuals experience burnout, the primary driver is a systematic organizational imbalance (Brassey et al. 2022). Consequently, the focus is on the organizational level. In alignment with Bosch's approach, the subsequent measures are designed to address prevention.

Based on the findings of the conducted interviews, a series of recommendations were formulated. An overview of these recommendations can be found in Appendix 2. Building on these recommendations, a two-dimensional matrix was created by clustering the potential recommendations. Figure 5 depicts this matrix in which the cost is quantified in comparison to effectiveness. While there are many different opportunities and aspects that firms could adopt, in the context of economic efficiency, company measures must be guided by the considerations of cost and effectiveness. Therefore, quadrants II. and III. of Figure 5 aren't considered further. For instance, the concept of dynamic task rotations would probably be very effective. Nevertheless, given the financial impact, the proposal isn't economically viable. A low-cost and effective method to reduce stress is for employees to take a short break (Wiens 2024). By making such breaks mandatory, for instance, by implementing calendar blockers, employees would be obliged to disengage from their screen daily, even if only for a brief interval.

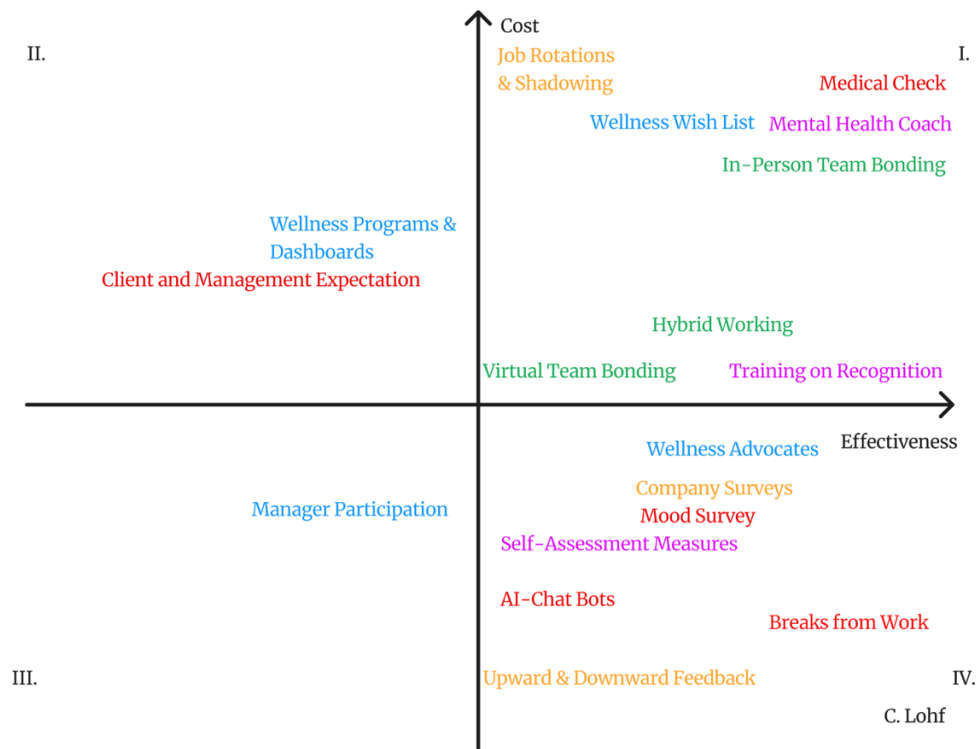


Figure 5 Two-Dimension Matrix – Cost and Effectiveness (Legend: Isolation – green, Ineffective Offers – blue, Overwork – red, Dissatisfaction – orange, Lack of Training – purple)

To address the frequently reported feelings of isolation and lack of team culture, particularly in the context of remote working, companies should invest more heavily in team-building initiatives, both in-person and virtually. The primary recommendation is the implementation of regular in-person events, such as monthly joint breakfast sessions, team lunches, or bi-monthly “Team Days” that are counted as working hours but with non-work-related activities. Although this may be a costly endeavor, the potential benefits could be significant, including increased motivation, a stronger sense of team culture, and enhanced collaboration. Research indicates that employees who are satisfied with their social connectivity are, on average, 2.5 times more likely to report high levels of productivity (Hilberath et al. 2020). As a less expensive and effective alternative, firms could facilitate virtual interactions. Another low-cost option could be the implementation of a weekly scheduled short check-in between managers and each team member. Although this may appear to be a minor action, the respondents frequently cited a lack of interaction and a sense of feeling undervalued.

Moreover, corporations must foster awareness and educate their employees on the early indications of burnout. A cost-effective yet highly efficacious strategy is the implementation of mandatory training for all employees, which serves to enhance awareness and, in turn, reduce stigma. A further recommendation is the hiring of a mental health coach for the management level. As an illustration, Bosch has one with whom the above-mentioned interview was conducted, as referenced in the chapter on coping mechanisms. The mental health coach could support the prevention of burnout among managers by providing guidance and assistance to those at risk. Additionally, the coach could train these individual managers with information regarding the most cited symptoms, as well as guidance on how to engage in leading conversations with employees when there are indications of potential burnout. In contrast to the approach taken by Bosch, it is this author's position that such measures should be made mandatory for managers, with non-compliance resulting in disciplinary action. Although the financial investment required to employ a mental health coach is greater, the benefits in terms of effectiveness and long-term value, given the relevance of management personnel and a potential multiplier effect if managers lead with a good work-life balance, make it a worthwhile investment. Moreover, managers should receive training in emotional intelligence, with the aim of fostering a psychologically safe environment and encouraging open communication. To facilitate not only general but also self-awareness, team meetings could conclude with a brief self-assessment checklist, which allows employees to evaluate their own measures towards their health. An example of the translated checklist utilized at Bosch can be found in Appendix 3. The implementation of self-assessment checklists represents a cost-effective strategy with high efficacy, whereby employees are empowered to engage in regular health evaluations.

The aforementioned aspects are designed to foster a psychologically safe environment for employees. The following aspects are intended to facilitate the identification of instances where employees may be experiencing elevated stress levels. To address the issue of work

overload, many firms have implemented systems such as traffic-light indicators or mandatory rest periods. While these systems provide insight into the number of hours worked, they do not offer a clear indication of the employee's perception of their stress levels. Therefore, a mood survey with a chatbot could be distributed daily, with respondents obliged to complete it and provide ratings on their satisfaction with the current work environment, stress levels, and overall mood (see Appendix 4). When an employee consistently rates these aspects as low, the chatbot generates an alert and transmits an anonymous message to the team supervisor indicating that one of their members is experiencing distress, thus allowing the manager to implement temporary adjustments. Although this approach is relatively inexpensive, its efficacy is uncertain, as it relies on the willingness to be genuinely self-reflective and honest.

A quantifiable result could be a firm offering medical examinations on an annual basis. These examinations encompass a comprehensive assessment of the employee's general health, including discussions about their overall well-being and the measurement of specific biomarkers such as cortisol levels. While many firms already offer general health examinations, they could enlarge this offer by testing the cortisol level. The confidentiality of the results would be guaranteed, and they would not be shared without the written consent of the subject. Cortisol, commonly referred to as the "stress hormone," plays a pivotal role in the body's stress response (Kudielka and Wüst 2010). The release of cortisol by the adrenal glands typically exhibits a diurnal rhythm. However, prolonged exposure to stress can disrupt this pattern. Recent research has highlighted the potential of salivary cortisol as a reliable indicator for assessing burnout risk, given its sensitivity in capturing real-time physiological responses to stress and its utility in measuring burnout (Mithen et al. 2023). Studies have demonstrated that the level of salivary cortisol is elevated with chronic burnout (Smyth and Clow 2020). Philips, for example, has developed a watch that monitors cortisol levels and provides users with direct alerts when levels are elevated (Philips, n.d.). In the event that the tests indicate chronically elevated stress levels,

the company and employee can collaborate to identify tailored solutions, such as modifying work schedules. Such medical examinations would generate quantifiable outcomes and mitigate the potential for subjective denial or underestimation of stress. Moreover, this would guarantee that the employee is aware, and that the employer-led initiative is desired. It is crucial to acknowledge that other factors besides the job may also contribute to elevated stress levels. The test sample is only an indication that can be affected by other factors, such as dietary intake. Accordingly, the results should be regarded as an orientation rather than a definitive conclusion.

11. Limitations and Outlook

Although the interviews were semi-structured, thereby allowing for in-depth views of individuals, the insights gained represent only a narrow portion of corporate employees. Consequently, the findings may not be representative of the broader population of corporate employees and, therefore, not fully encompass the spectrum of stressors encountered by employees across a wide range of corporate contexts. Nevertheless, through the interview with a professional employed at Robert Bosch GmbH, insights were gained into a multinational company that can be viewed as representative of many companies. While the insights gained may be limited to the German context, they offer a broader perspective on employee experiences due to the company's size and international setting. Furthermore, due to the focus of this work on identifying recommendations, the interpretation of the results was limited to the most frequent aspects, excluding other observations such as managing a team remotely.

The literature review within this work project is based on publicly available literature and research papers, as many companies maintain confidential internal data, including organizational burnout metrics and detailed statistics on employee well-being, such as the number of sick days. Many of the existing research studies concern employees in general, without differentiating between those working in large or small companies.

Finally, a further limitation of this paper is that the findings are derived from the current

corporate landscape, where many are still working mostly remotely. However, given the current trend of returning to the office, the gained insights may not fully align long-term as corporations and employees working in those surroundings are facing a new emerging work structure. Further research could examine the implications of this transition and assess the impact on employee burnout levels. In this context, it is imperative for companies to achieve a balance between their ambition to enhance organizational culture and the necessity to re-establish connections within their teams. Nevertheless, it is crucial that companies acknowledge the flexibility that employees are losing as a consequence of these changes.

An additional area of interest for further research is the impact of artificial intelligence (AI) and other technological advancements in the modern workplace on the stress levels of employees. As AI becomes increasingly widespread and pervasive, it is important to comprehend its potential implications for employee burnout. One area of controversy is whether AI is associated with being a helpful tool that alleviates workload by automating repetitive tasks or decreases workload by taking on tasks. However, it may increase the stress level as employees fear being replaced or having their jobs become more and more focused on administrative aspects, excluding their subject-matter knowledge.

When examining the stressors, it is evident that a considerable number of them originate from the economic environment, including demands from clients or suppliers. Thus, burnout can't be eliminated. Nevertheless, corporations can adopt a psychologically secure environment, thereby promoting intrinsic and extrinsic motivation within their employees. The recommendations include both employer-driven measures, such as team events or mandatory training, and aspects in which the employer offers resources, but the employee must act proactively to utilize the offering. For example, this could include medical checks. By fostering greater awareness and offering assistance to employees experiencing elevated stress or burnout, companies can respond promptly and effectively when employees require support.

12. Conclusion

The challenge of burnout in remote environments requires an approach that considers both individual and organizational factors, regardless of the size of the organization. As this paper illustrates, burnout is a personal phenomenon that is influenced by many stressors, thus making it challenging for companies to implement a universal solution. The interviews revealed significant discrepancies in the demands and resources experienced by employees in different organizations, associated with feelings of exhaustion, depersonalization, and a reduction in professional efficacy. Irrespective of the organizational structure and size, both exhibited a deficiency in work-life balance and feelings of exhaustion.

Although remote work offers significant advantages, including flexibility, it also presents considerable risks. Such consequences include feelings of isolation and difficulties in maintaining clear boundaries between work and personal life. A hybrid work environment fosters greater interaction, which is crucial for cultivating a psychologically secure setting where employees feel valued and motivated, and knowledge can be shared. This would still allow employees a substantial degree of autonomy. In the initial stages, organizations may need to provide incentives for employees to return to the office. However, as individuals become accustomed to aspects like commuting more, they may find that their routine is more easily maintained and that they derive greater satisfaction from being in the office.

Ultimately, burnout cannot be entirely prevented by companies. A significant proportion of employees feel insufficiently supported by their employers and frequently lack the confidence to discuss their personal difficulties. To achieve a balance between job demands and job resources, organizations of all sizes and structures must ensure that they create an environment in which employees are motivated, feel supported, and are valued. Given the change in generational values, with an increasing emphasis on the employer value proposition, it is crucial for firms to prioritize sensitization and awareness of burnout and its symptoms.

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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 Corporations

Appendix 1: Overview Corporation Interview Participants

	Generation & Gender	Experience	Role & Industry	Focus
Interview Partner A: 22.09.2024 – 17:00 (UTC+01:00)	Gen Z (2001), female	1 year	Consulting – Analyst for the finance sector, current client has 85.000 employees	Onboarding and first full-time position in a new city
Interview Partner B: 25.09.2024 – 16:00 (UTC+01:00)	Gen Z (1999), male	10 years	Energy Supplier – Coordinates 90.000 km long electricity grid	Challenge of balancing a full-time position and a master study
Interview Partner C: 26.09.2024 – 08:00 (UTC+01:00)	Millennial (1990), female	6 years	Big Four – Senior Consultant for mandate with 400 assignees	Has exhibited physical signs of stress and transition motherhood
Interview Partner D: 01.10.2024 – 13:30 (UTC+01:00)	Gen X (1980), female	14 years	Big Four – Senior Consultant for mandate with 2.000 assignees	Has experienced a state of burnout
Interview Partner E: 01.10.2024 – 18:30 (UTC+01:00)	Baby Boomer (1964), male	35 years	Automotive Industry – Vice president for controlling with turnover of €1.5 billion	- View as a leading manager of 100 employees - Working 100% in-office
Interview Partner F: 02.10.2024 – 11:30 (UTC+01:00)	Gen Z (1997), female	1 ½ years	Software developer – Junior in sales	Working in big company that is fully remote
Interview Partner G: 02.10.2024 – 16:00 (UTC+01:00)	Gen Z (1996), female	2 years	Consulting Analyst for the tech sector	Working in high-stress environment
Interview Partner H: 03.10.2024 – 11:00 (UTC+01:00)	Millennial (1995), male	8 years	Automotive industry – Assistant to vice president of purchasing	Working in a role that's entirely dependent on boss
Interview Partner I: 07.10.2024 – 07:00 (UTC+01:00)	Millennial (1987), female	12 years	Big Four	Managing team from distance

Appendix 2: Overview of Recommendations for Corporations

Problem	Explanation and Relevance	Recommendation
Isolation and lack of team culture	Incorporated into the organizational structure of corporations, the team culture is often lacking due to several factors, including the high level of competition in the market. Considering the significant increase in remote work arrangements, the interview participants frequently reported feelings of loneliness. Given that isolation can result in depersonalization and diminished motivation, it is imperative that companies address this issue. Furthermore, a lack of team culture may also give rise to bullying.	• Companies should facilitate virtual social interactions, such as team challenges, where employees for example are competing to accumulate the greatest number of active minutes as a team. • Introduce scheduled check-ins with managers allocating 10 minutes each week to conduct a check-up on each direct team member. One potential solution is to assign a blocker with each team member's name. • Transitioning from a fully remote work environment to a hybrid work culture, to enhance the team culture and increase contact between team members. • To enhance the development of a stronger sense of team spirit companies should introduce regular in-person gatherings, such as a bimonthly team days or monthly breakfast rounds. • Include gratitude practices after meetings, by reserving the last five minutes of meetings for employees to share positive experiences or achievements. • Enable virtual shadowing and role swaps to facilitate empathy building. This can be achieved by allowing employees to observe the difficulties and obstacles faced by their colleagues.
Ineffective wellness offerings	Within corporations numerous coping mechanisms already exist. However, the issue lies in the types of offering themselves, as well as the lack of individualization and inefficiency in the communication of these measures.	• Develop a mobile wellness app that consolidates and presents all available offerings. • Create an Interactive wellness dashboard on the intranet. This should display information on the range of organizational offerings, participation rates in programs, and feedback from employees to reduce stigma. • Integrate AI-driven tools into the communication systems in order to create recommendations based on factors such as job role, reported hours, age, and user preference. • On a rotational basis, each team should select a “wellness advocate”. The designated individual would be responsible

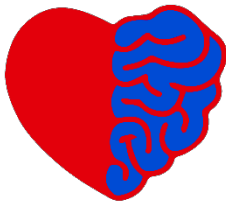
		for sending notifications regarding existing offerings, emphasizing personal preferences, and soliciting feedback on potential improvements. • Introducing an employee-driven wellness wish list to align demands with organizational offerings. This empowers employees to proactively suggest or vote on preferred offers, fostering engagement in the wellness program. • A weekly overview of special activities that can be incorporated into the business schedule in order to be considered as working hours. • The participation in at least one activity or offering monthly should be made mandatory for managers. This would serve to establish a role-mode culture, one in which the well-being of employees is prioritized and in which transparency is encouraged.
Overwork and exhaustion	All of the interview participants reported experiencing elevated stress levels, with some even exhibiting indications of physical symptoms associated with stress.	• A voluntary bi-annual medical examination by a physician to assess general health and cortisol levels. • Integrate sensitization and awareness initiatives so that employees may be more aware of the signs of chronic stress and thus reduce stigma attached to it. • Implementing a survey designed to assess the prevailing mood within the organization, incorporating indicators of job satisfaction, general mood, and perceived stress levels. It is crucial that employee participation be mandatory and occur on a weekly basis to ensure compliance. In the event that any member of a manager's team identifies critical reports continuously, the automated system will issue an alert without disclosing the name or other details of the individual responsible. • Enforce non-negotiable breaks, such as a 10-minute stretch or 30-minute lunch breaks by implementing time-tracking tools and AI-powered chatbots. These tools can automatically send reminders to employees to take breaks or to stop working when their scheduled hours have been reached. • Establishing transparent parameters regarding employee accessibility to clients and within teams and instructing employees

		on the effective management of time and client expectations to negotiate deadlines and address unrealistic demands. • Employe temporary personnel or rotate junior staff members to provide support during peak times. • Introduce mandatory protected time blocks, during which employees can engage in physical activity, or other non-work-related activities. • Implement a traffic-light system to monitor and manage working hours. This system should be tied to direct measures, such as influence on the performance evaluation of the corresponding manager. In this case, the total hours worked by an employee on a specific task are also examined. Moreover, employees or teams that persistently exhibit high workloads may be assigned a personal coach to investigate the underlying causes, such as an inadequate project staffing level or an inefficient task prioritization process. • A debriefing session should be conducted either on a monthly basis or in the end of a project, depending on the tasks at hand. This session allows employees to reflect on the challenges and successes encountered during the project, and if they choose, to propose suggestions for future projects. • Introduction of “disconnect days”, on which there are no meetings and work communication, thus enabling employees to catch up and work at their own pace.
Dissatisfaction with current tasks and toxic workplace with lack of recognition	A significant number of individuals within corporations have expressed discontent with their roles, citing a lack of meaningful challenges, repetitive tasks, limited scope for decision-making, and a shift towards administrative duties due to outsourcing and automation as key sources of dissatisfaction. Toxic work environments are particularly prevalent in remote work settings, where employees may experience feelings of isolation and a lack of	• One strategy for increasing variety is to implement job rotations and cross-functional projects. This approach aligns tasks with employees' skills and preferences, thereby enhancing the diversity of their work experience. • Matching present tasks with the experience levels, skills, and capacities of employees by establishing guidelines for the requisite skill sets for specific positions. • Companies need to address the concerns surrounding task outsourcing and job security concerns in order to prevent a sense of feeling of being trapped with only administrative tasks. Consequently, it is imperative that firms undertake a continuous reassessment of the roles and

	support, including a sense of being undervalued (Brassey et al. 2022).	responsibilities of their local employees. • As the relevance of AI and automation increases, it is essential for companies to provide their employees with the necessary training and resources to ensure their comfort in leveraging these technologies, thereby preventing feelings of redundancy. • Create structured career development plans individually, with a clear path forward, thus reducing uncertainty while enhancing motivation by providing a visual representation of career progression. • Implement a system of both upward and downward feedback to enhance the effectiveness of the feedback mechanism already in place. This will allow employees to feel valued and foster a culture of open and constructive feedback. • Training managers in emotional intelligence enables them to lead empathetically, value employee contributions, demonstrate acknowledgement, and foster a sense of appreciation, recognition, and support among their employees. • The implementation of a monthly employee surveys. In many companies, this is already a quarterly practice, but these are mainly focused on entire regions, rather than individual teams. Accordingly, the surveys should be adapted to smaller teams to yield more precise insights and, consequently, more accurate data on the specific areas that require adaptation. The increased frequency would also ensure that companies can respond in a more timely and proactive manner. In the event that specific teams report low morale across multiple surveys, the corresponding management team would be required to analyze these findings and develop an improvement plan.
Stigma and lack of manager training	Companies need to implement standardized support mechanisms that enable managers to identify and address the early indications of elevated stress levels. This will foster an environment where employees feel secure in disclosing concerns or health	• Enforce standardized health coaching across all departments, to ensure that employees receive equal measures regardless of their department or manager. • Hire or train mental health coaches that provide mandatory sensitization trainings for managers with a focus on recognizing early signs of too elevated stress levels. Training conducted by the mental health coach at Bosch include role-playing

	issues.	scenarios and case studies that illustrate warning signs. Companies should make these mandatory, that managers who do not participate be considered non-compliant. • The involvement of a mental health coach can facilitate the reduction of stigma through the implementation of sensitization strategies. The implementation of mandatory training programs for non-management employees is an effective strategy for enhancing mental health awareness, normalizing conversations about mental health, and promoting the utilization of stress management techniques. • Team meetings could conclude with a brief self-assessment checklist for employees to evaluate their health priorities. This is because employees often fail to acknowledge when they are not doing well. • In addition to training managers to enhance awareness, there is a need to further educational initiatives to promote sustainable work practices. Instilling realistic expectations in managers, reinforcing the importance of regular breaks for employees, and respecting work-life boundaries are key strategies for fostering a healthy work-life balance. • Managers should also be made aware of the importance of fostering an environment in which employees feel encouraged to openly discuss and address elevated stress levels or workload challenges. Managers should serve as role models by sharing their own experiences with mental health challenges and taking mental health days, thereby demonstrating that proactive steps can be taken to maintain resilience.
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Appendix 3: Bosch - How important is your health to you?



Please rate on a scale from 1 (totally unimportant) to 10 (very important)

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10

1 totally unimportant

10 very important

What did you do for your health last week?

	Health aspect	No (0 points)	Yes (1 point)
1	Moderate movement		
2	Drunk enough (no alcohol)		
3	Healthy nutrition		
4	Slept sufficiently		
5	Took breaks		
6	Relaxed		
7	Time spent in the fresh air		
8	Pursued hobbies		
9	Time spent with pleasant people		
10	Thought optimistically		

Points: _____

Appendix 4: Daily Mood Survey

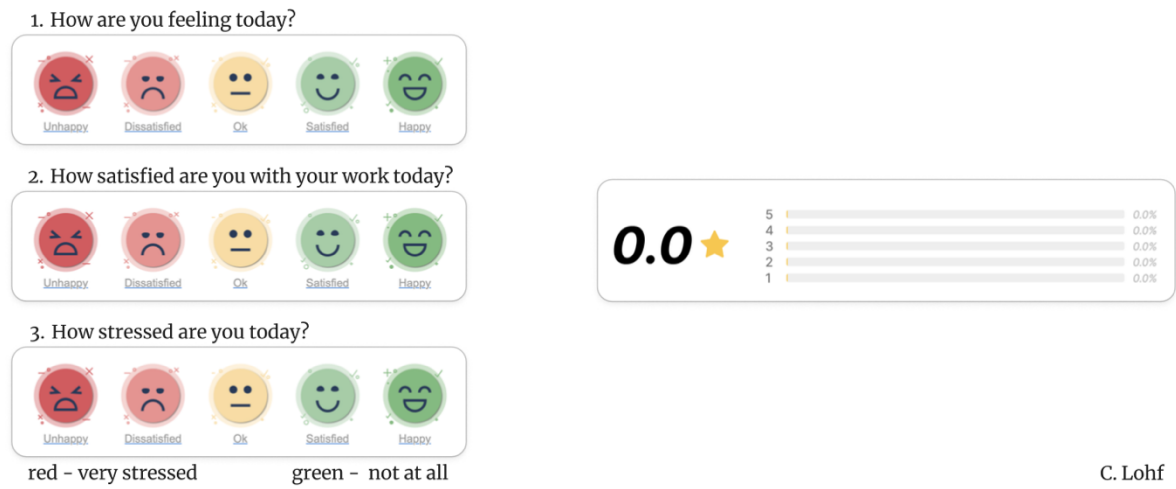


Figure 6 Example Visualization for Mood Survey

Group Part

Appendix Group Part

Appendix 5: 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: _____

Group Part

Appendix 6: 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 7: Transcript Interview Partner A

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 A: *I did my bachelor's in international business bachelor at Maastricht University, the standard business track. I was always attracted to banks and finance, and the whole relationship management consulting has so much of that side, so I wanted to keep that side. I then applied to many places and realized I could combine the banking side and consulting.*

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 does your employer determine it?

Interview Partner A: *I am working hybrid. I try to do three days a week at work and two at home. Simply because in my team, I was the only one up until last week in Frankfurt. Now, we've added two people to the team in Frankfurt. I assume it will increase because I was there four days out of five the previous week and again this week. Otherwise, it was very hybrid for the past year, and with consulting, the team is spread out wherever in Germany, Austria, or Switzerland. My employer doesn't really care where we work unless the client wants you to be there.*

2.2 Was it challenging to work remotely in the beginning for the onboarding process, or was it not difficult as you had already done an internship there?

Interview Partner A: *With the internship, I worked five days a week from the office, but that was also difficult. The onboarding was in January, but because I started mid-month, it wasn't the complete onboarding. My company did remote onboarding and only started physical onboarding in March 2024, so shortly after. I can understand why they did it remotely, as we were 300 people starting with the company across Austria, Switzerland, and Germany. It was difficult because you hear so much about this company and many great things about it as a new full-time employee. I was hoping for a bit more of events. It was difficult because I had a whole week of onboarding online, and then I was expected to come to work on Monday. I felt very much like a stranger. I think that, honestly, the onboarding week was quite difficult. But it's okay, I've recovered.*

3. What aspects of your job do you find the most fulfilling? What factors do you find the least fulfilling? Characterize your work environment (for example, do you work mostly alone or in a team). You mentioned initially that you barely see your colleagues, so I imagine you don't really know them.

Interview Partner A: *Now I kind of know my colleagues, but at the beginning, no, not at all, that was difficult. I would say the most fulfilling part of the job is that I love what we do with our projects. Our tasks and outcomes with our client are crazy, super interesting, and fulfilling because we are working on a project and see it going live directly in the bank. I have already*

Group Part

spent ten months with that specific client, which is highly fulfilling because we see directly all the hours we put into something. The least fulfilling is that all these people are remote. We spend many hours working on stuff and being on calls, and then eventually, we see each other like every three months for like an onsite workshop at the client with mainly client people, and then you feel like these people are absolute strangers even though you've spent so many hours per week with them. I think that's not fulfilling, honestly. I think it's annoying that you spend so much time as a consultant with your clients but only see them every three months. As a consultant, you're investing so much time into another company, and you're nearly feeling like you're part of that company. The line between who you work for is very small sometimes, which is also unfulfilling. I think company-wise, the work environment is fantastic. Everyone on the team is highly supportive. I think that's unmatched from all the other internships I've been doing, but with all of this remote working, it's difficult sometimes at the end of one call, you're going to have like two to three minutes of maybe like chit chat, but like you're not really building another type of connection with them because you always notice their time crunch.

4.1 How would you assess your work-life balance in a remote working environment? Are you satisfied with your current working conditions, the team you are working with, your supervisors?

Interview Partner A: *It's very difficult to stop, and that's why it's much better when I'm in the office. When I'm home, I think even lunch break is impossible. There's just one wall between my work computer and where I could chill. So I think it's very difficult. If I am in the office, I must take a lunch break with my colleagues and stop for at least 30 minutes. But at home, it's very difficult. At 6:00 to 7:00 p.m., 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. And then the work phone, I think that's the unhealthiest thing that exists. We have to be reachable in any case, but this is the unhealthiest part of remote working.*

4.2 Would you say you have found your work-life balance?

Interview Partner A: *I think no. It's been very difficult because the work itself has also been extremely intense, with many overtime hours. I have not found the time to do sports or that sort of thing in the evening, so I go in the morning because no one is annoying me with tasks. I think it is very difficult to find a work-life balance because at the office, you're bound to work hours with everyone leaving, and then you think you should do the same. At home, though, no one tells me it's 6:00 p.m. Let's go home. I must say I'm not yet in the perfect balance.*

Part 2: Stress, Burnout, and Coping Mechanisms

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

Interview Partner A: *Yes, I'm definitely exhausted. I must say I've had a very difficult summer. I honestly felt my body was exhausted. I usually never get sick, but I got sick, which was exhausting. I came to a point where I said, "This is too much; I need to calm down."*

5.2 Is that the moment you started to do sports in the morning to find a balance?

Interview Partner A: *No, I always did sports in the morning, but at that time, it was impossible.*

Group Part

I didn't have the energy. I couldn't, so I was getting as much sleep as I could, and so I wasn't able to do sports. It was too early in the morning to do sports, which I think I should have because then my body would have stayed quite strong, and I would not have gotten sick. So, that was the first time I felt really exhausted from work, and it was horrible.

5.3 Have you ever experienced feelings of detachment from work or a decline in professional efficacy?

I never felt detached from my work because I love what I do. That's why in the evening, I'm just like, "Oh, I can still do this," and then I just go on. I need to set boundaries, which I'm trying to learn. I would say a decline in professional efficacy is something I'm trying to stop, and that's why I also try not to go further in the evening. I feel like we're making so many more errors, and the day after, it just takes us more time to review what I did last night at 10:00 p.m. just because we thought we could finish this. Ultimately, we made so many mistakes that we had to redo it. Late in the evening, however, I see the work declining, which leads to a higher level of exhaustion. It doesn't even help either way; it's a vicious cycle.

6.1 How often do you feel stressed at work, and what are the primary sources of stress?

Interview Partner A: *I see a huge difference between working from the office and home. I think the main source of stress, however, is the client. It's not even my boss or team, but the client expects stuff within the hour. When I'm in the office, I feel like, oh, it's okay; I can do this within the hour, whereas when I'm home, I feel like I have so many distractions, and I'm like, oh, I'm home; I have time; I have the whole day. I rearrange my table so many times, which is just not helping with my stress. I would say at work, it's manageable. I would honestly say it's maybe at least 2 to 3 times a week that there is stress, but it has phases of stress. There can be pressure or actual stress. I would say actually stressing out is not that often. It's just like constant pressure with adrenaline to do it. I think the client and working remotely are the triggers that I have.*

6.2 Do you have a busy season, or does it depend on the mandates?

Interview Partner A: *We are working on a project with the clients and the management board. So it's all CEO, COO, and like the MD level, and we're with them indefinitely. So unless I say I want to change clients, it's the client that has new things to change every single hour on different things, and we're doing a whole process improvement for the bank, and they're insane. They think we're there all weekend, all week, constantly. The supervisors try to take on so much already, like weekends. For example, they work with them on weekends, and they don't want any of us juniors at all because they're about to be MDs and are high up. They say this is not normal for you to do. You're really not going to touch anything on the weekend, which is good but also super unhealthy for them. But yeah, they try to support you as best as possible.*

6.3 Would you say your stress level has increased during your almost nine months in the full-time position?

Interview Partner A: *The probation period was very stressful because, at the same time, you're trying to perform and do the work but still perform. We were then a team of two, my boss and I, and that was very stressful until I had the exhaustion like 3-4 weeks ago and had to take a bit*

Group Part

of time off. At that time, my boss managed to add two more people. So that was great. Now we're increasing the team, and that's also why I'm more in the office to fully onboard them so that they can take over some of my work as well because it's too much. I am trying to give them what I didn't get. I think we're going in the right direction. Honestly, this week was much better already.

7. Do you feel your organization provides sufficient resources to support your work (e.g., technology, emotional support, training)?

Interview Partner A: *At our company, we always have a project manager and a people manager, and both have been extremely caring and checking that I was doing fine. I must say that at the same time, I lost two people in my family, so it was extreme. It was way too much. So they really tried to provide support in any way they could. The company also offers many different types of training, including people development training, and that's also something that they offer. So I think they were extremely supportive, and they knew that it was work, but they also knew that it was like a personal side with the family. They even had to talk with the client, saying that it was too much and that they would lose me if they didn't meet their expectations. I think that's supportive of a company doing it with their client because you're risking something with them. I think that's extremely supportive, and I don't think many would have. Many would have easily switched me out as an analyst and taken someone else, but no, they really cared, and the client took it very well, so they've calmed down a bit.*

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

Interview Partner A: *Still trying to find a coping mechanism. I'll work on it.*

Part 3: Organizational Support and Future Outlook

9. Do you feel your organization is aware of and responsive to employees' stress and potential burnout? If yes, what measures are in place to support employees? (e.g., flexible schedules, mental health days, communication protocols.) Besides talking to the client, do you think there's anything else you wish to be introduced?

Interview Partner A: *I think that's very difficult for me at work. I know the company wants to add more people to the teams and help with all the work. The issue is with the client, who sometimes doesn't have the budget to have bigger teams but still has the same ambition with projects. I feel like my company is trying as best as they can to help us with their staffing. They're even staffing unstaffed people on our teams without charging the client to help us. I think they know many burnout cases and how that can happen. But then I don't know how much they can change or help because, in the end, the clients are always messing it up. My company can be as aware as possible and offer many things, but the client isn't listening. So, to answer that question, I wouldn't know because the company has so many things that are so supportive, like many training offerings or mental health days that you take if you're not feeling well. When I had to choose which contract I would take in January with other consultancies as well, in the three interview rounds that I had with them, I already felt extremely supported and listened to. I connected well with the managers I spoke to during the interviews, and I don't*

Group Part

think all consultancies have that.

10. How do you think the remote work environment affects your overall stress levels compared to working in the office? Could you go to the office five days a week alone? Would that change something?

Interview Partner A: *I would love and enjoy that. In the office, it's sometimes very loud with too much chit-chat, and I just really must focus and do my stuff. So I don't always sit where all my friends and colleagues are and then just meet them at lunch.*

I think I will start increasing my days going to the office except for Fridays, but add Mondays and go four days because Mondays are stressful, which just starts my week's stress. I think I need to stop doing that and start going to the office. Honestly, I'm more efficient at work and feel I have control. So, I want to increase my office days despite my long commute. I work about 40 minutes outside Frankfurt, which is quite annoying; that's why I come home at dinner, between 6:00 and 7:00, and then continue from here because I don't want to get stuck in traffic. While the commute is annoying, I feel like it's worth it. I like getting ready in the morning, leaving, and then awake. I have already walked to the train and can really wake up.

11. Do you anticipate your current stress or job satisfaction level will change in the next five or ten years? Why or why not?

Skipped because the interviewee mentioned several times that it's not the company that needs to fix things, but the client.

Part 4: Job and Career Reflection

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

Interview Partner A: *I think my answer would be the same as to question nine, to be honest. Maybe changes to my role itself. In my project, it was me as an analyst and then my senior manager, and between us, there is such a huge gap, so I got so much responsibility. In contrast, I'm currently a baby in the work-life and have barely any experience. So, I think they give me too much responsibility when they're in small teams and forget that I am just an analyst. I like their trust, but I think there are some things that I should not oversee and shouldn't be requested to do. It's a good learning curve, but I think it's a bit too steep for an analyst, and that's mainly part of my stress. They hold me responsible for products that are going live in the bank for the client within six months, and then I lead an entire team, and I'm like, hello, I'm 23. I think that they should maybe rearrange their responsibilities throughout their roles. But the company practices seriously, and for that, I must again say I am very grateful.*

13.1 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 A: *Yes, I still would, honestly, because, like I also said in question twelve, the amount of responsibility I've received, I learned so much, and I think how much I've learned just with this company in soon to be ten months I think it's insane, and that's the most rewarding thing I've had. Also, the number of training and certifications that I've already done throughout*

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those nine months, even when I was in my probation period, I think it's really recommended for someone even just with a bachelor's because I prefer just directly to work and not do a master's. I think how much we learn just by directly working is extremely valuable. So I would still recommend it and also still remote, honestly. I would try to find ways to move into hybrid, at least. I would do this job for maybe three to five years, but then I would not go beyond that. I think I would not last that much longer, to be honest, because I think after I want a family and all these things, I don't think that's the right way to do it, but I still would recommend it for now.

13.2 Do you think that it also has like do you think it would change when you would work in a different country? Do you think that would make a difference?

Interview Partner A: *I think country-wise, it doesn't change. I really think the difference is what your projects are about because in financial services, where I am, there are other people with other clients. They are sometimes living the good life 9 to 5, just chilling, and I really think it's just who your client is going to be and the type of project you're on because I also plan to be moving out of Germany, but I expect to have the same work disaster.*

13.3 Will you stay in the same department, switch locations, and work remotely from that country?

Interview Partner A: *Yeah, that is something that I'm currently working on. Initially, I would want to stay in Germany and then go back to Switzerland and be closer to my family again. I would be open to continuing to work remotely if I could be closer to my family.*

Appendix 8: Transcript Interview Partner B

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 B: *First, I did a technical apprenticeship as an electronics technician in Germany. I then did a dual bachelor's degree in electrical engineering at the same company. After my bachelor's, I took up a full-time position as a planning engineer for energy supply networks and completed my master's degree in hydrogen technology part-time. I am still working as a planning engineer for an energy supplier.*

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 does your employer determine it?

Interview Partner B: *I work in the office and at home, and usually, I work three days a week in the office and two days at home. I chose this by myself, and I can adjust it independently to suit me. I really appreciate the opportunity to talk to colleagues in the office in person. However, when there are tasks that require a high level of concentration, I am also very happy to be able to work from home. So, in the end, I'm happy with the combination of both.*

3.1 What aspects of your job do you find the most fulfilling? Do you like to work in a team or alone more?

Interview Partner B: *I mainly work alone on projects that fall within my responsibility. So I don't mind working alone. While I miss the exchanges with my colleagues, I see the benefits of working alone while working on projects in silence. Seeing when a project works out, and the customer is happy with the result is most fulfilling.*

3.2 What aspects do you find the least fulfilling?

Interview Partner B: *Right now, I can't think of anything that's super unfulfilling, but sometimes I feel like the task's repeat. I feel like the processes are always the same, without much room for new ideas or innovations.*

3.3 Have you always found your tasks to be the same, or did this perception change over time?

Interview Partner B: *I think it changed and increased with time and will now be even more complex with the end of my studies.*

4.1 How would you assess your work-life balance in a remote working environment? Are you satisfied with your current working conditions, the team you are working with, your supervisors?

Interview Partner B: *Yeah. Now, I'm happy with my work-life balance because of the freedom and flexibility, and I can set my working hours however I like. My supervisor is very supportive and has been very understanding when I have to balance my studies and job.*

4.2. Do you have a lot of exchanges with your team?

Interview Partner B: *I'm also really happy with my team. After COVID settled but we remained mainly working remotely, my boss introduced our team to a "Team Day" each month, as some don't work from the office at all. For example, we went on bike tours or had overnight workshops near Lake Constance, during which we did a mixture of training sessions and free time to get together. So I think I'm really lucky with that level of teamwork and support from my boss.*

4.3 Do you have a routine for shutting down your laptop, or do you find it difficult to disconnect from your work completely?

Interview Partner B: *Oh yes, I think I know how to turn off because I like to play soccer, and I think that helps a lot to play soccer after a hard day. As I don't want to miss the practice, I'm often forced to turn off my laptop, completely shut down, and only concentrate on my soccer team.*

Part 2: Stress, Burnout, and Coping Mechanisms

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

Interview Partner B: *Yes, of course. There have been a lot of times when I felt exhausted, particularly when trying to balance my full-time job and my part-time master's program. When I had exams, for example, the workload was a bit overwhelming at times, and I felt like I was constantly running from one thing to the next. After exam season, my adrenaline fell off, and I was often sick immediately afterward. But I would also like to thank my supervisor and my friends and family for being so supportive, which helped me manage the combined heavy workload more effectively.*

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

Interview Partner B: *I feel stressed from time to time, mostly when the deadlines at work and my studies overlap. The main source of stress, I think, is not from my day-to-day tasks but rather when something unexpected happens, or colleagues are out, or something like that.*

6.2 Do unexpected things and, thereby more stress happen a lot?

Interview Partner B: *I would say it only happens occasionally, but it is not regularly.*

7.1 Do you feel your organization provides sufficient resources to support your work (e.g., technology, emotional support, training)?

Interview Partner B: *Oh yes, I think I get all the necessary technological equipment. I have to admit that besides the mandatory training, I haven't used any other training offers. I don't know what my company is additionally offering. I guess it's good that when it's important, the training is mandatory, and training for the job is mainly held during an onsite workshop. So everyone listens. The support I received during my bachelor's and master's studies was huge.*

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

Interview Partner B: *Sport helps me best to reduce stress and disconnect from work. I also like*

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to distract myself by going for a walk, meeting some friends, or talking to my family.

8.2 Do you have regular training sessions? How often do you practice?

Interview Partner B: *Yes, I have regular training sessions three times per week. On the weekend, we usually have a soccer match. So yeah, three to four times a week, I would say.*

8.3 Have you had to skip practice because of work?

Interview Partner B: *Yes, but more because of my master's degree. But that is, I think, in combination with my work because when I have to work long hours, I have to study for my master's degree after, and the day only has 24 hours, and sometimes I just need more.*

Part 3: Organizational Support and Future Outlook

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

Interview Partner B: *I have worked in different departments at my current firm. Therefore, I think the awareness depends on the specific manager because they have their way of helping people. But I think the company is also aware and has a lot of measures to try to help us employees. For instance, we have regular surveys focused on employees and mental health, which help to monitor well-being and gather feedback. Additionally, there is a yearly mental health awareness day to raise awareness and encourage open conversations around mental health. I think for me, the flexible working hours are also a significant support mechanism, allowing me to take the time I need to manage my workload and well-being effectively*

10. How do you think the remote work environment affects your overall stress levels compared to working in an office? Are you more stressed when you work remotely at the end of the day?

Interview Partner B: *I am convinced that working from home reduces my stress level because I can do what I want without anyone disturbing me. But I think this is a very individual thing, as I work best by myself and needed this flexibility in the last years for my master's. I know that many in my team always complain about feeling isolated, but it hasn't occurred to me. I guess this is also because at home, I always eat lunch with my roommates, for example, and therefore, I'm forced to take a break even when working from home. My company has adopted the idea that from our working hours, the regular breaks get deducted whether we take them or not, therefore forcing the employees to really take the breaks, even when working from home.*

11. Do you anticipate your current stress or job satisfaction level will change in the next five or ten years? Why or why not?

Interview Partner B: *I think there will be a change in stress levels and job satisfaction as I want to develop personally since I'm not studying simultaneously, so my focus will be more on my job. I think that the earlier mentioned feeling of similar tasks might be more present and lead to boredom at times.*

Part 4: Job and Career Reflection

12. What changes could be made to your role or company practices that would benefit

professionals, especially in managing stress and avoiding burnout?

Interview Partner B: *I think they are already offering a lot for their employees' well-being. Maybe trying to create more variety with the task to constantly present new challenges to ensure people aren't feeling stuck or dissatisfied. I feel like some of my colleagues are happy with the fixed structure and repeating tasks, but I don't know if that's enough for me forever. It was perfect during my studies, but let's see how that change changes now that my focus can be 100% work.*

13. 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 B: *I would definitely recommend this job, especially for those looking to have time outside of work. Like in my case, studying, the flexibility, and the freedom offered here at my current firm allows you to maintain a strong work-life balance. The wide range of autonomy will enable you to manage your time effectively and make it easier to take on more in your personal life, like pursuing a degree. I think it's an excellent environment for personal development and growth while handling multiple responsibilities, and my company and supervisor are really understanding.*

14. When preparing for this interview, I read some forms that your company offers internal coaches, which guide you along the way in case you ever feel stressed out or have burnout. Is that true? Have you heard of that?

Interview Partner B: *Yes, it's true. I heard of that but never needed them yet.*

Appendix 9: Transcript Interview Partner C

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 C: *I arrived in Germany at the age of nine. In our country, Kosovo, there was a war in 1999. I was enrolled in the 3rd grade in July and had to attend the 4th grade in September. After finishing school, I studied economics and lived abroad in New York for a year. Following my studies, I started working at this firm directly.*

1.2 How long have you worked for this company?

Interview Partner C: *I have been working there for six years.*

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 does your employer determine it?

Interview Partner C: *We agree to one weekly team day within my department. On this day, everybody is supposed to come to work from the office. I recently moved with my family away, and due to the long commute to work and having a small child at home, I can only go once a month, and the rest of the time, I work remotely.*

2.2 Is your employee okay with you only working from the office once a week?

Interview Partner C: *Yeah, sure. I had the flexibility to choose this.*

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

Interview Partner C: *The most fulfilling part of my job was working with a team and having face-to-face meetings with our clients. I enjoy the exchange with clients and even the harder tasks as I feel I am learning something. Being part of a team and having a lot of exchanges is something I appreciate. But since COVID and my parental leave, this has changed. I have also felt less connected to my work and colleagues. While I really love working remotely, and I'm grateful for the opportunities and time it gives me with my son, I feel like the personal exchange has really suffered. After coming back, I haven't even talked to many of my colleagues, and before this time, we used to laugh a lot together and have private interactions. Unfortunately, this is only the experience with a few colleagues. Also, I have a feeling of pressure and expectations that haven't been adjusted to my new working hours.*

3.2 Do you still have the same workload even though you work less?

Interview Partner C: *Yes, unfortunately.*

4. How would you assess your work-life balance in a remote working environment? Are you satisfied with your current working conditions, the team you are working with, your supervisors?

Interview Partner C: *Now that I am a mother, my priorities have changed a lot, which is why I really appreciate the flexibility of working remotely. I can manage my time better by working in the morning, picking up my son, and continuing to work when he's taking his nap. I guess that is also the good part because, without him, I don't know if I would manage to stop working and disconnect from work. Before I had my son, I felt like I was always online. If it weren't for the ability to work remotely, I would probably have to look for a different job. I am really grateful to my employer for the support with adjustments to my working hours. The autonomy I have helps me balance. My responsibility and the flexibility the company offers is something I value highly, even if the work balance isn't perfect. Overall, I am still mostly satisfied with my current working conditions. While I am sad that with some of my team members I am only in contact with when I or they have a specific question, I'm still happy and satisfied as I completely love my role as a mom, and the job I have, lets me go after that in the best possible way. I guess I also changed that perspective, though, since before I had my son, I often worked until late in the evening and didn't turn off my laptop until every task was completed, even if things could have waited.*

Part 2: Stress, Burnout, and Coping Mechanisms

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

Interview Partner C: *Sure. Unfortunately, I feel stressed quite often, maybe when I am now thinking about it, every day. A big part of that stress comes from balancing my reduced working hours with the same exceptions in place when I was working full-time. It feels like there's never enough time to get everything done, and I am constantly playing catch-up, which creates a lot of anxiety. I also feel a lot of pressure to perform at the same level as when working full-time, even though I work 30% fewer hours. I wouldn't say that my performance has declined. I have learned to accept that I can't do as much as I did when I worked full-time.*

6. How often do you feel stressed at work, and what are the main sources of stress?

Interview Partner C: *I guess it's hard to say since I don't take notes on it that actively, but I would think multiple times a day. There are times of the year when this varies depending on how close we are to the busy season. For me, the main sources are probably the combination of the tight deadlines and the pressure from my supervisors, and I specially created myself to deliver high-quality work. It often feels like something urgent needs to be done, making it hard to fully focus or prioritize tasks effectively. Especially in the weeks before important closings, the pressure is high. I don't think the workload changes when working remotely, but since the personal exchange is sometimes missing, people don't notice when a colleague has too much to do. The willingness to help others has also declined, in my opinion.*

7.1 Do you feel your organization provides sufficient resources to support your work (e.g., technology, emotional support, training)?

Interview Partner C: *What I really love about working for such a big firm is that we have so much support with all the necessary tools. I have received all the necessary technological supplies, like a second screen or cheaper access to adjustable desks. Whenever I have questions or IT problems, I can just call IT 24 hours a day and receive help. I have heard that there are*

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a lot of offerings for well-being, but I have never used any of these and honestly don't really know where to find details on them. While my firm offers many training possibilities, like online info sessions on specific topics, depending on the workload, it's hard to participate in those.

7.2 If you would know where to find details on, for example, emotional support or further training opportunities, do you think that you would take them?

Interview Partner C: *I think I would use it, yes. If it helps, yeah.*

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

Interview Partner C: *My quality time with my family. Before my son was born, I tried different things like yoga and cooking since cooking has always been a passion of mine as my father owns a restaurant. But none of these things really motivated me to get up from behind my laptop like my son and family do.*

Part 3: Organizational Support and Future Outlook

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

Interview Partner C: *My employer is, I think, aware of the high workload due to the industry we work in and is probably offering stuff, but I honestly don't know what. I guess I noticed the great support with my working part-time. One example that shows flexibility in the working hours is that when daycare is closed, I can arrange my working hours according to how I like them, so I work during his nap times and otherwise can take flex time.*

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

Interview Partner C: *I think overall, working remotely has reduced my stress level a bit since I save a lot of time with my commuting and don't have to worry that much if the daycare will call and tell me my son is sick or something else since if that happens, I can just pick him up and continue to work. That would be different in the office, but I think it affects my, I guess you could call it, mental state as I really miss working with my colleagues and going to lunch with them.*

11. Do you anticipate your current stress or job satisfaction level will change in the next five or ten years? Why or why not?

Interview Partner C: *Not sure. I think it will remain somewhat similar since, in my job, we work very closely in accordance with the regulations of our mandate and their deadlines, and so, at least considering the stress, that won't really change. However, that may change depending on my future family. For example, if we have a second child since we are trying to have one. I am also kind of scared of how much of my task will be outsourced. So that's something that I think about a lot.*

Part 4: Job and Career Reflection

12. What changes could be made to your role or company practices that would benefit

professionals, especially in managing stress and avoiding burnout?

Interview Partner C: *I would expect more gratitude from our managers, such as a thank you or compliment. That motivates me greatly and lets me know that my management appreciates my performance. For example, in August, I covered for all my colleagues who were on vacation. That one week was the hardest week I'd had at my company. Because of the stress, I even had a sudden hearing loss and had to see a doctor. I have completed so much work and have not once received a thank you from our management. And I believe that our management is not compatible with leading personnel. They are simply not trained in that area. Of course, a promotion and corresponding salary increase should not be missing. If that continues to be lacking, I don't care about anything else and will look for another offer. From the side, I need to learn how not to work overtime. I must come to terms with the fact that I cannot complete the work assigned to me within six hours.*

13. 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 C: *All in all, I think it depends on what you are looking for and at what personal stage of your life you are in. With all the flexibility, I am satisfied overall and would recommend the industry. Especially given that my husband works in a different industry and when talking to him, I notice that while there are slight differences, most of the aspects are very similar, so to be honest, when working in such a big firm, I don't think the differences aren't too big. Maybe one more thing in this case: this work is what we are doing, so you can also use taxes in your private life. That's also a reason why I am working there as well.*

14. Do your managers know that your KPIs have not been adjusted to reflect your reduced hours?

Interview Partner C: *Yes, they know, but they can't change anything about that since those are the client's demands and are needed for promotions.*

Appendix 10: Transcript Interview Partner D

Part 1: Professional Background and Remote Work Environment

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

Interview Partner D: *I did an apprenticeship for three years in taxes and then started studying tax auditing, but for health reasons, so if we're already talking about burnout and such, I couldn't do it anymore, and then I decided to finish my studies because I was absolutely not feeling well at the time. I was in a medium-sized company when I did my training with a small tax consultant, and I learned a lot there. I was then in a medium-sized company for my bachelor's degree. When I finished that, I started looking for a job. I had a job offer from a small tax consultant, and while I was accepting that, I also got a job offer from my company. Then, I decided to join the company here, and I've been there ever since. I started at the company as a Junior Text Consultant, and then I've basically gone through all the stages from Consultant to Senior Consultant.*

2.1 How would you describe your working situation (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 does your employer determine it? Do you have time to pursue hobbies?

Interview Partner D: *I work hybrid, so I am part-time, work three days a week, and go to the office once a week. The decision came from the employer, so after the coronavirus pandemic, it was said that the wish was for you to come to the office once a week. I stick to that. I like going to the office because I appreciate the exchanges with colleagues, and I have the feeling that you learn a lot when you can just briefly exchange things like that. And the inhibition threshold to just ask is simply lower in the office. Some colleagues perhaps don't like to talk with you that much, and I find it quite pleasant to just go to them. I find the exchange important, so I like going to the office, even if it's just for lunch. I come from a different working generation, where it was always like working together with colleagues and going to the office. Therefore, it's not too difficult for me, and as I said, I like going to the office, and the other two days, I work from home.*

2.2 Does everyone stick to that once-a-week regulation, or do some go to the office less?

Interview Partner D: *So, I would say the majority in our office doesn't really stick to coming to the office, even though it's the guideline and a desired one from the employer. Of course, some people are always there. Still, unfortunately, my colleagues from the management level also don't show up in the office, so I can imagine that others then say, well, if a manager isn't coming to the office, why should I do it? And so, I would answer the question with no, not everyone definitely follows the employer's guidelines.*

2.3 I imagine it must be frustrating when only a few people comply, or what do you think?

Interview Partner D: *Definitely, it is frustrating because, as I said, especially when you're part-time and then take the time to get up an hour earlier and go to the office just to see your colleagues because you hope that there will simply be an exchange and maybe talk about*

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difficult issues or generally about how the team is doing, which in my eyes is very important. It all just gets lost, and when you're sitting alone in the office, you start to wonder at some point, why am I actually doing this? Why am I putting myself through this stress? Meanwhile, the others, who perhaps work the whole day and for whom it would be worth it to come to the office, don't show 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.

Interview Partner D: *What fulfills me? So, it fulfills me when I can simply complete my tasks within my rank or my area of responsibility and how I want to. Unfortunately, it's not always possible at the moment because something always comes up either due to staff shortages or overwork. We constantly have to do something else or take over something for someone else. I find that very frustrating because then, of course, my daily tasks, or the tasks that I should be doing, simply get left behind, and I then have to add them on, which, with my limited working hours, is always very difficult. This leads to me staying at work longer than I should, which often becomes difficult because I have my kids there, which frustrates me a lot. As I said, when I have days where I can get everything done the way I want, I find the work very fulfilling, and then I enjoy it. I also like working alone, so when I'm completing my tasks, I often say I need silence. Still, I must admit, I also really enjoy working in a team, so I appreciate it when people help each other, exchange ideas, one person helps the other. However, I currently have the feeling that it's not so much desired in my team since the majority prefer to just work on their own. Yes, it's sometimes very, very depressing. And sometimes, I feel like I'm a bit isolated, both in my tasks and work. So, when you're focused and have something to complete, I don't mind it because you just work through it, but you're not a machine. I mean, maybe that works for a day or two, and then you work through the stuff, but I think the social contact and social aspect is somewhat lost when working from home.*

4.1 Are you satisfied with your current working conditions, the team you are working with, and your supervisors?

Interview Partner D: *The question is interesting because I've asked myself that quite often, too: am I actually happy with what I'm doing? So, I think deep down I am happy, and that's why I've been with the company for so long. In that sense, because of my part-time work at my current employer, I have a lot of freedom, so I was able to organize my working hours freely. No one said anything or gave me a requirement about which day I have to work and for how many hours, so I would say that is a very positive aspect, especially when working part-time.*

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

Interview Partner D: *The question is difficult because when I was in the office, I had to leave, yes, so this might be a bit different for someone who works full-time because, at home, they can probably take some free time in between. For me, it didn't matter whether I was in the office or working remotely, I just had to work my hours, and then the other part of my life begins. What, of course, is easier for me when working remotely is to balance the work-life balance a bit is that I can still say, okay, I have to work my six hours, but whether I start at eight or nine doesn't matter, I'll just add the extra hour at the end, as long as my private life allows it. So, yes, the*

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work-life balance is a bit more given for me with remote working. But for me now, there is no big difference whether I go to the office or work from home, because I simply have to stop after those six hours because of my family.

Part 2: Stress, Burnout, and Coping Mechanisms

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

Interview Partner D: *So I can definitely answer the first question with yes, and it wasn't that long ago. Two years ago, I noticed it for the first time: yes, I was exhausted. At first, I didn't want to acknowledge the signs. It started with me having difficulty concentrating. I noticed that I couldn't focus properly when I had too many tasks. Suddenly, it was just a mountain of tasks, and I was sitting there, not knowing what to do first. While I was working on one task, my thoughts were already on the next one. I noticed I was losing focus, which I didn't have before. Before, I could complete one task and then move on to the next. But I started to ignore things like that and thought, that's just how it is. Then, of course, you get into a kind of stress because you're somehow falling behind because you're not as efficient as before. At least, that's how it felt for me. Eventually, it turned into physical symptoms. At some point, you can't sleep anymore, and you're very irritable when you can't sleep. And if you continue not listening to your body, for me, it eventually started with feeling unmotivated. I didn't want to do anything anymore, even simple things like getting up in the morning and brushing my teeth or getting dressed. That's how it continued. Everything just became exhausting; the whole life felt exhausting, taking care of the kids and making food. Every single activity became exhausting, and eventually, it got to the point where I was just sitting there crying, staring at my laptop, not knowing what to do anymore. And that's when my husband pulled the emergency brake and dragged me to the doctor. So that's how it was for me, how it manifested, or how it started, yes. I am lucky with my husband and that he especially had an eye for it and saw it. I am very, very grateful to him for that. As I mentioned earlier, I've experienced this before during my studies. But I think this time I kind of noticed the signs, but I think I deliberately ignored them, I'd say. I don't know. I just thought I could manage it, I could manage it, but it didn't work out. Because you asked if my work suffered from it, it didn't. Because I was already used to always giving 150% or 100%, my work didn't suffer. But I did because, of course, I put even more stress on myself, maybe worked overtime, and sat down again in the evening. I just couldn't manage within my set working hours anymore and basically went from bad to worse in trying to meet the demands of my job. That makes it even harder because then you never really have an end to the workday or a break, and your mind just doesn't draw a line and say, now I'm done for the day.*

6.1 How often do you feel stressed at work, and what are the main sources of stress?

Interview Partner D: *We discussed this, so I went to rehab afterward to recover a bit from it and simply explore the cause. How can you deal with stress? How can you avoid this happening again at work? There were a few interesting approaches, and actually, the entire five weeks I was there, it was all about mindfulness and giving yourself breaks, just taking a moment to breathe, simply recognizing when your body is telling you to stop, or even just small things, for example. They gave me the tip to, after every task that maybe took an hour or longer, just stand*

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up briefly, look out the window, treat yourself to a coffee, or take a lot of time for yourself, yes. And when I reflected on how I might have slipped into this, it was a mix of everything. During and after the pandemic, I think I neglected myself. Yes, I wasn't mindful enough of myself and was just functioning. So, I was functioning at work, functioning in my private life, and now afterward, I apply these tips with mindfulness, like taking breaks, maybe during work, and especially after work, really taking care of myself. This means pursuing hobbies and spending a lot of time in nature. This helps me a lot; for example, just going for long walks in the forest and moving in general helps a lot, as does doing a lot of sports. It doesn't have to be jogging or any particular sport, but simply getting outside, into the fresh air, and actually being mindful, really taking care of myself, clearing my mind from other things, and engaging in activities that bring me joy. That's why my answer to that would be that my trigger was definitely that I didn't take care of myself and didn't look after myself, even during stressful phases.

6.2 Do you believe that your employer is, in a certain way, partly to blame for the fact that, at some point, you stopped taking care of yourself?

Interview Partner D: *That's a difficult question to answer, I must say. I can't really answer that, but I must admit. I could imagine that maybe if we had been in the office more, someone, or perhaps a colleague who is close to you, might have noticed and maybe said, take a deep breath or slow down a bit. And there were probably colleagues who said that to me. When we talked, and I said I couldn't take it anymore, I don't know where my head is at, there were probably colleagues who said yes, then slow down or take it one step at a time. But I don't know if there was really an awareness to grasp or help with it properly. I can't really answer that question with a yes or no. I could come up with causes or hypotheses. But whether, in my specific case, my employer could have prevented it, I don't know.*

Interviewer: I've also heard quite often that, especially because you work so much from home, a big factor is that people don't really see how many tasks individuals have. So no one notices when someone has too much to do.

Interview Partner D: *Yes, definitely, because you're just sitting there and can't find an end, and you have the feeling of being a solo player, like, this is my task, so I have to finish it. So, sometimes you do feel well, not exactly abandoned, but you feel like you must do it yourself, that you can't just message others, like, no, this is my task, I have to get it done. And because of that, of course, you get even more stressed, yes.*

7. Do you feel your organization provides sufficient resources to support your work (e.g., emotional support, training)? Have you used any of the well-being offerings from your firm?

Interview Partner D: *Unfortunately, no, and I have to honestly admit, it's good that you mention it. I think it would be really interesting. I recently heard from a friend who works at another large company, and they went away for a weekend through the company. It was called a "Vital Weekend". I think something like that would be really cool, but I would hope that if it's on a weekend or something, it would be nice if it was supported by the employer. That might push some people a bit, although I think we, in our organization, can't really complain financially. I believe we are at the point where we could maybe take care of that ourselves. I think it would rather be good if more would be done within the individual departments and by the supervisors to ensure that employees do this consciously and actively. Because when it's something*

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voluntary, it means I must recognize that I need it, and then I have to actively sign up for such a thing. Of course, we also get emails like, 'We have Mental Health Weeks' and so on, and it certainly appeals to some people, but we are all so overloaded that we push it aside again. Whereas if there is something mandatory, where you might have to take care of your mental health, and if that were perhaps also considered part of work hours, I think it might help more, or even those who feel like they're just stressed, you know, where it's not yet heading towards burnout or a mental health issue. It would probably be good for them, too, just to take a breather. But I think that we are still quite far from introducing something like mandatory training or events. I would support that being implemented because, especially with remote work, many just hole themselves up and work, work, work until they collapse.

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

Interview Partner D: *Meditation helps, and there's also this quick way of coming to your sense of self. There are breathing techniques that they taught us in rehab to help briefly shift to other thoughts. For example, there's a technique that says you should just briefly turn away from the problem, simply look around the room, or maybe just go to the window and look at something nice, focusing on that to briefly project your thoughts away, just a little bit and stepping away from the problem, getting up for a moment, breathing, sitting down briefly, closing your eyes. And, of course, yoga helps me a lot. A mix of nature, yoga, and meditation helps me the most.*

Part 3: Organizational Support and Future Outlook

9. Do you feel your organization is aware of and responsive to employees' stress and potential burnout? If yes, what measures are in place to support employees? (e.g., flexible schedules, mental health days, communication protocols.) Do you think your supervisors support their team members, considering it's hard to say what the employer should do in such a large company with different departments?

Interview Partner D: *No, so I'd say not actively. I don't want to speak badly of our management or anything. When I communicated it, of course, no one said anything, but there also wasn't any response like: "How can we support you? What can we do for you?" The only bit of help that came was, "Okay, then work at your own pace," or "Let us know if you can't keep up with something." When I said for the first time that I couldn't keep up, that was the kind of support from management. But actively, like coming up with actions or other forms of support, no. I think our management simply isn't trained enough to recognize that. And I think it's also individual, so I had managers who were completely understanding or maybe had experienced it themselves. I had managers who would listen but didn't really know what to do with that information or didn't even understand that there are people who go through that.*

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

Omitted because the interviewee mentioned several times that remote working doesn't necessarily increase the stress factor but rather makes you feel a bit more isolated.

11.1 Do you anticipate your current stress or job satisfaction level will change in the next five or ten years? Why or why not?

Interview Partner D: *Given how things are going, I fear my satisfaction will decline. There are some changes that I don't like very much. I'm curious to see where it will go, but I can imagine that in the next five years, I might have to see if everything still fits the way I want it to, especially because my family situation will likely change to the point where I might be able to work more. Then I could imagine that maybe I have new goals for my career, and the way things are currently or might be developing, I don't know if I will still be satisfied with my current employer and the stress.*

11.2 Where are you afraid it might develop to? Which aspects do you think your satisfaction will decrease?

Interview Partner D: *Due to more outsourcing, our expertise will be needed less, and we will increasingly become some kind of extended arm of someone else, where we will only manage and organize ourselves to death. I am also afraid that what I have learned, or the specialization, will be required less and less and that I will only manage myself to death. That's how it is currently as well because there are other colleagues who then do the work, and I just kind of oversee it. In my department, a lot is already created automatically, so in the past, for example, we used to look at the DBA and check how it is taxed. To make the work easier, which at the same time means to become faster, bigger, stronger, and to increase our revenue, we need our automation because otherwise, we cannot fulfill our agreements our contracts, but a lot of knowledge is lost. I also think the training of the students suffers, yes, so I think that we invest much more abroad than maybe locally. I don't know if I like that, and I also feel that my knowledge suffers a bit because you eventually get used to this automation and think, ah, everything is already done. Some computers or someone has checked it, and now I just look to see if the checklist has been fulfilled. I believe this will be negative, and of course, also for our students. They will notice it eventually if they have been in another department or so, that maybe some knowledge is lost. Regarding stress, yes, I would say you can already notice that it is increasing. We have various meetings, and in every meeting, it is already communicated how far behind we are with everything. It won't get better. Yes, more and more people are missing, people become dissatisfied, they quit, and then all the automation doesn't help in the end if what still needs to be done here is done by only three people, right?*

Part 4: Job and Career Reflection

12.1 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 D: *Phew, I think that's not feasible, but no matter who I talk to, everyone says it would be nice if I could just do my job. Yes, I believe that if every rank did their own work, what they are supposed to do in the company, I think people would be more satisfied and less stressed. I think we simply have too few employees, which is partly intentional, as many positions are being cut. I think that leads to having to do too much around it and not your actual work. But how this can be concretely improved, I don't know. When you bring it up, they say, yes, we are already outsourcing work abroad, or we are getting help from other colleagues. Difficult, I actually don't know. I have sometimes thought about how we could do that. I think a big part would also be if we didn't constantly have this time pressure to get things done, but that's not possible because everything here is so dependent on revenue and bookings, deadlines,*

and the mandate.

12.2 In a conversation with someone from the same company, one possible approach was to train managers more directly, for example, in team communication or feedback mechanisms. Could you imagine something like that?

Interview Partner D: *I agree with that person. Our management is not trained in leadership. They absolutely have no training in that. I believe that there are enough employees who don't aspire to become managers. You have to want that to some extent. But yes, our management often leaves you alone. It's all well and good when management often says, sort it out among yourselves, but often it requires someone from above to say, just do it this way. I think many employees sometimes wish for that and say, you are the manager, tell us how it should be done. Then, there would probably be less trouble within the team if management simply said no, and this is how it will be done. I have to say, though, that we had something like that in our company before, and in my opinion, it worked better when the manager said, this is how it has to be done, and there was no discussion. I have the feeling that because they are not allowed to tell employees what to do, we are not allowed to say anything to them. We have to keep everything peaceful and harmonious. I believe this leads to conflicts, and people increasingly say, "It's not my problem, it's not my problem," and in the end, it's always the same person who does everything, while those who do nothing lean back even more. If management notices this, they see it, too. He always volunteers, who doesn't, and then actively says, 'Now it's your task,' you could relieve those who are already doing a lot and are stressed. So maybe this approach from that perspective.*

13. Would you recommend your role or industry to others based on your experience?

Interview Partner D: *Yes, overall, I would still choose my role as a Senior Consultant. As I said, when I really think about it, I do enjoy the work. It's just the circumstances around it that make you reconsider whether it was the right decision. When I listen around, I don't think it's due to my job description. I think every company goes through a certain transformation. We also had a big project where older employees told me they couldn't cope with this change, which was quite difficult for them. I think I'm at an age where I can handle such a transformation, but of course, I need to figure out how to deal with it. For example, I must see how I can solve this feeling of being lonely, either after work or during work hours, by seeing which colleagues I can still exchange with or who comes to the office with me. If you look at it from that perspective, but purely from the stress factor, I think it doesn't matter which company you are in within the industry. All in all, I would still choose the job. Deep down, I am satisfied. I can imagine that even in another company, if you think it's cool at first, you might realize after a few months that not everything that glitters is gold. The only thing I might consider in another life is whether it could be a job where everything doesn't have to be so time-pressured and billable. I don't like that about my job as it causes overtime and stress, which I don't think would be the case in other industries. Or at least not to that extent, I think.*

Part 5: Individual Questions:

14. You mentioned that you started your training and your professional life in a small company, right? Do you notice a difference in the structures and hierarchies of a small company compared

to the large company where you work today?

Interview Partner D: *Yes, there are differences. I have to admit, in a small company, I learned much more than I would learn in my company now. I believe that there is a lot of exchange in such a small company, and the exchange was much more intimate. You learned so much from the older colleagues. The boss was constantly present and discussed the cases with you again. So, purely from a learning perspective, I would say that I learned much more in the smaller company in terms of the basics. In terms of hierarchies, it was clearly defined. There was the boss, and we were the employees, and his word was basically the final word. We were very independent in our work, which he also demanded. We had client contact and so on, and he gave us free rein. But when it came to the signature and so on, he did discuss the case briefly with us. So we were very independent, which, of course, meant you learned a lot more and read up on things because your boss naturally expected that when he talked to you later, he wouldn't have to read up on everything, but you would present him with the finished result. This made the desire to learn, always improve, and do the work correctly very high. In the large company, I have to say, I find this globalization very nice, that you also deal with other countries and can speak English. Just in terms of IT for example, you are at a completely different level of progress. You get to know other areas that you don't have in a small company. I think in the end, you have to decide for yourself which direction you want to go. Yes, but purely to learn the basics of technical topics. I would say nothing better could have happened to me than a small company because you get the broad mass of complete expertise. It's often not possible in large companies because you're dealing with completely different topics and are very specialized.*

15. Can you remember the time after returning from the five weeks of rehab and returning to work? How did you feel, and did you have any support from the team?

Interview Partner D: *Unfortunately, I didn't know about the reintegration process, so I reduced my hours on my own. So, after being sick for so long, I didn't have any reintegration. I started again with the same number of hours I had before. However, I had already submitted a request to reduce my hours further. The team members who knew what I had been through were very considerate and told me to take it slow and settle in. But ultimately, it was more like, 'Ah, luckily, someone is back to whom we can give the work.' So, I was quickly fully loaded again."*

Appendix 11: Transcript Interview Partner E

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 E: *I studied economics in Germany in Tübingen and spent one year abroad in New York. I'm a Vice president at my firm. My role is that I am financially responsible for a business unit with a turnover of roughly 1.5 billion.*

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 does your employer determine it?

Interview Partner E: *If I'm not traveling, then I'm completely in the office. However, I change locations, so sometimes I work in this location or that location, but I do not work from home. In my company, we have an agreement that we are allowed to work from home. However, we saw after Corona that too many people currently are at home. So, at least for people in a leading position, there is now a clear indication that they should be in the office three days a week.*

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 E: *Well, first, it's very international, so the business unit's headquarters is located here in Germany. However, most of our people and turnover are abroad, especially in Asia. Due to this, we work in international teams, and my daily routine is basically that I have from 8:00 meetings till the evening. So, what do I find most fulfilling? Most fulfilling, I find that my job description is quite diverse. I would put it that way. I have a lot of different tasks, so it never gets boring. The second is that I can basically do, to a certain extent, what I want. If I want to travel, I can travel. I'm the one who can say what I have to do and what I don't have to do, and since I have a big and extremely professional team, I can also delegate a lot of topics. So, I enjoy quite some freedom in my work, and this is what satisfies me the most. Well, some aspects are not under my control, like certain directives from the headquarters, which I personally do not like that much. For example, a lot of centralization topics are ongoing in my company. These are things which I personally do not like that much.*

4.1 How would you assess your work-life balance in a remote working environment? Are you satisfied with your current working conditions, the team you are working with, your supervisors?

Interview Partner E: *Yes, basically, I'm satisfied because I have the freedom to choose. I do not have working hours. Basically, I do not have working days at all, so it's up to me when I'm working and where I'm working so I have that freedom. I have chosen to work from the office and not remotely to separate my private life from my work life so it's not mixed up. And so basically when I come home, I can basically say, you know, the job is over, and then I'm at home. This is the reason why I do not work from home.*

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4.2 How do you then notice when it's time to return home and stop working? Is this difficult for you, or do you have a structure that always says I don't know, at 7:00, you get in your car and drive home?

Interview Partner E: *Because my wife is waiting, no kidding. Yes, I've got a certain structure. Basically, as I said before, I am mainly in meetings the whole day. Those start at 8:00 and usually end around 6:00 p.m., then I do some emails that I haven't done during the day, and then I'm back home at 7:00 p.m. something. I would say pretty structured, but of course, I also can work shorter or longer, so I do have some freedom.*

4.3 Did the working hours change the higher you went up in the hierarchy?

Interview Partner E: *Yeah, sure, as long as you do not have a leading position in my company, there are rules and restrictions coming out of legal topics, as well as company internal agreements. For example, if you're not in a leading position, you're not allowed to work more than 10 hours a day, not more than 50 hours a week, something like this, and this is not valid for me because I have a different contract.*

Part 2: Stress, Burnout, and Coping Mechanisms

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

Interview Partner E: *I mean, it's a good question. I've been working basically for almost 35 years, and for sure, there were stressful situations. For example, I did the internal auditing for a Mexican location, for which I was responsible. In countries like that one, rules are not followed as they should be, and then it comes to a situation where it really becomes stressful because you do not follow processes, and there is a conflict with wasting money or security. It's getting quite severe within my company, and dissipation, of course, happened, and then you have a certain feeling of exhaustion. Of course. But in general, I would say this is the exception. From my perspective, my professional performance hasn't lacked because I do like stress to a certain extent. Stress also means that you have a lot of things to do at the same point in time, which I personally enjoy, and on the other side, I try to compensate for stress basically by practicing sports.*

6. What are the main sources of stress? Do you feel your organization provides sufficient resources to support your work (e.g., technology, emotional support, training)?

Interview Partner E: *I think stress is perceived if you cannot 100% control a situation. This might be that you get certain expectations, or you have certain expectations coming from your supervisory board, which, due to certain conditions, you cannot fulfill. So, this is stressful. Also, if you see in your organization a lack of people, so you have more tasks to do than you have people to fulfill the tasks, or this might be then it becomes stressful. I do not see a lack of things like technology in my company. I think there the support is pretty good, so you get what you need and do and get support in that regard. There are hotlines that you can call that also have training for stress and burnout. So here I would say the support is pretty good.*

7. What coping mechanisms do you use to manage stress and maintain your well-being? You mentioned that you mostly do sports to balance it out when you are stressed. Do you feel like

sometimes in the busy times of work, you do not have the time to do sports?

Interview Partner E: *Well that's why I try to practice in the morning because, as I said before, all the meetings start at 8:00/8:30, and then I can only go to sports in the early morning, which is why I do so. So normally I have the possibility to practice sports, of course not to 100%, but in general, yes, I can.*

Part 3: Organizational Support and Future Outlook

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

Interview Partner E: *I think that yes, my firm is aware and responsive with many measures in place. We have to practice, and there are some cases where you learn how to react. However, I think the bigger topic or issue is that I think it's extremely difficult for somebody to realize if there is a burnout case or if somebody is stressed or depressed. I personally also had at least one case with a quite big depression of one employee working for me in the US, where I and also the others never realized that he was in a deep depression. Yeah, so after he told me that this occurred to him, then I realized some symptoms basically retroactive, but at that moment, I didn't realize it. So, I think the biggest issue is that most of the management, including myself, have difficulties seeing if one of the employees is stressed or if there is a potential burnout. And I think this is the biggest issue. I do see that we are not experts.*

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

Interview Partner E: *Let's put it that way, we often have discussions if it's good to work from home or not. There are different opinions; some enjoy the flexibility, and because they can enjoy it, my conclusion is they are also less stressed. But there are also others who complain about the work environment at home. They complain about disturbance from kids at home, etc. So, I would say it's mixed, yeah. And the second topic I see is if you work from home, there's also less control in that regard that colleagues or bosses are not able anymore to see if you are stressed or not. So, the control mechanism is lacking if you work remotely because there is no control instance anymore.*

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

Interview Partner E: *I am in the automotive industry. Due to the transformation and heavy competition from China, I think the stress level is increasing simply because the economic situation is worsening. Yeah, this is one thing. What will happen in the next couple of years is difficult to say. I'm coming closer to retirement. And then, of course, things which are important for you or not that important for you might change in general. I think the world is getting more dynamic. But on the other side, you also adapt to that. So, if I look back at the last 35 years, of course, everything changed when I started. There was no Internet, you could not reach somebody, there were no smartphones. This completely changed, but I personally do not see that people are more stressed due to that. I think they simply adapt or adjust to the situation. I think more important is if you work in an environment where the competition is high, and your*

economic situation is not that good, maybe even including layoffs, then I think it's getting more stressful. Now if said situation in general is good, I wouldn't expect that it's getting more stressful in the next couple of years.

Part 4: Job and Career Reflection

11. What changes could be made to your role or company practices that would benefit professionals, especially in managing stress and avoiding burnout? So, in the beginning, you mentioned that you feel like the management needs some kind of sensitization to address and acknowledge when somebody is having too much stress.

Interview Partner E: *I think you have to practice because this is a big topic. An issue might be that people working a lot is generally well-perceived, so those are normally the people who get promoted, people where you think they are highly motivated. Still, the flipchart or the other part of it of the medal is that these people are also more stressed, and now to see when this is flipping when the tipping point has been reached from a high performer to somebody who might be stressed or even is going to face burnout, I think this is pretty difficult. So I think, therefore, we have to practice more with some experts who give you some ideas about what the indications are and explain when you have to react.*

12. Would you recommend your role or working in your industry to new joiners based on your experience over the last 35 years? Why or why not?

Interview Partner E: *I just have experience in a big industry. So, for me, it's difficult now to judge if the stress level is higher or lower in a smaller company or a big one. I would assume that in a bigger company, you have more support. I also would assume that if something happens, a bigger company's financial support is better than a small company's. This might result in a bigger company, but it might not happen that often. This is just speculation from my side. I would recommend the role and industry. Yes, I would, but not depending on the stress level. I would simply recommend it based on my experience.*

Part 5: Individual Questions:

13. You mentioned being an expat in the US. Did you notice differences in your working style, stress levels, and coping mechanisms?

Interview Partner E: *Now, at that point in time, first of all, the freedom in the US regarding working from home, flextime, etc., was not that big at that point in time, maybe like in Germany. Besides this, the working hours were longer, but they didn't work as intensely as we did in Germany. What is a little bit more stressful if you're an expat is that you have a combination of going abroad and, in most cases, somebody else is going with you abroad, like your family, and then you have two aspects of stress. One is work, and the other is whether the family is somehow happy in the new situation and will adapt. Often, you have some stress at home because of issues with a partner or with the kids and at work, and then it becomes quite stressful, you know? So I think you have one more aspect if you go abroad as an expat. Just to add, I mean, for example, people who went to China have different experiences because the work attitude is different. They work if it's needed. They even stayed during COVID-19 in the company and slept there for weeks. This was also expected from the expatriates, and I think it has become quite stressful. This was not the case in Spain or the US because of my expat experience.*

Group Part

14. You mentioned that you think it's important that the management gets training to notice when people are dealing with too much stress. Do you know if this exists for leadership?

Interview Partner E: *It does exist. I think it's not mandatory, but it's planned to be mandatory. But it does exist.*

Appendix 12: Transcript Interview Partner F

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 F: *My academic background: I studied for my bachelor's in Germany at ESB Reutlingen. It was a double degree. So that means I spent the first two years of my studies in Germany and the following two years in France. Then, I did my master's in management at Nova School of Finance and Economics with a joint degree from CEMS, where I spent one semester at IIM, Calcutta, India. I got my current role because my manager was also studying CEMS a few years ago, and then she found my profile on LinkedIn and found it very interesting and thought that it was kind of a fit. She contacted me, we had some conversations, and we both thought it was a fit. I have been working there for a year now.*

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 does your employer determine it?

Interview Partner F: *My company is fully remote. That means that everyone who works in the company worldwide is completely flexible about where they want to work. There is no office at all. When they started as a startup back then, there was an office in Berlin because it was founded in Berlin. But as they grew, they decided they wanted to be completely flexible and remote, so they closed it. Sometimes, colleagues go together to "we work" if they want to connect and network together. They are financing "we work" offices, but you can choose if you want to work from home or somewhere else.*

2.2 Are you allowed to work everywhere worldwide, or are there restrictions?

Interview Partner F: *You can choose not only within the country, but I would say within the world if it arranges with your team. So, if you are mainly working with clients in the US, it would be like it would not be necessary, but it would be good if your working hours fall in the same time zone. But everybody is doing their best to always arrange a time that works for everyone. So, for instance, I am currently still based in India, and some of my team members are in Australia or Europe, and then we try to schedule a time to be aware of or be polite with their times, but also with mine.*

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 F: *I would say that I find it very fulfilling that I'm working on projects where I am the project owner, and I'm still at the beginning of my career. But nonetheless, they give me a lot of responsibility, and most of my tasks I do alone. I work with clients so that changes a lot, but I'm not dependent on someone else on my team. Of course, I have some weekly team meetings where it's nice to be online and to participate just to get to know what the others are working on. I am also meeting one of my supervisors for one project weekly just to tell him where I am at and where I need help, or just to talk about it in general or if somebody has some*

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feedback. Yeah, sometimes I miss a bit of variety. I'm doing a lot of recurring tasks every day, which is also what you could expect from sales. I mostly do inbound leads, so that means I get contact requests from people who are turning towards the company who are interested to get a pricing license or just want to clarify some questions. This is very recurring. I mostly have to answer the same questions every day to other clients, so I would like to have more variety of tasks. And I'm also sometimes missing the exchange. After all, I'm working remotely to just chat with people mostly, you don't want to waste your time in a sense and only call to just follow up, like asking how the weekend was. So, I'm only in contact with the people I'm really working on a project with.

4.1 How would you assess your work-life balance in a remote working environment? Are you satisfied with your current working conditions, the team you are working with, your supervisors?

Interview Partner F: *I think I have a great work-life balance in general. Let's keep it like this because of the flexibility in where I work, so I can travel and arrange my work plan or my daily hours as I want. If I say in between my work that I have a doctor's appointment, nobody cares. I just put a blocker in my calendar so everybody knows I'm unavailable at the last minute. So I love the flexibility very much. We also don't have a fixed amount of holiday days per year. There's a fixed number of minimum days you have to take. I think it's always the legal days in the countries you're employed from. So, I'm employed in Germany, and I think my legal days are around 20, but we also have flexible time off. That means if I say I have to take a flight on this day or have something else, I can just take as many days as I want. I think that also balances how effective or efficient I am at working because when I am then really actively working, I try to be. I try to make the most of it as I don't have many live meetings. I can also do more focused time and get more tasks done more efficiently. On some days, if I have a lot of leads coming in, and this is something that I can't regulate, or that my team can't regulate, I have to follow up on the leads as soon as possible. So, possibly on the same day. That means if I get a lot of leads in on one day, I also have to work longer, and it also occurred that I worked over hours one whole week one or two hours every day more. But I think, as I said, it balances it out because I can add as many days off as I want in another week when I don't have a lot to do. I can just leave work early and just close my laptop.*

4.2 Has a supervisor ever said no, you can't take that day off because there's too much to do?

Interview Partner F: *I have not experienced that. They always say, okay, arrange someone who will follow up on your leads and nobody will say no. Yeah, so this is great. Of course, if the whole team is off, then it might be difficult, but if it's very necessary because you have something urgent, like a wedding or something like a doctor's appointment that you can't miss, nobody will say no. And then it's also not a big drama if you don't follow up on the lead.*

Part 2: Stress, Burnout, and Coping Mechanisms

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

Interview Partner F: *I was feeling a bit exhausted in the beginning when I just started my job. So, onboarding was quite a lot as everything was online. We got a big Excel sheet with tasks,*

and the productivity manager who set everything up also just launched this onboarding list so he couldn't tell if it's enough time or if the tasks are too much work or not. As I didn't want to say, I was a bit behind my schedule in the first few weeks of my job and had to work overtime. It was like a complete information overload for me. So yeah, that was when I felt the most exhausted. But then I slowly got into it. I learned a lot. I also met some of my colleagues in real life and it helped a lot as well. Once a year, they organize a company retreat, where we have the possibility to meet everyone, do some team building, and have some strategy meetings about the next year. That was already in the first month or the beginning of the second month of my job. So that was nice. In the beginning I also felt a bit detached because I was the new one, and everybody was already kind of connected, and I didn't know who I could turn to. I mean, of course, everybody was very welcoming in saying, hey, if you have any problems, you can always ask. But I thought it was a very, very formal work relationship and not the kind you have when you start your job in the company, in the office itself.

6. How often do you feel stressed at work, and what are the main sources of stress?

Interview Partner F: *I would say, of course, I feel stressed sometimes at work, but it is in a still healthy relationship. It's not that I feel exhausted, and I say I'm so stressed, I don't want to work anymore. I would say mostly at the end of the month, it is getting more stressful because we have quotas that we need to achieve for the month, and at the end of the month, of course, the pressure's on to hit the targets and then our managers are also more demanding. If you are far away from your quota, they ask you why it is happening. Can you please give me like a whole list of leads that you were working on, why it didn't work, and yes. So definitely the end of the month is the most stressful one. But as I said, I think in every job you have stressful periods, and as soon as it gets better, you don't think it's that bad anymore. You know what I mean? As soon as it gets a little bit less stressful, you think, like, oh, it actually wasn't that bad, and you need to have a kind of pressure also to get the business moving*

7. Do you feel your organization provides sufficient resources to support your work (e.g., technology, emotional support, training)?

Interview Partner F: *So, at the beginning of my work at the onboarding phase that I was mentioning earlier, we also had training about mindfulness and stress coping at work. But you just, I feel like this training you only do them to have them done and don't really take care of it afterward. I also get monthly e-mails asking how you are feeling and how you are coping with stress. But honestly, I don't even open them. I just delete them directly because I don't have the time or I don't want to take the time to read these e-mails. And I think if I would in these stressful periods at the end of the month if I would tell my manager, oh hey, I couldn't work on that this and that because I was feeling stressed and I needed to, like, take a break, they wouldn't take it that good. And from like support from my work technology wise. I mean, if something is not working from the hardware or software, it is a software company, so we are really dependent on our software and also Salesforce, where all the sales processes are happening. If something is down, then we can't do our work properly. That happened yesterday, actually. They sent a message to the group they would be dealing with it as fast as possible. Try to do some work that doesn't require the software. Of course, it's hard. I still try to do some work outside of the software, and then they resolve the issue in a few hours, so they are really trying their best, and*

they know if something is not working.

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

Interview Partner F: *I always feel better if I create a to-do list with my top priorities that I need to do and then what I can possibly also shift to the next week and as soon as I have like my detailed plan because sometimes it gets a bit messy in my in my everyday work as well with all the tasks that I have because I'm working at several projects simultaneously. So, as soon as I have this list, I try to work everything from the list, and I also try to empty my mailbox. I have different folders in my mailbox, and I try to sort them and work them out. As soon as I see that I have no e-mail left in my mailbox, I feel much better. And then after I work hours, I also try to go for a walk or just empty my brain because I sometimes feel like it's quite hard to look at the screen the whole day, and as it is remote, you can't even take a break and go for a coffee with your colleagues. It's always on the screen.*

Part 3: Organizational Support and Future Outlook

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

Interview Partner F: *This is quite a hard question, so I would say, in theory we have all these flexible schedules and time off. Also, the annual retreat is to kind of like to take a break and with a focus on well-being. But in my everyday tasks I can't really see it. Of course, at the beginning of meetings, the managers always ask you how you are doing. Is everything fine? Like is it too much work that you're having? But it's always nice to hear that, and I think if I had a severe problem, I could talk to my managers because they are quite young and open-minded. But especially at the beginning of your career, when you want to get promoted and you want to grow in the company, I don't think it is well seen to tell it. Maybe it's just a personal issue of mine. I don't know if other colleagues would do it, but yeah. Sometimes at the end of the month they are already a bit, I won't say, angry or stressed, but a bit bossy. When you don't hit your quota, and because, of course they also need to report to the CEO, they have to argue or discuss why they didn't achieve it. So it's kind of also their responsibility to make a fit to target. And of course, I can also understand the company has to do the business to move forward, and yeah if we tell them it's too stretched, yeah, the company can't just take a break, you know. Somebody has to do the business.*

10. How do you think the remote work environment affects your overall stress levels compared to working in an office? Do you feel more isolated?

Interview Partner F: *So, I must say, at my previous company, we were only allowed to have one remote working day per week, and it had to be from the same country. I did my internship in France, but I am originally from Germany, so one weekend wasn't enough to travel back to Germany. Even with one day of remote work, it was kind of tough, and I hated that I was unable to go home. Also, because I didn't have a lot of days off during my internship, so just like that, flexibility was really missing. Sometimes, it was also very annoying. What does it change if I work a day from another country? And that also demotivated me sometimes in a sense. And*

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yeah, if I could decide if I would want to work my whole life remotely or being in a company with a flexible like a someday of remote break, I would always choose to go for the non-remote company just because I think you need to have the connection to your colleague to your managers. And only then it's easier to work. You get so much more information. You get the data that you need. If you have an issue, you can just go directly to the person's desk. Also, your relationship with your colleagues is essential, and it is so hard to get on a deeper relationship level within a remote company. I would say my ideal company would be one with an office, but that you have one or two days where you have to be in the office just to have the team meetings and, like, get in contact with the people who are not big fans but then you can choose the rest of the week completely flexible. You can go to the office, but you don't need to.

11. Do you anticipate your current stress or job satisfaction level will change in the next five or ten years? Why or why not?

Interview Partner F: *I think it will increase. I mean, if you get a higher position, it is always connected to higher responsibility and then, of course also more pressure and stress. My job satisfaction, I think will also increase. As I said, right now, I have a lot of manual tasks that are always recurring. If I have more tasks and responsibilities, I will have more variety of tasks, and also the salary will increase, and I think it will also be a great part of my job satisfaction.*

Part 4: Job and Career Reflection

12.1 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 F: *Maybe something like a timer on your own laptop. For example, you set your regular work hours from, you know, 9:00 to 5:00. Let's say it like this and that you just get a reminder on your laptop saying your scheduled work time is about to end in I don't know, 15 minutes. Then you can like delay the timer, of course because it's normal in a job that you have to work over hours and some days, but if it's recurring. You work too many days for too many weeks over hours that you get an e-mail directly to you and your manager saying that you have to reduce the task so that your manager also sees that you are working, but it is maybe just a bit too stressful. And you don't need to have the courage, you personally don't need to take the step and say tell them, hey, I'm working too much, you know?*

12.2 Do you think, now that you mentioned it, that your managers or supervisors would notice if you couldn't cope with the stress?

Interview Partner F: *I mean, yes, at some points, they will notice if I'm behind my deadlines, but I try to manage that it doesn't arrive. That's why I'm doing my overtime and may sometimes also work until eight or nine just to get it done before the deadline, and then I won't tell them, hey, you know, I worked until eight or nine. Because sometimes I also search for faults in my manner of working. Sometimes I think, oh my god, I'm so slow in doing that. How are their orders going, and why are they so much faster than I am? Maybe it's because they are already in a routine. Maybe it's just because I need more time to write my e-mail? I'm not sure. Maybe they are just doing the same as me.*

13. 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 F: *I think the job is great for junior positions right after university. One major thing I learned was I got a lot of confidence as I was forced to talk to clients and somehow speak and convince them, and like my whole personality had to change for a more confident one. Even if sometimes I'm faking it. But I think it will be really, really helpful in my future work and in my future positions to know how to present myself. As a junior, I love the point that I'm so flexible, but it means that I can still enjoy my youth. I can go out in the evenings. I can travel a lot, and now, as I said, I'm in India, I can just go from place to place. I still need to work, and I still need to get my tasks done, but when I have free time, I can do it from wherever I want to do it. I think it's also very important for people who are starting their families. Because if you have a little child that you have to take care of. For example, I have some colleagues, and I wanted to schedule some meetings, but they have fixed timings in the morning and in the evening for dropping off their child at the kindergarten and then taking the child back, and I think it's really great in the sense of having a great work-life-balance. But at the same time, it is software sales. It is the account development role, so yeah, there is a lot of competition on the market, but it's also competition within your team to hit the quota. So it's quite stressful, and I'm pretty sure that I don't want to work there for a long time.*

Appendix 13: Transcript Interview Partner G

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 G: *I did an undergrad, so a bachelor's and also a master's in a business-related field in the management area or domain, and I just wanted to use those skills that I've learned and apply them in the consulting industry, which is why I ended up at the current employer. So, my bachelor's degree was in business and management, and my master's in business innovation was in combination with a management degree.*

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 does your employer determine it?

Interview Partner G: *We have quite a flexible module so that we can decide for ourselves. But quite often, we are on the customer's side, and we also have remote work days. So, depending on what the customer demands, we can also be quite flexible in that term. But since COVID-19 hit, a lot of meetings and stuff have been put to remote because the customer values it differently than before.*

2.2 Do you have a personal preference?

Interview Partner G: *Yeah. So, it's actually quite interesting because we do a lot of conceptual thinking, so it's quite good to be together in one place and Co-locate. But for like work that I fully need to, you know, go deep or think about it and make a structure for myself first, the remote setting is way better because I'm not constantly disrupted or like all the time during my day. It always depends, and I try to set my work that way so that I can always also utilize my remote days to the fullest. And so, I actually also plan ahead and plan it in my schedule.*

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 G: *Yes, I actually mostly work, so consulting is a people's business, so I usually work in like teams of three to five and over a specific period of time. I actually like working in a team and also seeing the progress we make as a team, but also, to be fair, sometimes it's just a little also like it can be quite demanding if there's a lot of stress within the team where, like it's a super stressful project then also, it's sometimes hard to coordinate everything, hear it within the team. So there's a lot of communication and a lot of planning ahead effort and structuring effort needed to coordinate a team of three to five people, especially in my case as I'm rather like a junior compared to others, so others might also need to look out for me in a sense that they need to allocate some work or need to give me specific instructions from what they heard from the client's side. It can also be super stressful to work in a team, but overall, I like it better than working alone on a project or just with another person.*

4. How would you assess your work-life balance in a remote working environment? Are you satisfied with your current working conditions, the team you are working with, your supervisors?

Interview Partner G: So, regarding the first question, I feel that remote work just cuts a lot of commuting time, right? I can have lunch, for example with my family more easily because I'm able to prepare something in advance if I have like a specific downtime minute. I don't get myself a coffee, but I can just, for example, start preparing vegetables for cooking or something, so I'm way more flexible working remotely. I can also schedule it better if I want to meet someone or if I want to like have an hour or something like a meeting with another person, it's just way more flexible than in the office, for example. And regarding work-life balance, I mean the consulting industry is not the industry that's said to be the industry with the highest work-life-balance. So we need to be honest with that. But also within this industry, I see a positive development actually towards more sustainable working hours. My company, for example, has a traffic light system with specific working hours that should be kept. For example, it's ten hours from Monday to Wednesday, eight on Thursday and six on Friday. And everything like up until those times is like the green side, and everything above is like unsustainable and on the red side, so the red of the traffic light. And with that, this is one of the approaches where the employer tries to actually also create some awareness for the issue, but also get some accountability from the seniors because, in the end, the bottom 5% in Central Europe of the projects that are red are flagged within the management team and are kept under close supervision. This also has a direct impact on the bonus. And if, like on a regular basis, the same projects are flagged and if there's no improvement within the projects in terms of working hours and how satisfied we as a team are, there are like some serious interventions also coming. So, the system is in place, and it's also used, but to be fair, not everyone is reporting those times correctly. So, you can still cheat the system in a sense. So it's also still your responsibility to like, stand up for your working hours or for what you believe is a sustainable working hour in your opinion. But like alone that the system is in place is already a good thing because it just creates awareness and also, it's openly talked about that working unsustainable hours is not something for the long run, especially in consulting. So I really appreciate that from the employer side. In case there is some need for mental assistance, for example, there are also quite a few resources where I can, for example, as an employee, go and book an appointment with also people who have been working or have experienced working with consultants, for example, like some psychiatrists that also has talked to other consultants already. So, there is also this basic understanding that I don't need to bring into the conversation but that already exists when I book an appointment. But this is something I've just been told by others because I have never myself booked an appointment yet.

4.2 Regarding the traffic light, did I understand correctly that you can work longer, but it gets flagged?

Interview Partner G: Exactly. So, I like if a project like consulting is an industry where you have a lot of also heavy working times if I can say it that way like you have longer working hours for certain periods, and this is, of course, something that I just need to take into account when I decide for such a profession. But it's not about working like after 10:00 every day. So, I am, we are as a team if the need arises from the project side because something just immediately

came up or something is super priority, then we as a team often decide to stay longer and just push through to just have it done and like go and start with a clean slate the next day. But that is just if the reason for the longer working hours is based not on like bad management, bad timing, or bad prioritization from the project manager, the project leader's side. In this case, we get a coach if we're flagged, and then it's also about getting more, like getting better prioritization of how we approach the whole topic; do we need better client management, do we need to say no to certain things that the client demands that are not within the original contract? So we just need to cut back on those, and it's more about actually working to make the whole working atmosphere better than it is at the moment when the project is flagged.

Part 2: Stress, Burnout, and Coping Mechanisms

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

Interview Partner G: *Definitely. So I've also worked longer hours already, so my typical day starts at like 8:30/9:00, and it can also go up until like the next day, 1:00 to 3:00, and sometimes it just happens even though then we're like this day is a red working day. Of course, my efficiency is not on the same level if I work for such a long period, especially if that's a more stressful week. We have more stressful, like more stressful project weeks, for example. My efficiency is not always at 100%, especially maybe also after lunch or when we just, you know, had a short downtime, and then you need to get started again. But this is actually okay because I can plan the tasks myself, and also, if something arises, I do it immediately. But for the most part, like we have some tasks that we can schedule ourselves so we can prioritize, and I can also prioritize some tasks that I would like to do earlier. For example, I know that in the first couple of hours of a day, I'm most productive, so I just put those tasks that need more attention on top of my schedule. And so, of course, I'm sometimes feeling exhausted, and also there's a decline in the efficiency. Still, in the end, there are also some nice benefits like a coffee bar or like a Muesli corner in the office where I just can get a snack or some fruits and stuff and I can like, you know, recharge myself for 10-15 minutes and then get started again.*

6.1 How often do you feel stressed in your work, or would you say the stress level depends on how far along a project you are?

Interview Partner G: *I would rather say it's a second one, so it depends first of all on the project and then on how many sources are staffed for the project. So, if the project is undersold or the project managers and managing directors have sold a project adequately. And then there is still the project phase we are currently in. So, for example, if a tech goes live because we are working on a software go live, this period is way more stressful than the beginning period of a project. So it always depends on like which project I'm on, how the resources are staffed and sold, and then also which phase in the project I'm in. So there is not one rule on how to, you know, assess how often I feel stressed at work.*

6.2 Do you know what the main source of your stress is? Would you say this is rather your supervisor or client, for example, of each project?

Interview Partner G: *So I mean, a lot of pressure comes from client relationships, and also, maybe some clients are more demanding than others and need more attention than others. But*

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also supervisors. There are some supervisors who go for quality over quantity. Unfortunately, there are still some supervisors who emphasize a lot of output more than the actual quality, like those who are declining in a sense, but still, this is an issue. So, it can also be from a supervisor's side. But I mean, the good thing about team settings is that you still have a way of having people you can talk to in such a case. And you also have some resources in terms of such a coach. As I said beforehand, if you're a flagged project in terms of stress, but you also always have the opportunity to talk to like your superior and just tell them how you feel. Because this is actually also quite good feedback for their performance, and they're also evaluated on it. So in the end, everyone's objective is to reduce stress to the lowest possible, but also deliver the best project outcome. But of course, this is not always possible, but open communication, I found, is the best way to address such a situation.

7. Do you feel your organization provides sufficient resources to support your work (e.g., technology, emotional support, training)?

Interview Partner G: *So I actually think the employer already does a lot because it's just an open issue in the consulting industry, like it's spoken about, that the working hours are just not always the yellow from the egg, but with the coaches and also the possibility of talking to a psychiatrist, for example, that has already experienced or is experienced in working with people in consulting I actually feel that this is already a quite a good start. And also, the technology but also training my employer offers are quite sophisticated. So, I also feel that there are a lot of opportunities to exchange myself within my cohort or also exchange myself with people that I've met through other project work, for example. So, within a couple of weeks, you always have a small network build-up where you can talk to a lot. And also, I myself have a mentor who's independent of my project that I can talk to in any case and also address issues such as my personal well-being or my mental health or stress, for example. But I can also address issues such as my future progression or how I best get to the goal of being promoted within, I don't know X time. So, I think all in all, there's a lot of opportunities that the employer provides that help me or should technically help me as long as I also make use of them. So it's also my responsibility to see the signs of like burnout or maybe stress or something and to react to it because if I'm not reacting, those resources are also not like taken advantage of. So I still see, like the consultants themselves, in a strong position to also act in case something arises.*

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

Interview Partner G: *What helps me a lot is just my family and friends. So, in the end, to just get a little bit out of the bubble and also just, you know, go into nature, do some sports, talk to my friends about everything except work, and also just get into my head space into something that's not connected to that. That just grounds me again. And also, for example, I love hiking, so I'm from Austria we have a lot of mountains in my area and that's also something that I really appreciate. This also helps me a lot in like spending my weekend in a nice manner.*

Part 3: Organizational Support and Future Outlook

9. Do you feel your organization is aware of and responsive to employees' stress and potential burnout? If yes, what measures are in place to support employees? (e.g., flexible schedules,

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mental health days, communication protocols.)

Omitted because the interviewee mentioned several times the different measures applied by the company to support their employees, like, for example, the traffic light system, coaches on the team, or psychiatrists

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

Interview Partner G: *I mean, it depends on the project again. There's no clear yes or no answer because, for some clients, remote working works quite well, and there is also a lot of like there's a lot of organizational support behind remote work also within the client's organization. But for other clients, it's more of a hustle. So, you just need to figure out what works best for some clients and how to get best a hold of them to just like achieve those results you actually need. But I think overall for me, working remotely helps with my stress levels because I'm closer to my family, close to home, and also I don't need to commute out of the office again, or when I am not so prone to talk a lot I can work in silence. For example, Fridays is a very common remote working day, and on Friday you can just have some lunch with someone who's back at home if you're working from home. And it's also quite easy to just close your laptop at, in the best case, 6:00 PM and then straight go for a like a walk or meet someone, and then like the transition from work to work-life balance is easier for me in those remote settings.*

11.1 Do you anticipate your current stress or job satisfaction level will change in the next five or ten years? Why or why not?

Interview Partner G: *I actually think it will change quite a lot. So, on the one hand side, I'm changing with like the responsibility I also carry or like that I've taken on. So it's also a good thing to be promoted, because you also get newer responsibilities from performing tasks to maybe also supervising tasks. So there's a lot of change coming within the next couple of years, and also my personal like satisfaction is probably rising with time. So, I'm quite young, or I consider myself quite young these days, and there still might be the possibility of like creating a family or also wanting to spend more time with your significant other. So it's always also a matter of what changes around you and how you change yourself in that time. So I actually think that it's anticipated that there's a lot more stress, but I'm also getting more resilient in a way. But I always also keep in mind that my work is not what defines me, and it's something that should also work next to a family. But let's see how that works out when it is time for that.*

11.2 Do you think that the stress level of the employer itself will change, or do you think that only you will probably change your perspective?

Interview Partner G: *So, I mean, projects are projects, right? So, there is this movement towards more life balance and also more awareness within the employer and also within clients. So I hope in the best case that also there is some more awareness in terms of what is required and what is needed at a specific point in time where some work and some answers can just be postponed to the next day. I actually hope that there is a positive trend towards more awareness of our working time. And also for the client's working time, because often you also need input from them at a specific point in time of the projects. But I also think that the stress level from an employer's site hopefully gets better. But you never know how fast such a system also works,*

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right? So, the traffic light system is introduced, and it's also in place and it's also enforced to a certain point, but it's not something that is really, really hardcore enforced by now, for example. So, we still need to create more like responsibility in the sense that you report your hours across your organization how they actually have been, and this is still something that could be cheated technically, right? So, in a sense, I feel like there is more awareness, and there will be even more awareness within the years because with, like, the new generation coming, that doesn't see the point in like working until they're dead and they don't define themselves for work. I actually also anticipate that there's at least some change and even more programs for maybe parenthood or also getting women that have been pregnant and also have stayed at home for a certain period of time back into the workforce. So, I think that there is still a lot to come.

Part 4: Job and Career Reflection

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

Interview Partner G: *I think my employer is already on a good trajectory. So, I think the increased enforcement of the traffic light system and also creating the awareness among customers that consultants are not just paid workforces that work around the clock, but they are also humans, they also have families, and they also should work in a sustainable manner, would help a lot. But I actually think that there is already a good task force and awareness within the organization. So, I'm really curious about what's to come, but I feel my employers are all already on a good path.*

13. 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 G: *So I think this is very type-dependent. For myself I have learned a lot in the time I've been working as a consultant. So, I already know why I did what I did. And it also tells me about the work I do and also when I see how clients react to the advice we give. Also, with whom I interacted. I'm interacting with people on the C-level, and even though I'm by far one of the youngest in the room they still listen to us, and they listen attentively because we are the ones with the industry insights in most cases. So this is for my personal satisfaction and also my sense of belonging. In a way, this is something that really satisfies me. But there are, of course, some downtimes, just like the working hours resulting in less time for family and friends during the week, that also need to be addressed, so I think this is quite type-dependent. But for myself I made the right decision to join my employer and also join the consulting industry. But I also need to say that I'm not sure how long I will stay in total. So this is something that's just super in the future. That's something that I won't know to date, and I'm elaborating on a constant basis just to ensure that my mental health, stress level, and work-life balance are always in check.*

Appendix 14: Transcript Interview Partner H

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 H: *Sure. So, I studied in a so-called dual system. It's a mix of theory and practice at the same time within Stuttgart with a large corporate company tier. Then, after my bachelor's, I did a master's in Belgium and New York and then and then rejoined my current employer again. Within purchasing, as of today, I'm the assistant to our chief purchasing officer.*

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 does your employer determine it?

Interview Partner H: *I am usually completely in the office. However, it depends on wherever my boss is. Since I'm his assistant, it depends on where he is located. In case he is located working from home, I move within working remotely as well. Typically, however, I would say that I work at least four days in the office and, yes, very rarely more than one day remotely.*

2.2 Do you like working remotely or from the office more?

Interview Partner H: *I prefer to work more in the office because I have a lot of exchanges with different people, and it's easier to get things done.*

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 H: *Most of the time, I work alone. But of course, there are also team tasks that we have to fulfill. Then, what do I like the most? The tasks or my current position which I have is, of course quite stressful and busy. There are a lot of due dates and a lot of deadlines which you have to meet. On the other hand, as my boss is the Executive Vice president within my firm, he meets very interesting people, so enlarging my network is, I think, one of the most fulfilling Jobs. I mean in the end, and also when you then see how your boss succeeds on the basis of what you have provided and delivered, like presentations or decision proposals and so on. That's, I would say, quite fulfilling. From my understanding, the least fulfilling would be the constant pressure to meet deadlines and the flexibility required because if something pops up, then you need to prioritize whatever is required. So, your flexibility is quite limited, I would say.*

4. How would you assess your work-life balance in a remote working environment but also from the office? Are you satisfied with your current working conditions, the team you are working with, your supervisors?

Interview Partner H: *I think, to be fair, you would have to differentiate. Of course, there are very stressful times, particularly when certain deadlines are due. I would say then, of course, that the work-life balance is declining to some extent. On the other hand, I think I'm quite good*

at really easing off and just focusing on what I'm doing as of today. I'm now focusing on the moment, so I think it really depends on the situation itself. Of course, there are times when it can be more stressful because, of course, within the position I have, as of today, you are really dependent. As an assistant, you're really dependent on what you what your boss requires at a certain stage. So, because of that, it can be more stressful, but I think I'm quite satisfied overall.

Part 2: Stress, Burnout, and Coping Mechanisms

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

Interview Partner H: *I would say so, yes. I mean, you really have certain periods that are really stressful within purchasing. It's typically either the beginning or end of the year and then there are some stressful phases in between. So, for example, where you have to provide, where you are in the middle of negotiations, or when, for example, the business plan is due and within these or after, or shortly before and then after. Of course, you feel, and to some extent also, you're a little bit detached from your work. And, of course, you have to give 110% in these times. I would say that afterward, you do see a decline in your professional work and how you feel and work, and therefore, it's also important for me to find an option for how to relax again and somehow get my mind off of work.*

6. How often do you feel stressed at work, and what are the main sources of stress?

Interview Partner H: *Yeah, I would say so that I'm often stressed. I think, typically, you can categorize it I'm thinking into two aspects. On the one hand, it's really the due dates on which certain things have to be done, and then the other category would be last-minute changes. Or where you have to cope with yeah factors you cannot influence but are somehow always changing. And I think those two things can be quite stressful and would also be the main sources of stress, I would say.*

7. Do you feel your organization provides sufficient resources to support your work (e.g., technology, emotional support, training)?

Interview Partner H: *So, starting with technology, I think we are very well equipped in order to make or so that I can make my work as enjoyable as possible. So, I do have the flexibility to work remotely if that would support or help myself in order to be less stressed. For example, if I know I have a very early appointment, I could do this from home instead of having to go to work and then do the meeting there and, therefore, have to wake up earlier. So, I think that's from a technology point of view for sure given. I would also say that speaking for myself, at least that my boss is quite understanding. So he understands, of course, that after a very stressful period. It's normal also that I can, for example take a day off or whatever, so emotional support is for sure given, and he backs me off. So, not to the extent that there is really like a resource provided, but more of a frame setting and expectation management by the employer and top management within my firm.*

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

Interview Partner H: *Exactly. So I try to go as often as possible to the gym or what is also quite*

a good mechanism for myself to reduce my stress level is to be with friends or go with my wife to dinner or cook together. So there's a couple of things I do in order to then, yeah reduce my stress levels and, yeah, get my mind off of work. So, there are many things I would say for myself. It's not typically just one, but it's more of a combination of all together. So, for example, also when I had a stressful week so working week, I tried to minimize, of course my stress level on the weekend In order not to yeah, stress myself even further.

Part 3: Organizational Support and Future Outlook

9. Do you feel your organization is aware of and responsive to employees' stress and potential burnout? If yes, what measures are in place to support employees? (e.g., flexible schedules, mental health days, communication protocols.) For example, do health days or maybe some kind of prevention workshops occur?

Interview Partner H: *I know that there are things available at my company in order to support the topic of mental health being and so on. To be honest, for myself, I have not booked anything so far. What I can say is that in terms of my job and what I'm responsible for, I think there's quite a good awareness of how stressful this job can be. And so I think there is more focus on people from HR and so on to focus on those positions. But in the end, typically the job which I'm doing is also limited to a certain time frame. So typically, it's two years on for how long you would do this job. So it's quite a stressful period, I would say. But I think the awareness is given for these roles in general. And I think it's also during the interviewing process that this topic of stress and how you maintain your stress level and how you cope with higher stress levels and so on is also quite a big deal and quite a big topic within the staffing process. So there is a lot of put on it from very or day one on. I think it's also how people are then chosen in the end, how, whether and how good they can cope with stress because it's just known that I think the stress due to the really certain due dates and tight deadlines and so on and having to be available not 24/7, but yeah, quite extensively. I think these things are considered while staffing for these concrete positions.*

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

Interview Partner H: *I think it's just different in that regard, right? I mean there are certain benefits which you have by going into the office, for example, for myself, it's for sure the canteen does not have to cook and then has to manage both somehow. Because I mean, during the lunch breaks, then having to cook and eat and so on. I think I feel that it is sometimes quite stressful. On the other hand, you are more flexible when working remotely, right? So you can do more. So what I typically do sometimes is typically exaggerated, but what I do, if I have the time, is to take off during the day some time and then go to the gym or something. So, I quite enjoy having the flexibility to go to the gym and then work again after that. Within the office, I feel like that's a little bit difficult because yeah, taking the car and then going to the gym and then going back to the office. For me, it is something that I don't really do, so I think there are real pros and cons to both of them, which help me maintain my stress level in both aspects.*

11. Do you anticipate that your current level of stress or job satisfaction will change in the next five or ten years? Why or why not?

Interview Partner H: *For sure, I mean, as an assistant, you're really dependent on your boss and what short-term topics come in. You really have to cope with certain situations and need to adjust accordingly. So, your life depends on your supervisor or my supervisor in that regard. Within the next, I mean, it's not clear quite clear yet what next job I will take over, but there, of course, you have different stress levels. You have a different kind of expectation towards your job, and it's more that you are setting certain guidelines and so on, and now you're really dependent, of course, on the working style of your boss and so on.*

Part 4: Job and Career Reflection

12.1 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 H: *Good question, to be honest. Personally, for myself, I'm I don't think so. I think all the resources would be given if I would want to take them or what would want to use them. So I think my firm is doing quite a lot in that. Of course, I mean, in the end, you can always have, for example, certain amenities like having a gym within my firm, which could somehow even increase the flexibility and get the mind off and so on. But I think overall, the boss is doing quite a lot, and then for me personally, in terms of the understanding of my boss and so on, he is given, and he supports me, I believe, very well. So there are those two aspects, or from corporate and then having really also this topic of how your leader and your boss are handling such situations. I think there's nothing really that could be changed dramatically in that regard.*

12.2 I was talking to one of the employees from your HR department, and she mentioned that they do some sort of prevention workshops to deal with burnout or especially to make aware of the different symptoms that are accommodated when you have burnout or can't handle stress. Have you ever taken part in such a workshop, or have you heard of them?

Interview Partner H: *Yeah, there, you get quite a lot of invitations on an optional basis. So far, I haven't participated. But I feel like that during my studies, I had a lot of the topic of burnout and so on. What are the symptoms? And so on. So, I had this actually in my classes as well, so I feel like that I have quite a good understanding of what symptoms could be. And then I could also honestly answer if it's now too much. I have also mentioned this to my boss, for example, in the past when I said, hey, okay, now it's quite tough. I'm not really able to support any further tasks, and he was quite understanding to that, and then we just prioritized the certain topics or tasks that were open. However, I did not really participate in certain meetings or seminars in order to think about or work on the topic of stress in that regard.*

13. 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 H: *For sure. I really like my job. I know it's stressful, but I also know what I'm getting out of it. But I think you really need to be the person for it. So I don't think it's a job everybody can do because you are really dependent on your boss and on his working schedule, as I mentioned beforehand. So it's really something you want to do, or you really need to. Yeah, I feel like this is something you want to do in the end, and then I would really honestly recommend it 100%. The industry is something you would need to like or either dislike, right?*

Group Part

I mean in the end, within the automotive, I think it's really something you have to like. I like cars, and I like the technology behind them. I think it's very fascinating, but if you feel like cars is not something that interests you, then potentially you would have to choose a different industry. I think the same applies also to being an assistant to an Executive Vice President.

Part 5: Individual Questions:

14. I know you are also self-employed at a big firm, simultaneously with your full-time position in a corporation. Do you notice any difference regarding the resources or the stress levels?

Interview Partner H: *Yeah. I mean, I think that also shows how I'm capable of working with stress because, yeah, basically, next to my, my, my first job, I'm doing the second job, and here I have the flexibility to really set my own working hours. So I do however much I want to do, and of course, that's a little bit different. But also, here I would say that at least from a technology point of view, I think all resources are also given to work remotely or to work in the office and so I quite enjoy that flexibility. But I would say there, since I'm more self-employed, I'm really also my own boss, right? So, the topic of maintaining your stress level within that corporation is a little bit different, and the expectation of managing it yourself is also higher than within my company, I would say.*

Appendix 15: Transcript Interview Partner I

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 I: *I first did my Abitur, and of course, during that time, I thought about what comes next. And yes, after my Abitur, it was clear that I would definitely study. My first thought was that I would study business administration. But the more I dealt with it, it actually somehow bothered me that almost everyone in my close, but also distant circle studied business administration. Therefore, I looked around a bit to see what the alternatives to business administration were, and then I decided on business law. My focus areas were taxes, law, and financial services. Unfortunately, I think that in the third semester, I realized that I should have studied business administration because of the number of available opportunities. Many subjects we had only touched on business administration, and I realized too late that I actually enjoyed it more and had more interest in it, but yes, I had already chosen my focus areas. Somehow, yes, I didn't dare to take the step to change my course of study, so I stuck with it and finished studying business law and wanted to do a master's degree after my bachelor's. But I studied at today's technical university, and unfortunately, there was no proper offer for a master's that built on it. So, after my bachelor's degree, I applied for a job directly. I had my first employer, and after about two to three years, I think I changed employers because almost my entire team also changed.*

1.2 So, you started as a consultant and worked up to your current position as a manager?

Interview Partner I: *Exactly, exactly. I started as a consultant and actually pretty quickly, although the positions there are called a bit differently, but I pretty quickly became a senior consultant at my first employer. And yes, I then switched to a new employer with that position and was actually one of the few senior consultants in the department, almost the oldest, yes.*

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 does your employer determine it?

Interview Partner I: *So, I was actually always only in the office, even though we had the possibility to work from home back then. But that was actually rather rare, and I did it maybe only once or twice in the, I don't know, past six years. Actually, I really liked going to the office, but since the COVID-19 pandemic, we had to move to working remotely. Since then, I don't want to say it too loudly, but I have been almost exclusively at home. I try to go to the office once a week. Yes, sometimes it works better, sometimes less well, but I am way more at home than in the office, actually.*

2.2 Do you like working from home more than from the office?

Interview Partner I: *I can actually only answer this question with yes because I am almost only at home. When I am in the office, I realize again how nice it actually is to be in the office and not always have the same environment at home because you have certain advantages in the office that you don't have at home.*

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). Both questions, regardless of whether it's for the small or large mandate.

Interview Partner I: *Now, I have to think about that for a moment. We have certain guidelines regardless of which company we oversee, which I also think is right. Nevertheless, I have quite a free hand in how I approach all topics. However, there are phases where we have very strict guidelines that we have to follow. But yes, in a large mandate, well, there are, of course, many processes specified, and I have to say that I am a person who likes to work according to processes. However, there are phases where I feel like, okay, I want to do something that is not so according to the process, and for that, I actually have many small mandates. And even though we have to have certain structures in our company, I work quite freely with small mandates because I decide when I do what and how I do it. And this mix of large mandate and small mandate is exactly right for me. I work in both a team but also alone. On large mandates, you logically have a team; one works for the other, which is also fun. On small mandates, you should ideally also have a team. The whole thing has changed a lot due to the Corona pandemic. We had a lot of departures, which is really sad. We also had internal process changes, so teams actually had to shrink. So, unfortunately, it is the case that I am quite alone on my small mandates for various reasons, and there I almost work alone, which, of course, brings many disadvantages. But I know what it's like to work in a team and alone.*

4.1 How would you assess your work-life balance in a remote working environment? Has it changed now compared to the previous office routine, or has it remained the same, or do you find it difficult to switch off after work?

Interview Partner I: *That is also an interesting question. Back then, it sounds so so so far away when I always went to the office, we were a very large team, and we were actually like a small family. You made friends, and you liked going to the office. I was single for a while and don't have children, so I didn't necessarily have the urge to finish work on time and go home because my family was waiting for me. So, I liked being in the office and it didn't bother me at all to stay longer in the office. Well, with the switch to working remotely, the whole thing has changed a lot, and I have to say that, at least in the beginning, I worked much more in the home office than in the office. I got up in the morning, and the first thing I did was sit at my laptop, turn it on, and first check my e-mails. After a few hours, I looked at the clock and thought wow, you haven't had coffee yet, you haven't taken a break yet. It slowly crept in that you really worked continuously for hours without taking a short breather or a lunch break. In the office, at 12:00 sharp, you went out with colleagues and ate. That doesn't exist anymore in remote work. But that is also a bit due to my personality because I think, okay, if I skip my break now, I can finish work earlier. But that never really worked out. So, I actually worked much more from home than I did in the office. This has changed a bit now. However, you don't really switch off. That is also due to my living situation, so my laptop is in my living room, so someone is constantly calling, or you quickly check your e-mails because you are waiting for an answer. So, there is no real end of work when working remotely compared to the office routine.*

4.2 Are you satisfied with your current working conditions, the team you are working with, and your supervisors?

Interview Partner I: *The question I can answer with yes and no. With my team on the large mandate, I am very satisfied. So, I work for different locations. I sit here in Cologne and work for another city from a distance. Actually, that was very difficult for me in the beginning because I joined a new team. I didn't know the people, and they didn't know me, and we did everything online. So, we got to know each other online via Microsoft Teams, which now works quite okay. My supervisor in Cologne, I know from my old employer. He was the reason why I switched to my current employer, and I am totally satisfied and happy with him. It is just sometimes difficult to be the only person at another location. Especially because the other managers are directly at the location and at least have the team day together. They aren't the direct boss but are on the same level as me. With those, you don't always get along immediately. It is sometimes difficult when the other two coordinate in the office, and I am only informed via Teams afterward. You sometimes feel left alone, but I try to create an environment where I feel comfortable, and therefore, it actually works quite well, and I am satisfied.*

Part 2: Stress, Burnout, and Coping Mechanisms

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

Interview Partner I: *Yes, definitely very often. When you look at exhaustion, I am actually very often exhausted. I can't remember a time when I wasn't stressed at work. This is actually unfortunately also due to the way we have to work. I often had the thought or feeling that it couldn't go on like this, that the way we have to work couldn't be sustained forever. Yes, I couldn't imagine doing this for a lifetime or having to do it, and I often thought about changing my profession. Not the company, but the profession because I know it won't get better if I only change the company. However, I am a person who, yes, is a creature of habit, I would say. Somehow, I never had the moment where I dared to look elsewhere, so I always said okay, I just have to pull through and keep going no matter what because it doesn't help to bury my head in the sand and be sad every evening or be afraid of work, so I always try to talk myself into liking my work. But that doesn't mean that I don't like my work. That shouldn't happen. I really like working. I also like doing my work, but very, very often I have moments where I just don't want to do it anymore or don't like it anymore.*

And regarding the detachment from work, I actually had four or five situations where I said I can't see this anymore, I'm not developing further. That often changed again when I came to another project or got a new mandate, so my daily work changed a bit. Yes, my professional efficacy has also declined. It definitely has. Yes, there's no other way to describe it.

5.2 Okay. And then, do you feel that these three aspects have increased because of working from home, or do you think it would be the same situation in the office?

Interview Partner I: *I think working remotely has intensified it. When you ask what is the disadvantage of remote work? The social environment is clearly the number one issue. I have a lot of contact with my team and clients every day, but it all happens over the phone. Of course, there are also some video calls, but that doesn't replace the daily personal meetings with colleagues, going on breaks, having coffee together, and exchanging personal matters. That is definitely a point why I say that I should go to the office more than once a week.*

Group Part

6.1 How often do you feel stressed at work?

Omitted as interview partner already mentioned several times that she can't even remember a time when she wasn't stressed at work.

6.2 What are the main sources of stress?

Interview Partner I: *Yes, definitely. We have guidelines regarding working hours, or rather, we have to track our working hours. So, that means I work full-time and have to enter at least 8 hours daily into what we call a time sheet. And entering the 8 hours into the timesheet is not the problematic part of the whole thing. But what is problematic, I don't know if this will be too detailed now, but there are some restrictions, and you can't always fulfill them. It is difficult to explain this to an outsider, but we work on a client basis and have to create invoices. That means, when I work, I have to track what I did and how long I did it. That is not problematic itself, but we actually have certain guidelines. And I have been doing this for 12 years now, and I can say that most of it never applies. That means, if I have the guidelines, for example, I have one hour to complete this task, it is often not feasible at that time. So, I have this issue daily, and at the end of the day, when it is 4:00 PM, 5:00 PM, and the eight hours are actually over, and I look at my timesheet and have only booked three or four hours, I think to myself okay, what have I done all day, even though I sat at my desk and worked all day. That is really the biggest stress factor I have. If someone asks me why I would want to change jobs, my answer would always be the timesheet.*

7. Do you feel your organization provides sufficient resources to support your work (e.g., technology, emotional support, training)?

Interview Partner I: *Interesting question. Yes, but with a but. We receive daily newsletters, info e-mails, and offers with both professional training where you can deepen and build your expertise, but also regarding mental health, etc. Since Corona, I have noticed, I don't know how it was before, maybe the offer was already there, but I have noticed it since the Corona pandemic. Yes, but that is also due to Corona, as we all work remotely. There are sports offers, for example, that you meet, I don't know, on Mondays at 9:00 and do online yoga together. Actually, I did that once and never again. Also, with an interruption because, of course, my phone rang again, and that is the point at work. We have a lot, yes, we have a wide range of offers, but the time is simply missing. And if I say, for example, okay, I will now do an hour of training that my employer offers me, then the first question you ask yourself is, okay, is this now free time, or where do I book this in my time sheet? And we are back to the topic of what the biggest stress factor at work is, which is definitely my time sheet. So, the offer is actually large. Technology, well, in some places, you wish for faster programs, but I think that exists in every company. I would say we are well set up, but it simply lacks the factor of time.*

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

Interview Partner I: *Mhm, I actually don't know exactly. When everything gets too much for me, I guess I first reach for my phone and check if I have received a message. What news is on social media? What has helped me, for example, in good weather, is that I say, okay, I will take a walk around the block or behind my house. There are beautiful fields, and then I take a short*

walk. That actually helped me. Or I do some household chores, but even then, always with the factor, okay, I have now lost time. Or my laptop rang in the meantime. Not just once but several times. Even if I consciously take time to relax a bit, I still have work in the back of my mind, which then also burdens me in a certain way.

Part 3: Organizational Support and Future Outlook

9. Do you feel your organization is aware of and responsive to employees' stress and potential burnout? If yes, what measures are in place to support employees? (e.g., flexible schedules, mental health days, communication protocols.) You have already said that several internal measures are not feasible in terms of time, but is there anything else you would personally wish for?

Interview Partner I: *Actually, it is hardly feasible otherwise at our work also due to the economic situation. This is also because we work with deadlines every day. With deadlines from the clients, with deadlines that the companies give us, or with actual deadlines. We work a lot with the tax office, and it is such that certain deadlines must not be missed. Therefore, I can hardly imagine finding a process that makes our lives easier. No, unfortunately not.*

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

Omitted, as already answered, that working remotely has increased the stress level due to different factors, one being especially the constant messages from the laptop.

11. Do you anticipate your current stress or job satisfaction level will change in the next five or ten years? Why or why not?

Interview Partner I: *If I have to give an honest answer, unfortunately, no, I don't think it will change. My hope, which is actually very private, is that if I ever become a mother. That my focus will be elsewhere, and I won't take everything so much to heart. Which means the stress will, of course, still be there. The deadlines are still there, but that I simply don't take these issues home with me in the evening and can erase them from my mind and, yes, leave work at work, and that is my only hope.*

Part 4: Job and Career Reflection

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

Interview Partner I: *What would benefit professionals, especially in coping with stress or avoiding burnout? Yes, maybe there should be clear communication from the top levels about expectations. The expectations are what I don't like. So maybe that something gets changed there, yes. But then again, we are back to the time sheet and the associated unrealistic limitations of bookable time. But for example, I don't know, maybe something more active, that you actually organize a team event. I know this only from the past. When there was a team event, it was always in the evening, which is, of course, also common, yes, but I can't remember that we ever said, so on Friday, we take time for the team and go on a nice trip. That doesn't exist with us. Probably because the top management thinks about all the work and thinks that it would be non-chargeable. And then I think, okay, but no, it is very important to take team*

Group Part

measures. What would also be interesting is that we are such a large company, and it is nice and good that we have all these online possibilities regarding sports, but for example, I am not a yoga person or don't like to meditate. Therefore, the offer that is given to me is not really mine and what I would find great, for example, if we had our own gym in the office. Or if we had a cooperation with a gym. For example, there is Urban Sports Club, and I feel like we are the only company that doesn't participate, and then I think to myself, okay, I work in such a large company, why don't we participate? Why don't we have the opportunity to benefit from such an offer? So, for example, I would really like it if the employer-provided such offers. For example, there is often the "Bahncard" or the job ticket or or or, but that only benefits people who commute to work by train or public transport. And then I think to myself, okay, but why isn't there consideration for people who don't need a job ticket because they bike to work or drive? I think the offer should be broader. But besides that, unfortunately, nothing else comes to my mind right now. At least nothing that would be feasible.

13. 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 I: *Unfortunately, no. I actually tell every friend that I would take a different path for various reasons. The pressure is immensely high with us, and I feel like it never gets better. And you work a lot. I mean, that will certainly also apply to other areas, and I don't want to blame the whole company because we also have many other departments. Still, in the department that I work in, if I could look back and make the decision again, I would choose something else.*

Part 5: Individual Questions:

14. Would you say that many people feel isolated or alone, especially due to remote work? Would you say that this feeling is intensified for you managing a mandate from a distance?

Interview Partner I: *Yes. Yes, actually. Yes, it is much more intense. Here, I often feel left alone. It is often difficult. Especially the start was very difficult because I didn't know the new team members. And many of them I still haven't met in person today, but they see each other every week in the office and spend a lot of time together, for example, at lunch. I often feel unfairly treated. We are three managers leading the team, and the other two are on-site at the location, and I often feel excluded, and it is difficult to build a relationship. Sometimes, I even have the feeling that they're not taking me as seriously as the other managers.*