

Implications of career break from personal and company perspectives

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<p>The objective of this study is to show the implications that career breaks have on individuals and employers. The intentions are to identify personal motivations for career breaks, and if the breaks change the careers of the people taking them. Furthermore, this study intends to understand how career breaks are viewed by employers, and if career breaks are becoming more acceptable internationally.</p> <p>The theoretical framework was based on description of work and careers both from employee and employer perspectives. Different generations in workforce, their expectations from work and motivations for career breaks are presented. Considering the employers, the concept of work-life balance and the reasons for organizations to offer sabbatical leaves are explained. Also, the existing research on implications of career break is discussed.</p> <p>The study was conducted in the form of an exploratory study. Data were gathered through two separate questionnaires: one for career breakers, another for HR professionals. 26 career breakers from 12 countries and six people working in HR in two countries participated the study. The analytical approach was qualitative.</p> <p>The findings of the study revealed that career breaks appeal Millennials, but also other generations interested taking a respite from work. Travelling, career path reconsideration and life-enhancement reasons were the most usual motivations for career breaks. Worry of work-related exhaustion was a factor impacting some career break decisions. The changes to career depended on personal career break motives, but respondents reported either concrete changes in the career, or positive changes in the approach towards work. The greatest benefit was the increased understanding of own life ambitions. The disadvantages were short-term. The findings indicated that HR professionals are willing to recruit career breakers as long as the motives are described and the skills are kept up-to-date. Sabbaticals are considered a significant employee retention tool. This study did not provide generalizable results but based on available literature, career breaks are suspected becoming more common – which at the same time is making them more acceptable. Even if new creative sabbatical programs are offered by innovative companies, sabbaticals are considered hard to get. This obliges young employees to have career breaks between the jobs. Finding a job after a voluntary career break was however not difficult for the study respondents.</p> <p>In conclusion, career break brings positive implications for an individual. The changes are more substantial if the career break is taken between the jobs. Millennials are forcing companies to think how to keep the workforce engaged, and the rise of sabbatical programs is expected.</p>	
<p>Key words career break, sabbatical, Generation Y, Millennials, HR, work-life balance</p>	

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1 Introduction

“It's incredibly easy to get caught up in an activity trap, in the busyness of life, to work harder and harder at climbing the ladder of success only to discover it's leaning against the wrong wall. --- If the ladder is not leaning against the right wall, every step we take just gets us to the wrong place faster.”

The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People

Stephen R. Covey (1989, 46)

This metaphor from business and self-help classic was introduced to me by an older German gentleman in autumn 2016 when I was studying and traveling in South-East Asia. I talked about my career break research to almost everyone I met, and without exception, people were extremely supportive and genuinely interested about the study. It seemed that people around the world had noticed the phenomenon I was writing my thesis about. These discussions allowed me to gain new perspectives on my research, process my own plan, and collect participants to my study.

The motivation for the career break I was having is well described by Covey, but I was not sure what were the reasons for all the other people having a break from conventional working life. I already knew many people who had taken some sort of career break but I didn't know what it really means. I felt that the breaks from working life were becoming more common, and now I was part of the same group myself. Sabbaticals had a long history in academic settings since late 19th century as university professors have been able to take a semester or two off from teaching to pursue other teaching related activities (Kimball 1978, 303). Since 1960's, US based companies started to introduce sabbatical policies for their employees in order to offer time out of work place – McDonalds Corp., Intel Corp. and few law firms being the pioneers (Pagano & Pagano 2010, 1). Now people were also taking “personal sabbaticals” and simply resigning from their work to do something else for a while. I wondered if having a career break makes a difference to an individual's career and how these voluntary leaves are viewed by recruiters.

1.1 Research objectives, questions and delimitations

This study attempts to understand the phenomenon that does not have a clear name or one definition. Still, after explaining what it is about, people around the world understand the concept. Let it be career break, sabbatical, gap year, reboot break, adult gap year, extended vacation, job-alternation-leave or time between jobs taken on person's own will. In this study, I have chosen to mostly use the term "career break" but I will discuss specifics of the terminology in a separate chapter.

Contemporary studies of today's workforce moving flexibly internationally and taking breaks during the career have not been yet available. This study attempts to describe the current circumstances of young generations living in a global world with urge to see and do more in life than work. The previous studies on sabbaticals are examined to give background for different type of career breaks.

Main research question is:

1. What are the implications of taking a career break?

The sub-questions are:

2. Why people take career breaks?
3. Does having a career break make changes to person's career?
4. How career breaks are viewed by HR and recruiters?
5. Have career breaks become socially acceptable internationally?

This dissertation studies the people who have, from their own will, decided to leave their work for extended time. I have excluded the career breaks used to have or raise children even if the term career break can be used in this context as well. I have also out-scoped recent graduates who are only in the beginning of their career and only now fully entering the work force. The same exclusion applies to people who are having a forced break in their employment due to their employer's decision to let them go. In addition to studying individuals, I am asking the view of HR professionals to voluntary career breaks. In total 32 people from twelve countries gave their view on career breaks.

1.2 Structure of the thesis

The first chapters of this dissertation are dedicated to describe the current perspective on work and different generations in the workforce with focus on Generation Y. The terminology and the options to take leaves are discussed next, before examining personal motivations based on available guidebooks, sites and previous studies on the matter. The following chapter gives an overview of career breaks from employer perspective. Concept of

work-life balance, employee engagement and reasons for companies to offer sabbaticals are discussed based on existing literature. Following academic conventions, the methodological choices are explained before displaying the findings. The last chapters are dedicated to discussion in order to respond to the previously set research questions and assessment of the study. Finally, the report is closed with overall conclusions, recommendations, agreed next steps and personal reflections.

2 Changing attitudes towards work

Multiple careers are becoming more common in modern life, and future researchers are predicting the phenomenon of career changes to accelerate. "One job/one company" or even one career for life is no longer a norm. (Perkka-Jortikka 2016, 12-13.) Attitudes towards work are changing when the older generations are being replaced by new generations with new values for life. Generation Y does not settle to work for one employer as the attitudes have changed towards more hedonistic view of life (Hobart & Sendek 2014, 2). Overall, employee engagement has been all-time low level during the past decade even if it has recently shown a modest trend of rising (Aon Hewitt 2011, 3 and 2016, 1, 6). Work-life balance has been one of the concepts that Generation X introduced (Hobart & Sendek 2014, 29) and connection has been proved to exist between flexible workplace practices and lowered employee turnover (Council of Economic Advisers 2010, 1). Next, I will discuss the commonalities of each generation currently in workforce.

2.1 Generations in workforce

The factors shaping each generation are social, political, economic but also formative experiences, media and changes in technology mark the creation of a new generation (Ek-Petroff 2011). Generations cannot be defined globally as regional events and regimes in countries have an impact to the people and consequently, how generations are defined (Ek-Petroff 2011, Catalyst 2015). In this study, I use the generation definitions commonly referred in Finland, Central Europe, North Americas and Australia. Hobart and Sendek (2014, 11) introduce these four generations and point out that for the first time in history, all four are working at the same time. While according to Leibow (2014), only three generations are in workforce, it makes sense to discuss all of them as even if the oldest generation is retiring, it still has a major impact to how we view work. Every generation has different values and attitudes towards work, and understanding their backgrounds and motivations makes both good business sense and diminishes the gap between the generations working together (Hobart & Sendek 2014, 27).

Generations in workforce are presented in below (table 1) with Traditionalists being the oldest generation, Baby Boomers and Generation X constituting the majority of the employees, and Generation Y being the last generation fully entered in workforce. Generation Y is also referred as Millennials. (Hobart & Sendek 2014, 12.) The years of birth vary slightly from country to country, and following table is a global generalization based on previously mentioned countries and continents (Catalyst 2015). It is worth to mention that

the youngest generation born since 2001 has been called Generation Z but they are not yet considered as part of workforce, thus not discussed in this study (Williams 2015).

Table 1. Generations in workforce (Catalyst 2015; Hobart & Sendek 2014, 12)

Generation	Year of birth
Traditionalists	1922-1945
Baby Boomers	1946-1965
Generation X	1966-1980
Generation Y (“Millennials”)	1981-2000

Traditionalists, currently mostly exiting the workforce, is the generation that was shaped by wars and Great Depression of 1930’s. Due to uncertain times and distress that they needed to undergo, Traditionalists value financial and job security. (Ek-Petroff 2011.) They view the work as an obligation that is supposed to be difficult even both physically and mentally. Hard and serious work is valued, and all the efforts are put to work in order to support the family. Authorities and managers are respected. (Hobart & Sendek 2014, 27-28.) Even if Traditionalists are mostly retired, their views shape the attitudes and expectations towards work from certain high positions and politics where Traditionalists still influence. Particularly interesting is the impact to their children, mostly Generation X.

Baby Boomers were influenced by the rising economic prosperity and progressive social changes that gave them optimism for the future (Ek-Petroff 2011). Hobart and Sendek (2014, 27-29) describe Baby Boomers as career focused work-a-holics who lived for work. Time and effort invested in work was rewarded with promotion, and years of experience and subsequent climbing corporate ladder was admired by Baby Boomers. Promotions were considered sufficient means for recognition and interaction with the management. (Hobart & Sendek 2014, 27-30.) Leibow (2014) points out that Baby Boomers’ sense of identity was tightly linked to their career. This generation is known to be the rebellious one, and they also see work as an adventure as an opposition to Traditionalists who were serious and more modest with their hopes and opportunities. Both Traditionalists and Baby Boomers lived to work and work-life balance was not a topic in their agenda. These generations were counting on relaxing when retiring. (Hobart & Sendek 2014, 27-29.) The children of Baby Boomers are usually born to be part of Generation Y. Leibow (2014) reminds that Baby Boomers’ focus on career has sometimes left family and own wellbeing to second priority which starts to now show as health issues.

Generation X saw the world changing and the company loyalty of the previous generations not always paying off. They questioned the “one job/one company” life objective and

stepped away from it to consider work as a mutual agreement between the employer and the employee where salary was received in exchange for their work and time. Gen X embraced the work-life balance concept and refused to give all their time to work. (Hobart & Sendek 2014, 27, 29.) Instead of living to work as Baby Boomers did, Gen X worked to live (Ek-Petroff 2011). Technological innovations had started to accelerate work, and Gen X requested more flexibility and longer vacations to balance the busier schedules. Free time was considered as a reward for their accomplishments. When Baby Boomers had only late in the careers started to realize that they are missing out life experiences if only focusing on work, Gen X did not accept giving all their time for work. (Hobart & Sendek 2014, 27-31.) “Gen X said, “NO WAY! I want to balance *now*, not when I am sixty-five. Travel will be more fun when I am thirty rather than forty, and forty rather than fifty, and fifty rather than sixty!”” (Hobart & Sendek 2014, 29.)

Generation Y or Millennials took the advancements of Gen X to the next level (Hobart & Sendek 2014, 28). Multiple jobs as voluntary choice became the new standard that older generations had first hard time accepting. Hobart and Sendek (2014, 29) describe Gen Y making work as part of life where everything needs to *fit* together. There's only one life and there's more to live than work (Hobart & Sendek 2014, 39). Technological advances enable flexibility to fit work and life together without sticking to office hours (Hobart & Sendek 2014, 30). Millennials take vacation policies that Gen X had built as granted and does not consider them as recognition of good work (Hobart & Sendek 2014, 31). Instead Gen Y appreciates even more liberal and flexible workplace practises and possibilities for time off (Leibow 2014), even without pay (Hobart & Sendek 2014, 110). Hobart and Sendek (2014, 38, 41) claim Gen Y to be as hard-working or at least understanding the correlation between hard work and success as the previous generations, they just want to do it in their own schedule. Great Recession of late 2000's and early 2010's had a significant impact to Millennials and their quest for job security (Hobart & Sendek 2014, 50).

As a summary, one can see that the attitudes towards work and requirements on career development and work-life balance have changed from generation to generation. Every cohort has different expectations that need to be addressed differently. As according to PwC study (2011), Millennials will comprise half of the global workforce by 2020, I will dedicate next chapter to further study this generation: chapter 2.2. will discuss specifics of Millennials' values related work and inevitable, life.

2.2 Values of Generation Y

Millennials have been characterized as tech-savvy, goal-oriented and confident generation that wants to learn new, wants challenges and speedy results (Leibow 2014). Goudreau (2013) and PwC report (2011, 4) describes Millennials expecting to progress in their career ladders faster. Ek-Petroff (2011) highlights that Gen Y is the most educated generation. Technological advances since 1980's have taught this generation to multi-task since their childhood which makes them comfortable to both work with several tasks simultaneously and to mix and combine work and private life (Leibow 2014). Gen Y has learned to live in global world where everything is available and shared, including workforce. The competition for a job may be with the whole world. (Hobart & Sendek 2014, 69.) This global thinking helps Gen Y in understanding different cultures. Millennials enjoy traveling, and modern technology enables keeping contact with friends abroad. (Hobart & Sendek 2014, 94-95) Mielach (2012) and Hobart and Sendek (2014, 31) state that Millennials have been misunderstood by previous generations in many aspects. According to Mielach (2012), one of the major misconceptions relates to Millennials' confidence on their skills and knowledge that can be seen as arrogance. Mielach (2012) explains the confidence deriving from pure enthusiasm of having many new ideas, willingness to contribute and use the technical skills. I assume that every new generation is always misunderstood by previous ones. It makes sense however to try to see through the stereotypes, myths and negativity.

Generation Y is ambitious to have a good life. This includes both work and life outside of work that Millennials appreciate more than earlier generations. This cohort is studied to be the most family-centric generation that wants to keep up close relationship with parents and even with extended family. (Hobart & Sendek 2014, 40, 96.) As discussed already in chapter 2.1, Millennials value work-life balance, and besides family and friends, they also want to reserve time to take care of physical health and contribute for the community (Hobart & Sendek 2014, 41). This generation puts their time into volunteer work more than any other generation (Hobart & Sendek 2014, 54). Overall, they are less motivated to earn money – at least when it related to purchasing material goods – and as Hobart and Sendek (2014, 278) puts it very aptly: "They don't need a luxury watch; they have a smart phone, thank you very much!" According to PwC study (2011), personal learning, development possibilities and work-life balance are more important than financial rewards. Also, Goudreau (2013) points out that Millennials values flexible hours and increased holiday time over salary.

Like Baby Boomers, also Millennials share the optimist view towards future. Confidence and optimism allow Millennials to have a good internal sense of security to try new things and ask questions without feeling being judged. (Hobart & Sendek 2014, 96.) Where Traditionalists respected management over everything, Millennials have been grown up to consider everyone equal which makes them to require same rules for everyone (Hobart & Sendek 2014, 59). This has been linked also to soft parenting by Baby Boomers that has made Gen Y to feel entitled (Hobart & Sendek 2014, 67). Bureaucracy, rigid corporate structures and information silos are disliked by Millennials who favor speed and efficiency (PwC 2011, 4). This disrespect of hierarchies has created a new challenge to leaders (Goudreau 2013). Furthermore, Millennials need for frequent on-time feedback has changed management practices. Generation Y is motivated by positive and developmental feedback which is drastic difference to Traditionalists and Baby Boomers low need for recognition and interaction with management. Old “No news is good news” culture is not able to keep attract and retain Millennials at workforce. (Hobart & Sendek 2014, 31, 46.)

Generation Y expects to work for their whole life (Hobart & Sendek 2014, 82). They have realistic understanding of changes in global economy after being impacted by financial crises in 2000 and 2008, so called Great Recession (Williams 2015). Layoffs and unemployment of Great Recession hit Millennials harder than older generations who had already established positions in companies (Hobart & Sendek 2014, 78). This shows in PwC report (2011, 4) as compromises in the jobs that Millennials have been forced to make. Only 18% of the age group expects to work for their current employer long-term (PwC 2011, 4). Gen Y values job security but is no longer blindly trusting the employer to keep their jobs if tough times come (Hobart & Sendek 2014, 85, 88). This light loyalty towards the employer is increasing, and even if Millennials are claimed for their ease of job hopping, it's not only for them to blame: if company fails to deliver their work-life balance, corporate responsibility or diversity promises, Gen Y feels at ease to leave (PwC 2011). Millennials look for varied work experience, meaningful work and inspiring leaders with ability to communicate the big picture, but if they cannot find it – unlike older generations who endured but disengaged – they will search it elsewhere (Hobart & Sendek 2014, 2, 50, 53). Enablers for the job changes are delayed family responsibilities and financial support from their own parents (Hobart & Sendek 2014, 49). Millennials are content to engage 1-2 years with an employer and are not looking for long-term commitment (Hobart & Sendek 2014, 109). If not satisfied, they feel there are loads of options; going back to school, move back home or live on shoestring budget for a while, take up a project like training for a marathon, go travelling or volunteering (Hobart & Sendek 2014, 47, 110). Working just because one needs to work is not a motivation (Hobart & Sendek 2014, 47). Other options are to do a lateral move or even work for less demanding job for a while or simply because it gives a

possibility to contribute to a bigger cause – all of which older generations usually consider as career suicides (Hobart & Sendek 2014, 50, 51, 110).

3 What is a career break?

When I informed my colleagues about my decision to leave my job without having a new one to transfer to, I received extensive support and honest envious words to reassure me that I have made the right decision. I learned that many had thought about the same but, for a reason or another, they were not able to act on it. When it came to officially announce my leave, I was struggling to find the correct words explain what I was doing. Even with my careful wording, some misunderstood. I was combining study leave and sabbatical without company involvement or possibility to return to my job. How do you call it then? After discussing with other career breakers, I realized that many had had similar struggles. Practically nobody had heard about the *career break* term that I found in internet research. Next, I am clarifying the terms used for an extended leave from working life. In the second part of this chapter, I am presenting different motivations of taking a career break.

3.1 Definitions used in this study

Both literature research and discussion with people on career break prove the ambiguity of the wording used to describe the situation, where a person has voluntarily left his/her job to pursue other interests. Hadden (2010) confirms that *career break* and *sabbatical* are used interchangeably in real life. The Career Break Site refers also to *adult gap year* which Oxford Dictionary doesn't recognize. It does identify *gap year* as "A period, typically an academic year, taken by a student as a break between school and university or college education" (Oxford Dictionary, 2016). As stated in the introduction of this report, I have excluded breaks that students have during their studies or before entering to workforce from this study. However, it's worth to mention *adult gap year* which may become a usable term in the future. Furthermore, Allen, Bearg, Foley and Smith (2011) have written a whole guidebook and renamed sabbatical as *reboot break*. McDearmic (2014) has done a thorough literature research and found that sabbaticals are also called as *Sabbath year*, *fallow year*, *year of rest*, *year of remission*, *self-funded leave*, *educational leave*, *long leave*, *release time*, *leave of absence*, *personal retreat* and *extended leave*. Only long leave is identified as a term by Oxford dictionary but with vague meaning.

I have found career break and sabbatical being the most used terms and I have dedicated next two chapters to define these terms. In addition, I will also introduce a Finnish specialty, job alternation leave, as some of the questionnaire respondents have benefited from this act when having their sabbaticals.

3.1.1 Sabbatical

Oxford Dictionary (2016) defines *sabbatical* in English as “A period of paid leave granted to a university teacher or other worker for study or travel, traditionally one year for every seven years worked.” Terms *sabbatical leave* and *sabbatical year* are related to *sabbatical* and defined as follows “(in biblical times) a year observed every seventh year under the Mosaic law as a ‘sabbath’ during which the land was allowed to rest.” Example sentences include following: ‘He took a three-month sabbatical from his job as CEO of a family business’. (Oxford Dictionary 2016.) Rest of example sentences are included in Appendix 1, and they describe sabbaticals being spent travelling, studying, doing research, writing books, raising children or pursuing other interests such as creative activities. Examples implies academic sabbaticals are paid leaves and person returns to his/her work.

Allen et al. (2014, 7) explain the history of the Sabbath originated from The Bible’s Old Testament where God created the world in six days and rested the seventh. While this teaching is familiar from the Ten Commandments, and it refers to days, rather than years, it was also applicable to years when farmed fields were left to fallow every seventh year. This year was a year of freedom, rest and symbolic return to oneself. (Allen & al. 2014, 7.)

Today, sabbaticals are available both for academics and employees working in companies and organizations (Pagano & Pagano 2010, 1). Hadden (2010) states sabbatical being a formal system where an employee takes time off from his/her job benefiting from organization’s sabbatical policy. Pagano and Pagano (2010, 1) define *career sabbaticals* and *business sabbaticals* as planned, strategic breaks from work to pursue other interests for predetermined time. To confuse this definition, Allen et al. (2014, 10) introduce *workplace sabbaticals* and *between-gigs sabbaticals* where first refers to renewal break after which the employee returns to work for the same employee, and the latter to a break before a new job or different line of work.

Where academic sabbaticals are paid, salary and benefits in company sabbaticals varies (The Career Break Site). According to Pagano and Pagano (2010, 1), sabbaticals are in most cases unpaid and the length is up to ten weeks. Allen et al. (2014, 8) however recommend much longer sabbaticals, from three months to a year.

3.1.2 Career break

The Career Break Site and Hadden (2010) define career break as time off from work where the person does not return to the same job after the break. Hadden (2010) notes that usually career break is taken if the company doesn't have a sabbatical policy. Leaving the job requires resignation which gives more freedom but less financial security as career breaks are naturally not funded. Career break relates thus to between-gigs sabbatical that Allen et al. (2014, 10) introduced.

Oxford Dictionary (2016) defines *career break* in English as "A period of time during which one chooses not to work, typically in order to bring up one's children or pursue other interests" and offers list of example sentences where the term is used, such as '*Mick is a police officer who has taken a career break in order to organise and develop the scheme.*' I have included rest of the example sentences as appendix of this study (Appendix 2). These examples illustrate career break being spent on raising children, travelling and committing to special projects such as setting up a new business. Career break can be the time as unemployed or between two jobs. It can also be part of company policy and the person can return back to his/her work after career break as following example sentence would indicate '*A career break can be provided for up to five years with the job guaranteed when the employee returns.*'. As defined in the introduction, I have excluded career breaks for child raising purposes and the involuntary career breaks out from this study.

Oxford Dictionary implies *sabbatical* being hyponym to *career break* which leads career break to be hypernym. This is why I have decided to use career break as main term in this study even if The Career Break Site and Hadden (2010) have defined the term differently. Career break can be paid if it's a sabbatical but if it requires resignation, it's not.

3.1.3 Job Alternation Leave act in Finnish legislation

Job alternation leave is a sabbatical policy in Finnish law, Act on Job Alternation Leave (1305/2002), and applicable for everyone except for entrepreneurs. This act allows an employee to be released off the work for specified time when an unemployed jobseeker is hired with fixed-term contract to the same company. (Finlex, 1305/2002 Section 1-2.) Employee must have worked for a year for the same employer who is willing to take part of the agreement i.e. allow the employee to have the leave and hire the substitute (TYJ 2016). Both alternator and substitute are paid; alternator receives 70% of earnings-related allowance that he/she would be entitled to during unemployment, substitute will receive

salary from the company he/she is working for (Finlex 1305/2002 Section 13, 15). Job alternation leave was started as two-year experiment in 1996 but has been continued, although significantly modified throughout the years (Nätti, Anttila, Manninen & Väisänen 2005). The conditions have been tightened again recently, and currently 20 years of employment history is required to start the leave. The maximum length has been limited to 180 days from previous 360 days. (TYJ 2016.)

Similar schemes are, or have been, available in other countries, although for example Sweden and Denmark have abandoned the laws experimented in 1990's and 2000's (Vuorikoski 2011, Berg 2005). A study ordered by Finnish Ministry of Economic Affairs and Employment (Junka, Korkeamäki, Ronkainen & Uusitalo 2009, 18-25) summarizes the experiences from other European countries where Belgium, Holland and Austria are referred as pioneers in decreeing of sabbaticals since 1985.

3.2 Personal motivations for career break

As seen in the previous chapter 3.1, there are several names for the career break. Even if the terms vary, I have found the concept being familiar in developed industrialized countries. When referring to younger generations and different motivations for the break, people can make connections even without knowing the terms. Similarly, as terms, also reasons for career breaks are multiple. One famous example was presented by famous Carnegie Mellon computer science professor, Randy Pausch, in his recorded *Last Lecture: Achieving Your Childhood Dreams* video that has received over 18 million views in YouTube since 2007 (Pausch 2007). Pausch took sabbatical to temporarily work in a new field after learning he is seriously ill. Next chapter introduces other motivations for a career break from previous research and other available literature.

3.2.1 Reasons for breaks

Kimball (1978, 304) has studied the Hebrew origins of Sabbath to define the stimulus for the break. He finds four motives that are mostly relevant still today;

1. mental and physical regeneration of the person
2. economic renewal of resources (referring to letting the fields fallow)
3. helping others who are less fortunate
4. education of faith and purpose to be in the world

Allen et al. (2014, xiii, 23) have performed a research on more than two hundred career breakers and classified the types of career breaks to seven groups. In practise, the motivations of an individual are often a mixture of few types (Allen & al. 2014, 23-24).

1. career development
2. correcting or validating the course
3. family
4. emotional healing
5. volunteering
6. life enhancing
7. pre-retirement

Connections between the current career breaks to the historical ones can be made in most cases. As people live longer, pre-retirement sabbaticals have become possible. However, letting fields to fallow is no longer relevant. Otherwise Allen's et al. categories can be linked to Kimball's groups.

Furthermore, yourSABBATICAL.com (2016) defines ten types of sabbaticals which emphasize the benefits that employer can retain from an employee having a career break;

1. travel
2. green
3. volunteer
4. innovation
5. family
6. learning
7. research
8. lifelong goal
9. personal growth
10. hybrid

I find Allen et al. list to be rather exhaustive, and next, I will describe more in detail those seven groups adding in how yourSABBATICAL.com categories fit in to the categories.

Career development break is often used to study, to achieve a certain degree or to attend a special training to move forward in the chosen career path. It can also be a time spent to explore a new career options or a new aspect of the current career. People enjoying learning and personal development use their career break for this purpose. The motivations can also be salary increase or possibilities to apply and be selected to higher positions. Inevitably, an individual may decide to have a career development break partly as an excuse to get out of the rat race for a while. After the break, a person returns to his/her job recharged with new energy. Career development break can be financed by the employer e.g. when it comes to tuition fees, if a person is on sabbatical and returning to work for the same employer. It can also be a career break where the person resigns from the

previous job to look for new opportunities. (Allen & al. 2014, 24.) There are three sabbatical types in yourSABBATICAL.com (2016) site that are covered by career development break: innovation, learning and research. Innovation sabbatical includes the idea of a person travelling to another country to experience another culture within or outside of own industry to bring back new ideas. Learning sabbatical implies to studying a degree or participating a training as described earlier in this paragraph. Research sabbatical can be used to develop a new product or business process or to work with a specific project e.g. writing a book. (yourSABBATICAL.com 2016.) Research sabbatical has been used by academics for long, but contain new possibilities for innovation-focused companies as well.

Correcting or validating the course may be a valid motivation for a career break. If a person is bored or sick with his/her job, a dedicated time to consider the next move might be required. There can be a childhood dream that was discouraged to be followed but after getting more confidence and independence, an individual is ready to make changes to the status quo. (Allen & al. 2014, 27.) “Many people go to work every day with a terrible secret: they know they’ve chose the wrong career, but they don’t know how to get out of it.” (Allen & al. 2014, 27). It’s common not to know what is the “calling” or the field one should be working in. A break from routine can create the space for new ideas to emerge. Career break can clarify the situation and help to find a new passion, or making it clear that old job is actually a good one with some tweaks either in own work habits or life changes outside of work. (Allet & al. 2014, 26-28.)

Family focused sabbatical can be taken for various family-related reasons (Allen & al. 2014, 28). Common reasons for a career break for family are increased difficulties in balancing work and home life. Especially if a family member has special needs, is ill, dying or has died. A career break may be necessary to take care of the loved one or of the family remaining. (Allen & al. 2014, 28, 30.) While some countries, like Finland, grant long maternity leaves for new mothers, not all the countries enjoy the same benefits. If willing to dedicate time for a new-born, a career break may be required. However, as Bansode (2016) points out, nowadays it might just as well be men who want to take extended time off from work to spend time with growing kids. Also yourSABBATICAL.com (2016) site recognizes this reason for a career break highlighting that when a person returns to work, their energy is replenished to dedicate their time to workplace objectives. It’s true that if concerned about an aging parent or a child, also the work efficiency may suffer. Both employer and employee would benefit of seizing the possibility for the employee to momentarily prioritize family over work.

Emotional healing sabbatical should be considered if an extended time is needed to nursing wounds after a traumatic situation. After losing a spouse, parent or child, or even after a difficult divorce, one might need to have an emotional healing break. Also, if a person has survived of an illness or other life-threatening situation, he/she might need to take a career break to reconsider the priorities and to be ready to concentrate on work again. A famous example of emotional healing sabbatical is of an American author, Elizabeth Gilbert, who wrote a book *Eat, Pray, Love*, of her experiences when going through her divorce and taking time off from her life to travel. (Allen & al. 2014, 30-31.)

Volunteering sabbatical appeals to people who want to contribute to make something good in life for others. One may have a special skill that can be used outside of own job to help others. Also, not everyone wants to travel as a tourist, and working voluntarily in another country may bring the culture more near than sightseeing. As volunteering has become so popular among Millennials, it's nowadays common to be forced to pay to do the volunteer work. This industry has been called "new volunteerism". (Allen et al. 2014, 33-35.) When back in the 1990's it was easy and possible for the fluent English speakers to go teaching English in poor countries with accommodation, food and petty cash provided, nowadays trainings and certificates are required and the work has become standardized where small salaries are paid to volunteers. YourSABBATICAL.com (2016) site lists volunteer and green sabbaticals that both can be classified to this category. While volunteering, which was just described above, can be spent as private career break or as part of company's sabbatical program, green sabbaticals refer solely to programs that employers offer to employees. Green sabbaticals are offered by environmentally green companies who are willing to let their employees to take part of some social responsibility program, or do research in this area (yourSABBATICAL.com 2016). Making reference to Millennials interest to volunteering and corporate responsibility, green sabbaticals may be an attraction argument for trendsetter companies.

Life enhancement career break can be a time off from work without an urgent need for change or a noble cause to help others. At some point of life, a person may require time for oneself to search new inspiration for work or life, or just reflect meaning of life and how it should be lived. If working for long and thinking about others, one may have lost their own dreams and interests. Many include self-discovery methods, such as yoga, meditation or other retreat programs to their career break. (Allen & al. 2014, 35-36.) YourSABBATICAL.com (2016) site recognizes personal growth sabbatical which has the same characteristics as life enhancement break according to Allen et al.

Pre-retirement career break can be taken by a person approaching retirement age and wanting to try out how the life will be after stopping to work. Some may want to make plans on how to spend the retired years, and some may need or want to continue working but in a different field. Volunteering work, new studies or travel are often combined to pre-retirement career break. (Allen & al. 2014, 37-38.)

Travel sabbatical that yourSABBATICAL.com (2016) has defined as a separate sabbatical type, is not recognized as a separate type by Allen et al. (2014) – presumably as often travelling is included to any other career break type. While reading about Millennials, meeting with travellers and considering the busy life and short vacation policies in many countries, I would consider career break for the sole purpose of travelling to be a possible motivation for a leave. Going to see the world and learning about other cultures does teach a lot about oneself, but a genuine interest of trying out how one can live and travel also appeals to many. Some have even made it a life style: after taking a break, today's nomads are able to work over the internet without having a permanent address or home.

Life-long goal sabbatical break is another category that yourSABBATICAL.com (2016) has defined but Allen et al. (2014) has not. I agree that taking a break to fulfil life-long dream can be a solid reason to take a career break to re-energize oneself for further working years. YourSABBATICAL.com (2016) gives examples such as, participating a theatre production, training for a triathlon competition and climbing to Mt. Everest. I would also consider Randy Pausch's sabbatical to belong to this category.

The types of leaves are sharply defined but life often isn't (Allen & al. 2014, 23). Also, working life should not be put on break completely. For example, Bansode (2016) gives tips for career breakers to include various activities to the to-do list: besides spending time with family, one should consider experimenting and trying new hobbies, read, travel, challenge oneself, stay connected, upgrade the needed workplace skills, volunteer/intern and consider entrepreneurship. A motivation for an individual's career break is often a combination of few, which also yourSABBATICAL.com (2016) site has defined as a separate hybrid category. I have however not considered hybrid category as a separate one. Further in this study, I will refer to these nine categories which are a mix of Allen et al. (2014) and yourSABBATICAL.com (2016) types.

3.2.2 Motivations and challenges in different age groups

Allen et al. (2014, 2-5) paint the motivations and challenges of people in different phases and ages of their life. I have built a table (table 2) and linked the age groups to previously

classified career break types. I have also added the two motivations (travel and life-long goal) from yourSABBATICAL.com site to the end of the list. As the age groups and motivations do not directly coincide with generations, the table contains following career breaker age groups: 20-30 years, 40-50 years and 60-70 years.

Common types that any of the age groups may consider as key motivation for the break are volunteering, travel and accomplishing a life-long goal. The other reasons appealing the youngest group are career enhancement, course correction and family related break. 40-50 years old may want to have a career break for career development, course correcting or validation, emotional healing or life enhancement purposes. The oldest group may, besides the common motivations, want to have a pre-retirement sabbatical. (Allen & al. 2014, 2-5.)

Table 2. Reason for career break usually taken by different age groups

Career break reason	Age		
	20-30 years	40-50 years	60-70 years
Career development	x	x	
Course correcting or validating	x	x	
Family	x		
Emotional healing		x	
Volunteering	x	x	x
Life enhancement		x	
Pre-retirement			x
Travel	x	x	x
Life-long goal	x	x	x

The challenges that the youngest group may face when considering a career break are inadequate financial resources, slow career start that may be difficult to compensate later and inexistent possibility to get sabbatical that would enable returning to the same job/company. The person in their forties and fifties may miss a promotion opportunity if leaving for a career break. If working in an important position, clients, employees or partners may be left in troubles when leaving for a break. At this age, people start to wonder as well if it will still be possible to get a new work, or if one is considered too old to start in a new job. The oldest age group shares the same fear of the possibility to still return to working life if one still wants it. The savings for retirement years may also create a barrier. (Allen & al. 2014, 2-5.)

3.3 Personal implications of career break from previous research

Sabbaticals and career breaks have been studied from various perspectives. Previous research on sabbaticals focuses usually to a certain profession. Since academics have enjoyed the longest of formalized sabbatical policies, many of the thorough studies have used academic sabbatical takers as research population. Allen et al. (2014, 78) writes about professors who are paid by the universities to be reinvigorated periodically in order to return to classroom energized and excited. This makes to wonder wouldn't everyone need this sort of a renewal period? Why only university professors should be refreshed? For sure they need to motivate students but hardly nobody works alone. Sitra researcher Lahti (2014) agrees and wishes that sabbaticals should be made mandatory as many employee gets tired during their employment years. A sabbatical would energize people in between and prevent precipitate retirements. Newbold (1997, 54) concurs and proposes sabbatical at least to every CEO before starting in a new position in order to prevent premature turnover or burnout.

Spector et al. (2010, 961) found in comparative research among academics that sabbatees enjoyed better well-being and their resource stock increased during and after the sabbatical. Stress levels declined, self-efficacy was increased and the burnout symptoms were relieved. The best effects during the sabbatical were found in the group who spent their time off abroad. However, their resource gain was decreased when returning home. (Spector & al. 2010, 961-962.) Miller, Bai and Newman (2012) point out that university sabbaticals are a powerful tool to reward faculty members who have done substantial research or worked long and hard for the institution. The studies research academic sabbaticals from specific angles, such as are equality issues when granting sabbaticals (Smith, Spronken-Smith, Stringer & Wilson, 2016).

Besides academics, there are specific studies on sabbatical implications of teachers (Gaziel 1995, 331-338; Otto & Kroth 2011), librarians (Weintraub 2008, 153-160; Hubbard 2002, 603-613) and nurses (Embree, Swenty & Schaar 2015, 352-358). Gaziel's (1995, 331-338) study revealed sabbatical enhancing elementary school teachers' professional identity, their increased feeling of empowerment, decreased number of burnouts and overall greater engagement to their workplace or to their profession. Otto and Kroth (2011) compared the inconveniences and benefits between academic and community colleges, and found out that renewal and refreshment of the teacher was common for both. Academia teachers benefited from having time for research to keep up the reputation of the university and their own knowledge. The people who needed to fill in for the sabbatee also

learned new skills. (Otto & Kroth 2011.) Librarians, who spent their sabbatical abroad, enjoyed new acquired skills, refreshed sense of purpose and increased understanding of different cultures and languages (Weintraub 2008, 153-160). In Hubbard's (2002, 611-612) study with librarians, acquired benefits were reaffirmed professional focus and increased problem solving skills, flexibility and energy levels. Nurses, who often suffer from burnout symptoms, were developed a balance scorecard model to evaluate the benefits of a sabbatical (Embree, Swenty & Schaar 2015, 352-358). McDearmic (2014, 10-20) has compiled findings of ten studies on sabbaticals among faculty members, academic librarians, pastors and employees of NGO in South Korea. The most common themes appearing as personal benefits of attending a sabbatical program were: better work-life balance, refreshment, acquired new skills and knowledge and increased commitment (McDearmic 2014, 21-24).

Most of the articles about career break, discuss women taking career break to raise kids and the subsequent impact to their career, salary development, status and challenges when re-entering workforce after long breaks (Herman 2011, 536-543; Lovejoy & Stone 2012, 631-653; Napari 2010, 55-73). As I have excluded child bringing career breaks from this study, I am not discussing these studied implications further in this report. However, related to bringing up children, Vandeweyer and Glorieux (2008, 277-278) have studied research data originally compiled by Belgian universities of 607 Belgium men, aged 20-49 years old, taking career breaks as part of Belgium job alternation leave policy. They have found out that surprising 54% of the men who have taken full-time career break used it to work for another job. It seems that the biggest reason for men to take a career break is to try out a new profession. Part-time career breakers instead spend 80% of the freed time to family related activities. (Vandeweyer and Glorieux 2008, 288-290.)

As part of the job alternation leave act in Finland, there has been several studies performed to assess the costs and benefits of the act. Nätti et al. (2005) reports better mental and physical well-being and improved family relations of the alternators. The difficulty was having less money to use. The substitutes benefited as well by having an opportunity to be employed which improved their financial situation, subjective well-being and self-esteem. This was due to improve their further job search, as the inconvenience of the job alternation leave agreement is the short duration of the substitute work contract. (Nätti & al. 2005.) Parvikoski (2015) has studied the implications of job alternation leave as a case study for one Finnish company. Surely other similar studies exist for other companies. Parvikoski (2015, 51-57, 63) reported results corresponding to Nätti et al. study. Additional alternator benefits came from possibility of planned change as refreshment to routines and improved job well-being that will likely extend the time an employee will work before

retirement. Substitutes reported insufficient induction to work duties as an inconvenience. (Parvikoski 2015, 51-63.)

A site promoting sabbaticals to companies and interested individuals, yourSABBATICAL.com (2016), summarizes benefits to sabbatical takers who have agreed with their employer to return to their job:

- Increased self-awareness when moving out of the comfort zone is a success factor in career development and leadership
- Replenished energy for work
- Increased commitment towards the employer who allowed to take a sabbatical
- Creativity and out-of-the-box thinking when gaining new perspectives in sabbatical
- New inspiration to share with others after having opportunity to achieve personal goals
- Added confidence on oneself

The cited research refers to sabbatical as studies on career breaks where individuals had resigned were difficult to find. Closest to understand those circumstances comes Hirschorn and Hefferon (2013) in their study *Leaving It All Behind to Travel: Venturing Uncertainty as a Means to Personal Growth and Authenticity*, where they focus on specific type of career break, the one to travel. Hirschorn and Hefferon (2013, 286-288) have interviewed ten Western young career breakers, aged 25-38, who have left their jobs to travel. Hirschorn and Hefferon (2013, 284-285) refer to Pines (1993) who explains the gradual disillusionment of Western who have adopted job as their religion but when failing to find life meaning in work, they end up in burnout. Young career breakers are thus willing to leave their established careers, earning and long-term relationships because of “existential yearning to travel”, calling for something “more” when understanding of life mortality, to take a leap of faith for authentic self-discovery (Hirschorn & Hefferon 2013, 289-298). These motivations have created the circumstances of growth, leading to vitality, fulfilment, self-efficacy, peace and helped in finding life meaning upon return home (Hirschorn & Hefferon 2013, 298-299).

The more surprising impacts of career breaks where the previous job is left behind is to start a career in a new field with connections made when volunteering. Another big change is to leave the work as an employee and start an own company. There are opportunities that the employer will also want to have the reinvigorated employee back. When the former employee has the possibility to negotiate the terms and conditions again, the new job might be better than the one before the break (Garone 2016.)

The inconveniences of career breaks were discussed in the previous chapter 3.2.2 separately for each age group, and they included fears related to financial resources, finding a

new job after the leave, falling behind with career or industry development, leaving other employees in trouble and missing possible promotions. (Allen & al. 2014, 2-5.)

This chapter has listed the implications of career breaks from previous research. Many of the studies focus on certain profession or they have been executed for specific country or company. Whereas Hirschorn and Hefferon study becomes closest to understand Millennials' worldview, it only takes into account the career breakers who have decided to travel while taking the time off. Furthermore, Generation Y is not the only generation who has started to value the time off. Allen et al. (2014, 69) refer to study according to which over 60% of Generation X in the US would like to take a career break. Tergesen (2013) writes about Baby Boomers wanting to have a break after all the years focusing on work and climbing the career ladders. If everyone wants to have a break now, what is the response from the companies?

4 Employer view on career breaks

This chapter looks into work and time off from company perspective. What does the employees' need for better work-life balance mean to employers, and how are companies addressing this requirement? I start this chapter presenting the benefits of good work-life balance before focusing on components of employee compensation and sabbatical leave as one of the employee benefits that employers can offer to attract and retain employees. The last chapter discusses the existing research to answer the question on how career breaks are viewed by employers.

4.1 Work-life balance promoting productivity and employee engagement

Employee wellbeing has become a key factor for thriving companies to invest in. Happy, competent and satisfied employees bring benefits to the company by being more creative, productive, loyal and performing better in terms of customer satisfaction. (New Economics Foundation 2014, 6, 9, 14.) Wellbeing at work is tightly linked to employee engagement – another focus area in human relationship management (New Economics Foundation 2014, 15).

New Economics Foundation (2014, 16) study has classified the drivers of wellbeing at work to four categories: personal resources, organizational system, functioning at work and experience of work. *Personal resources* determine the overall satisfaction of an individual's life by measuring health, vitality and work-life balance. *Organizational system* impacts to well-being by defining job design (including fair payment, job security and clear job description and goals), management practices (such as receiving feedback), physical work environment and social value that the job brings to the person. *Functioning at work* entails possibilities to use one's strengths, having the sense of control and keeping satisfying work relationships. *Experience of work* refers to employee's day-to-day life positive and negative feelings. (New Economics Foundation 2014, 16-40.) It is difficult to put the drivers in order of significance as they all promote the well-being, and thus employee engagement. For example, Perkka-Jortikka (2016, 39-40) states that job content, meaningfulness of the tasks, job security and work relationships are more important than financial compensation. However, related to this study, work-life balance has appeared as one of the more and more desired element by employees of younger generations. To cater this requirement, also employers have been activated to think how to support better work-life balance of the employees.

Work-life balance is dependent on number of working hours but the limit is personal. The situation also differs along individual's life changes. (New Economics Foundation 2014, 21.) A study ordered by the former President of the United States, Barack Obama, (Council of Economic Advisers 2010, 4-10, 18-20), confirms that flexible workplace arrangements, such as flexibility in the scheduling of hours, the place of work and the number of hours worked – reduces absenteeism and improves health productivity. The study also states that American companies have not yet adopted these opportunities in the company policies. One reason for not introducing more flexibility to employees' work is claimed to be the lack of knowledge between employees' increased job satisfaction and company profits with people defining the policies. The strong connection with the flexibility and productivity does however exist. (Council of Economic Advisers 2010, 25.) Poor work-life balance may result in stress, health issues, absenteeism and finally burnout (New Economics Foundation 2014, 21), Beagrie (2005) proposes career break as last result to reset the ill work-life balance situation, when reorganizing the work is not possible.

As discussed in the chapter describing the values of Millennials towards work, motivating younger generations requires adopting flexible workplace procedures. Goudreau (2012) calls out for flexibility in all the previously described aspects: besides independent work scheduling and telecommuting, vacation time should be more easy to get. This is a new trend to attract Millennials appreciating free time. It makes to think if younger generation is wiser not to through themselves fully to work, will they be saved from burnout? Mielach (2012) writes that Generation Y is rather willing to be unemployed than to work for a job that they hate. To help Millennials in long-term engagement, Allen et al. (2014, 257) proposes to create and commit to goals bigger than one or two years.

4.2 Why companies offer sabbatical leaves?

The benefits of rest to rejuvenate oneself are indisputable. Besides the weekly and yearly resting time that are mandated in Western countries, many are looking for longer period out of work to renew and re-energize themselves. An inspiring example of sabbatical benefits is presented in TED Talk with the title *The Power of Time Off* (Sagmeister 2009). Stefan Sagmeister is New York based graphic designer who closes his studio every seven years for one year long sabbatical. He explains the benefits and new creative inspiration he gets to his work when taking the time to travel and temporary live in another culture. As entrepreneur, he has the liberty to do it but he also takes a risk of losing his customers while being away and simply notifying by Out of Office message that he'll be back in a year.

4.2.1 Sabbatical leave as benefit

For those who work for a company, there might be a possibility to apply for a sabbatical that would allow returning to work after the leave. Human Resources (HR) strategy determines how human resource policies and procedures are integrated with business strategies. When it comes to sabbaticals, they are defined in HR policies which explain the rules and regulations of different human resource matters in a company. (Armstrong 2016, 62.) If a company offers sabbaticals to attract and retain the employees, it is thus defined in HR strategy with details provided in a specific HR policy. Garrett (2008, 22) recommends even smaller companies to create a sabbatical policy to show that the rules are the same for everyone. If the rules differ for key people and regular staff, it needs to be explained as well. Openly shared policy gives employees a goal to work towards as companies usually require a certain number of employment years before employee is eligible to apply. (Garrett 2008, 22.)

Sabbatical is considered as one part of employee total compensation package which consists of three elements: direct financial compensation, indirect financial compensation and non-financial compensation. Indirect financial compensation is also called benefits. *Direct financial compensation* includes wages, salaries, commissions, incentives, rewards, awards and stock options. The variety of *indirect financial compensation* is wider, and they can consist of elements, such as health insurances, pension scheme, sick leave pay, holiday pay, parental leave, sabbatical, company car, mobile phone, lunch vouchers and credit card. *Non-financial compensation* includes job description, autonomy, feedback, management, working conditions, workplace flexibility, telecommuting etc. (Ek-Petroff 2011.)

Compensation is a strategic matter to companies as it usually represents one of the biggest costs, and it reflects the company values motivating employees to work for the organization. The elements of the total compensation package have high impact on employees' motivation, commitment and behaviours. In order to stay in the game of the war of talent, companies must review competitive market conditions of their compensation package regularly (Ek-Petroff 2011). While not every company provides a sabbatical policy yet, the increasing requirement of the workforce to have breaks during their career may rise the number of companies offering them. If the competitor provides better possibilities to balance work with life, it may become a turning point for the employee looking for a new job. Besides attracting qualified employees, taking good care of employees looks good in company image. Romano (1995, 9) points out that having introduced a sabbatical program, makes it very difficult to remove from the employee benefits.

The terms and conditions of sabbaticals differ from company to company. Usually the sabbatical programs allow employee not to lose their continuity of service years even if they would not be paid or keep the other benefits during the leave. In some cases, employer allows employee to take the sabbatical only when resigning. This practise is less favourable for the employee as the continuity of service benefits are lost but it does still lower the risk as employee has a job to return to after the leave. (Done 2010.)

It's worth to note that annual leaves are longer in Europe than in United States. Americans are also not used to spend the earnt holiday days due to pressure to stay available at all times. (Allen & al. 2014, 7.) The usual sabbaticals programs offer break usually for 1-3 months (Pagano & Pagano 2010, 1; Allen & al. 2014, 197) whereas Europeans have better possibilities to accumulate 1-2 month holidays with annual leaves (Allen & al. 2014, 7). Only career breaks can provide time for a longer respite.

4.2.2 Employee turnover costs

One major reason why employers had started to offer sabbaticals to the employees is the high costs of employee turnover. If a good, trained employee wants to have a break, it is quite often less expensive to let the person to have a sabbatical than to find a permanent replacement (Garrett 2008, 22). Hobart and Sendek (2014, 16) refer to U.S. Department of Labor Statistics who have calculated that replacing a person costs 25 percent of employee's total compensation. Some companies estimate the cost of replacing an employee to reach \$200.000 (Hobart & Sendek 2014, 16). According to Lucas (2012), the turnover costs when needing to replace an executive may reach 213% of employee's salary.

The turnover cost consists of list of items, such as;

- Costs of replacement work while the position is vacant
- Lost work if not all work being covered by other employees or temporary labor
- Hiring manager's and HR salary used for application screening and interviewing
- Cost of advertising
- Costs of skills assessment and background checks
- Onboarding and training costs
- Costs of productivity ramp-up that takes several months (Hobart and Sendek 2014, 14-15.)

In addition, when an employee leaves, firm-specific knowledge is lost which may create additional costs or at least inconveniences (Council of Economic Advisers 2010, 17). The high cost of turnover is a motivation for organizations keeping the employees content.

Building attractive compensation packages is one key factor to retain employees in the company. Hobart and Sendek (2014, 16) remind to take into consideration that the strategy to retain Millennials is different from the previous generations. The study analysing American workplace practises (Council of Economic Advisers 2010, 25) has found that flexible work arrangements reduce turnover and help when recruiting new staff which at the same time increases the productivity of the whole workforce.

4.2.3 Business impacts of sabbatical programs

Personal implications of taking a sabbatical or leaving the job for a career break were discussed in chapter 3.3. This chapter is dedicated to present the reported benefits and inconveniences that employer faces when offering sabbatical programs to the employees.

Even if some forward-thinking companies have started to require employees to take sabbaticals (yourSABBATICAL.com 2016), usually it's the employee who needs to propose and sell the idea of having the sabbatical to the management. Allen et al. (2014, 54) proposes to build a business case for the employer to present the benefits of a sabbatical. According to UK study (Employee Benefits 2003, 14), 52 percent of the managers believed sabbaticals increasing employee qualifications. Sabbaticals can re-energize employees on the verge of fatigue or burnout, and thus decreasing the healthcare costs and employee turnover. They help to build leadership skills of the managers and leaders when they step back and look at the world from a different perspective for a while. For the employee continuing to work, sabbaticals can help to enhance their capabilities when they need to take over tasks from the sabbatical taker. Knowing about the possibility to take a sabbatical break can increase the loyalty of the whole personnel. Sabbaticals can also improve the morale in the workplace when rejuvenated and happier employees return to work with full force. (Allen & al. 2014, 55-56.) Sabbatical takers have been seen to have improved communication and problem solving skills and better adaptability to work under pressure when returning from leave (Stern 2003, 13). YourSABBATICAL.com (2016) reminds of the attraction factor of the sabbatical programs when hiring. Sabbaticals provide also a means to retain experienced employee willing to have break from work. After leave, the employees return energized with more innovative mind being more productive. Sabbaticals offer also a great means for public relations when building a company brand where employee work-life balance is taken into account. Besides attraction factor, also products and services of the company may receive a positive boost when spreading the word about the program publicly. Sabbaticals may also build stronger teams when several

people need to step up to cover for the one on the leave. When it comes to client relationships, sabbaticals provide a natural means to rotate the clients to make them belonging to company, not to an individual. (yourSABBATICAL.com 2016.)

Many companies have also understood the opportunity to manage talented workforce during recession (Pagano & Pagano 2010, 4). Long sabbaticals have been offered during Great Recession to control costs and reduce the number of layoffs. These actions can show company acting responsibly and help to keep employees engaged. (Davies 2009; Rhodes 2009.) Done (2010) recommends companies to consider offering unpaid sabbaticals to avoid compulsory redundancy consultations. With the quarter-based financial targets requiring immediate actions, companies can review if the situation has improved and invite sabbatical takers to return back to work (Done 2010).

In academic settings, the benefit that the faculty is supposed to gain from sabbatical takers is enhanced knowledge of the faculty member's field of study. The sabbatical application usually asks for the motivation for the break, and universities require reporting of the achievements after the sabbatical. These practises usually differ substantially between the universities. (Miller, Bai & Newman 2012.) A difference between corporate and academic sabbaticals is that universities usually hire part-time instructor to teach whereas companies will require remaining staff to fill in for the sabbatical taker (Otto & Kroth 2011).

Companies may be reluctant to give sabbaticals as they favour business continuity and consistency (Garone 2016). The increased workload of the personnel remaining to work and filling in for the sabbatical taker may bring along new costs, even if the salary of one person is not there. Companies may also see the risk of employee finding a new job while having the sabbatical which may result employer not to be willing give extended time for employees, taking all the effort to reorganize the work and just to see the employee not returning. This risk can be mitigated with setting up an agreement for the employee to come back and still work for the company at least for a certain time. (Otto & Kroth 2011.)

The findings from Finnish job alternation leave studies have found employer benefiting from having fresh workforce entering the companies with effective recruitment method. The inconveniences were related to reorganization of the work and additional training that was required to be given for the substitutes. Taking into consideration the benefits to the alternators, especially the increased well-being of the older employees, the benefits from job alternation leave have overtaken the disadvantages. (Nätti & al. 2005.) Parvikoski (2015, 70) points out that both employer and Finnish Ministry of Economic Affairs and Employment praise for the possibility to recruit new employees and try out how they perform.

Parvikoski (2015, 71) asks if hiring employees as fixed-term contract has been made too difficult if job alternation leave substitutes are the best way to find work for the unemployed.

4.2.4 Companies supporting sabbaticals

Sabbaticals have been offered by large American corporations since 1960's (Pagano & Pagano 2010, 1). The reasons to give employees the possibility for extended time off were to fight against burnout and to have time for volunteer work and social service (Romano 1995, 9). The pioneers in the corporate world offering sabbaticals were McDonalds, Intel and few law firms (Pagano & Pagano 2010, 1). Romano (1995, 9-10) and Stevenson (1995, 55-56) describe the early sabbatical programs of US based companies, and list large companies, such as Apple, Wells Fargo, American Express, AT&T and Time Warner. Eligibility typically requires five, seven, ten or fifteen years of service. The usual length of the sabbatical is one to three months but also full one year sabbaticals are possible, depending on the company. (Romano 1995, 9-10; Stevenson 1995, 55-56; Allen & al. 2014, 197.)

The number of sabbatical programs introduced by new companies are rising. Garone (2016) refers to experts confirming that both more matured workforce and Millennials have high interest for sabbaticals. This requires companies to offer the programs if they are willing to keep hold of their employees. (Garone 2016.) When 10% of the UK companies had a sabbatical policy in 2003 (Employee Benefits 2003, 14), currently 37% of the companies report having a policy in place (yourSABBATICAL.com 2016). While 1994 Apple employees were reported not to take offered 6 week sabbatical if willing to keep their jobs (Romano 1995, 9), the perspectives may be changing.

Fortune's 100 Best Companies to Work For (2016), Allen et al. (2014, 198-201) and yourSABBATICAL.com (2016) list the current companies favourable to allow employees to have sabbaticals. Fortune 100 companies list includes all information about the sabbatical length, eligibility and compensation. Detailed information clearly provides an opportunity for companies to advertise their benefits, and caters job-seekers to review and compare possible future employers.

Goudreau (2012) writes about new innovative sabbatical models of young companies who fear their employees working too much. Companies like Evernote and Netflix understand the connection between time off and productivity and they give unlimited vacation days for their employees. The job duties need to however be taken care of. Some pay sabbatical

bonuses for employees to take sabbatical or just to take one full week of holiday. According to recent study Americans don't seem to be able to relax even on holidays. They check emails and answer phones during holiday and feel more stressed when returning to office. One wise CEO however explains that when forcing employees to take a vacation overseas (by paying \$7.500 as holiday bonus), he forces employees to plan and organize their work better and everyone to work together for the common goal. No need to answer the phone or emails if work is documented and information is shared. (Goudreau 2012.) Allen et al. (2014, 197) writes about young lawyers who are offered to spend one year on sabbatical with 30 percent salary while required to spend some time working for pro bono cases, building experience and meeting new potential customers. Innovative sabbatical models include linking time off to company values, for example requiring volunteer work as Patagonia does (Pagano & Pagano 2010, 5).

4.3 Employment after career break

One of the research questions of this study was to find out how career breaks are viewed by employers. While career breaks are becoming commonplace with Millennials, how are companies treating jobseekers with periods in the CV, where they have not been employed by any company or organization? So far, no academic studies have been performed to assess the situation but few articles are discussing the matter.

Career breaks where an employee leaves the company, creates most of the benefits for the career breaker. There are implications to the companies as well, such as employee turnover as described earlier. Turnover may bring positive effects if an unmotivated employee is replaced with fresh enthusiasm. When a person resigns from his/her work, the business benefits are transferred to the new employer that the person starts to work in.

The first perspectives from employers are from early 2000's in short articles point out that career breaks are seen to improve communication and problem solving skills, and person's ability to adapt to different circumstances and working under pressure. Also, confidence levels were seen increased. (Stern 2003, 13.) Malvern (2002, 43) writes in Accountancy journal that accountants taking time off from their work are actually seen more attractive to employers. Traveling and other new experiences make career breaker accountants more interesting to be employed and standing out from the crowd. Ambitious people are seen to have career breaks – thus they are considered as courageous. (Malvern 2002, 43.)

Part of the benefits seen with corporate sabbatical takers are naturally also applicable for career breakers returning to work for their new employers. Career breakers are rejuvenated and more productive, and they have likely learnt new skills and gained knowledge to make them more innovative (yourSABBATICAL.com 2016). Increased well-being and learnings on what they want in life benefits the employer as well (Allen & al. 2014, 131). But do employers see this?

Hadden (2010) has asked the question how prospective employers think about people who have taken a career break. She claims that the views depend on the industry where the person is off, how the time away is spend and how well are the break is “sold” to the new employer. Director of an UK company, Paul Payne, agrees and explains that a year off can be seen as favourable for a company if job-seeker shows that he/she interested in learning and has learned new skills and experiences while off work which are likely to improve job performance (Garone 2016). Especially volunteering and working with professionals in another field can teach new ways to solve issues creatively. Also, they improve people skills. (Garone 2016.) Allen et al. (2014, 130-131) agree with Hadden and refer to professional recruiters who confirm that having a career break is not a problem if it is well explained. Being negative, complaining of being totally burnt out and having only needed time alone in nature may not be the way to attract employers. If learnings, self-improvement and widened perspectives can be explained, taking a career break should not be a problem. Employer may well value a person who is open to new experiences and views, and willing to take risks for life. (Allen & al. 2014, 130-131.)

Interviews of ten Americans taking career breaks are collected in LinkedIn site describing the different motivations for the leaves and evident changes that they had on their lives. None of the interviewed people reported significant issues with re-employment. (Murray 2014.) Despite my research, I wasn't able to find proper study on the implications that career breaks had made to people's lives.

5 Methodology

This chapter presents and explains the methodology applied in this study. I am starting with the initial research objectives, and then linking them to research philosophies, approaches and methodological choices. Next, I describe the sampling process by introducing the process of selecting the questionnaire respondents. Finally, I disclose the research process explaining how the study was conducted.

5.1 Research objectives

The research questions to this study emerged from personal situation and interests. Having started a career break myself in autumn 2016, I searched for current topics that I would be curious to do research about. The main drivers to choose to study the topic were my interest to HR and future studies, the book of today's careers by Perkka-Jortikka (2016) on display in university library, and the career breaks that I found many people having taken or at least seriously considering. Initially, I did not have a sponsor or an interested party to help or make use of my research but I was sure that the topic would be interesting both in individual level, as in a higher level, where the future work is discussed.

During the research phase, I literally used every opportunity to discuss about my thesis. I was traveling in South-East Asia and stayed in hostels where I had the opportunity to meet with people travelling, also many career breakers. Talking about the study happened very naturally as people were interested to hear about my travels and how I was able to combine travelling with studying. These conversations proved the point of Saunders et al. (2012, 92) of receiving numerous new ideas and viewpoints to my study. The discussions also helped me to crystallize what I really wanted to know. Finally, my research objectives materialized to following list:

- To identify the motivations for career break
- To describe the implications of a career break for individual's career
- To understand how career breaks and sabbatical leaves are viewed by companies and particularly by HR professionals
- To understand if career breaks are becoming more common and more acceptable with Generation Y entering the workforce

Following the research objectives, I also defined my research questions where I have one main research question and four questions relating to the main one. The main research question is:

1. What are the implications of taking a career break?

Falling under the main question, I am also intending to find out:

2. Why people take career breaks?
3. Does having a career break make changes to person's career?
4. How career breaks are viewed by HR and recruiters?
5. Have career breaks become socially acceptable internationally?

As I wanted to know more about the phenomenon without restricting the outcome, I chose to conduct an *exploratory study* (Saunders & al. 2012, 170-171). My target was to reach career breakers and HR professionals in an informal manner to enable respondents to disclose their views in a relaxed manner. Besides listening to career breakers and HR professionals, I was keen on studying the already available literature about the topic. I considered it significant to find out how much research has already been done of voluntary career breaks to answer some of the research questions.

5.2 Research design

This study reflects *interpretivism tradition as research philosophy* which is commonly used in social sciences (Jakubik 2011). The topic is too complex to narrow it down to meet realist, positivist or pragmatist views that Saunders et al. (2012, 132-137) lists as other philosophical choices used in management and business research. My target to study the phenomenon and the different viewpoints and actions taken by individuals with empathetic attitude which will make me subjective. My role as a researcher is literally being part of the studied phenomenon, which highlights also from axiology point of view the chosen interpretivism philosophy. Furthermore, it emphasizes the risk of mixing my own values, views and expectations to the actual research findings (Saunders & al. 2012, 132, 137). These topics are further discussed in chapter 8 assessing the research quality.

Saunders et al. (2012, 130-131) separates two aspects of *research ontology*: subjective and objective approach. Similarly, as the example of customers in Saunders et al. (2012, 132), my study aims to describe individual behavior impacted by environment, social expectations, their background and experiences. As I am describing the personal motivations and implications of career break, my aim is to understand *subjective reality* of the individuals.

The *research approach* for this study is *inductive*. I am not able to create and test hypothesis as my goal is rather to understand a phenomenon that is expected to be complex. In-

ductive research approach analyzes the collected data in order to make sense to the studied subject, and consequently developing a theory of the findings (Jakubik 2011). As Saunders et al. (2012, 146) puts it, as I am more interested of 'why' people take career breaks than 'if' they take them, I am more drawn to use inductive approach. I am more open to various viewpoints when I decide not to define a hypothesis in advance as deductive approach would require. Selected research approach has however an impact to possibilities of generalization: inductive approach does not emphasize the need to generalize the results which allows smaller sample size than deductive approach would require (Saunders & al. 2012, 146). Possibilities of generalization are further discussed in chapter 8.3 in connection with reliability and validity of the results.

Following the interpretive philosophy, exploratory nature of the study and inductive approach, I have chosen *mono method qualitative research as methodological choice* (Saunders & al. 2012, 163). Qualitative method suits well to discover non-numerical data of respondents' feelings and opinions in order to create commonalities and even a conceptual framework which is exactly the target of this study (Saunders & al. 2012, 161, 163).

The appropriate *research strategy* to follow the methodological choice, and eventually to provide rich data to answer the defined research questions, is a *case study*. This strategy helps to answer the 'why?', 'how?' and 'then what?' questions that this study is intending to find out. Multiple cases have been selected to answer the research questions to ensure the data validity. Of the data collection methods commonly used in case studies, questionnaire is the main method in this study. Triangulation is made to pre-interviews with the respondents, existing literature and informal discussions with countless people interested to talk about the topic. (Saunders & al. 2012, 179-180.) The *time horizon* is *cross-sectional study* providing a snapshot of the phenomenon at the time of the report completion (Saunders & al. 2012, 190-191).

As mentioned, the *data collection method* used in this study is a *questionnaire*. The chosen method enabled reaching respondents internationally without additional travelling or phone cost. The questionnaire had semi-structured questions similar to ones that could be asked in an interview. Providing the information in written format had the benefit of respondents to have more time to reflect on their answers. My intention was to look at the both sides of the work, i.e. record the views of both of employees and employers. Answering the research questions required insights of career breakers and of people working in human resources departments. This decision made me to create two separate questionnaires: one for career breakers and one for HR professionals (Appendix 3 and 4). Both

questionnaires were to be self-completed, and they were sent to the respondents by email after separately agreeing with the respondent to take part of the study. Even if Haaga-Heilia provides a possibility to use an electronic survey tool to collect data for thesis work, I decided to use a simple e-mail questionnaires in data collection. I reasoned email to be the easiest way for the respondent – as at least the travelers are sometimes suffering from weak internet connections which make it difficult to fill in electronic questionnaires. In addition, I consider writing of such sensitive matters as career breaks less formal and more personal by email. I expected to have more confidential responses when respondents were able to write to my personal email as opposed to fill in an electronic survey. The questions were all open questions, except for the questions of basic attributes, such as age, gender, nationality and country of living. These attributes were not asked from HR respondents. Only the preferred way to refer to the person including country of living and industry were asked from HR professionals. Opinion and behavior variables constituted rest of the questions. I paid attention not to make the questionnaire too long which would lower the number of respondents. The questions were open questions, and respondent was independently able to decide how thorough answers he/she would write. After disclosing basic attributes, career breakers were asked ten questions, out of which five asked about behavior and five about opinion. HR professionals were asked eight questions, out of which four of behavior and four of opinion. Both questionnaires were preceded by background info of my studies, and an affirmation that the received information is viewed only by me and deleted after the report completion. I also provided a possibility to have a copy of my completed thesis report sent to the respondent.

5.3 Sampling

The population of career breakers and HR professionals in the international settings is immense, and only a sample was possible to be studied. Having chosen to conduct an exploratory study with qualitative methods and case study as research strategy justified using *non-probability sampling technique* (Saunders 2012, 260-261, 281). This technique does not allow generalization similarly as probability sampling but considering the research questions and the wide population, it was the only possible technique to explore the topic. Possibilities of generalization are further discussed in chapter 8.3 in connection with reliability and validity of the results.

The purpose was to collect responses both from people who are currently in career break, and from the ones who have already finished their career break. The people planning to have a career break were not included in the study. The reason to include both people on break and the ones who had already returned back to work was deliberate, as I suspected

the feelings and ideas to fade fairly soon after the break. The people being on break had been recently forced to do lots of thinking, self-exploration and give explanations about their decision. In the other hand, the people who had returned to work were able to report what had happened afterwards and also to reflect the whole experience. The strong prerequisite was that the person had personally and voluntarily decided and act on having a break from work. People who were on break to raise children, who had just graduated or who were made redundant were not included to the sample. I also scoped out the people who had voluntarily resigned during company restructuring programs even if they were benefiting financial compensation packages offered by their employers. This decision was based to witnessed difficulty of those situations: even if it is the employee who resigns, the decision is forced. I looked at the career break from the wider meaning of the word, and included both people who were on sabbatical and returning to work for their previous employer, and the people who had quit their jobs. I considered that essential was the time out of work obligations that enabled to use the time for something else that was meaningful for the person. Some people were paid during the leave, some used their savings to fund the break. In Finland, some were benefiting job alternation policy. I was not interested how career breakers were financing their break from the work. The length of the break did not matter either. Another point was to find respondents globally from countries/continents where there was people taking career breaks.

Deciding on the sufficient sample size when making a case study with non-probability sampling technique is always difficult (Saunders & al. 2012, 283). As my intention was to do an exploratory study and also to use existing literature to triangulate and support my own research findings, I assessed a sample of 30 for career breakers and sample of 10 for HR professional questionnaires to be sufficient for the study. This number of respondents follow the Saunders (2012) recommendation where minimum sample size in non-probability study for heterogenous population is 12-30 (Saunders & al. 2012, 283). As my questionnaire was semi-structured and resembled a semi-structured interview – even if in written format – I also considered Saunders' guidance of 5-25 samples to support my judgement. The recommendation is to continue data collection until data saturation but as I did not receive responses from all the people I was initially in contact with, I admit that I did not reach fully satisfactory data saturation. For example, there were types of leaves and changes in people's lives that I was not able to capture in this report. In the end, I was able to collect 26 answers to career break questionnaire, and 6 answers to HR professionals' questionnaire. I however consider the lower number of responses are somewhat compensated by the rich and long written answers that I received from the respondents.

The sample of questionnaire respondents were selected mostly with *haphazard or convenience sampling* but also *volunteer sampling techniques* (self-selection and snowball technique) were used. Convenience sampling methods included contacting known people either being or having taken a career break, or working in HR. People met while travelling in South-East Asia in 2016-2017 constituted another large group of convenience sampling respondents. Self-selection sampling technique was used when publishing a call of questionnaire respondents in LinkedIn. Snowball sampling took place without my specific request when people hearing about my study started to find more candidates to participate. Convenience sampling returned eighteen respondents (69%) and volunteer sampling offered eight respondents (31%) to career break questionnaire. For the HR questionnaire, both techniques returned three responses.

The different means to connect with possible survey respondents, the number of responses per initial contacts and response rate percentage are listed for both questionnaire types in table 3. Most of the career breaker (CB) respondents were found while travelling in South-East Asia from October 2016 to March 2017, and 12 people out of initially volunteered 19 people also returned the questionnaire. Already known personal contacts were the next biggest group of questionnaire respondents, and six of seven initially agreed respondents replied in time. I also wrote a post in LinkedIn newsfeed of my research to look for additional career breakers, and all six people who contacted me after seeing the post also came back with their insights. There were also several people who offered to find new respondents and had discussions with their friends, colleagues or acquaintances to participate the study. I contacted four possible respondents, and received two answers. It was considerably more difficult to find respondents among HR professionals. I suspected it is hard to find respondents but it proved to be even harder to have busy business people to respond to the questionnaire. Most of the respondents were found through respondents who already participated the study. In this group, three contacted individuals out of five returned the questionnaire. Knowing the HR professional did not ensure participation as with the career breaker survey. My posts in four different LinkedIn groups for HR professionals did not return any responses even if one person initially volunteered to participate. The LinkedIn posts texts and the names of the LinkedIn groups that I made the posts are available in Appendix 5.

Table 3. Responses per initial contacts and response rate according to sampling technique and questionnaire type

Detailed sampling technique	CB	HR
Already known personal contact	6/7 (86%)	2/5 (40%)
Person met while travelling 2016-2017	12/19 (63%)	1/1 (100%)
Person identified through another person	2/4 (50%)	3/5 (60%)
Person contacting me due to my personal LinkedIn newsfeed post	6/6 (100%)	N/A
Person contacting me due to my post in specialized LinkedIn group	0/0 (0%)	0/1 (0%)
Total	26/36 (72%)	6/12 (50%)

Apart from the people met while travelling, everyone was contacted solely via emails. All the people counted as a possible respondent were willing to participate and enthusiastic about the topic. In practice, finding the time to think and write about personal goals, their completion and eventual changes in life was not always easy to find. Most of the volunteers were reminded even several times about the questionnaire. The response collection time was extended as it became apparent how much time it actually took to have the questionnaires returned. New respondents were found during the whole data collection time. As everyone were personally asked to participate, they were also personally thanked to take part in the study. Also, the people who did not respond, were thanked for their interest.

5.4 Conducting the study

The study was conducted between September 2016 and April 2017. Literature research confirmed the lack of previous research in the exact field of study, and proved the purpose of the research. The research questions and objectives were defined during the literature research, discussions with various people while travelling, and when defining and testing the questionnaires. All the three (research objectives, research questions and questionnaires) were linked together to ensure each question supports answering the research questions, and that there are no unnecessary, duplicate or unclear questions. Theoretical framework and questionnaire were created in autumn 2016, and the questionnaires were piloted with two respondents for each questionnaire in November-December 2016. Testing the questionnaires was crucial even if it took longer than expected, and I received excellent feedback and improvement ideas, and also suggestions for further research. Two questions were added and order of the questions was changed in the career breaker questionnaire. One question was added and one question was removed from HR questionnaire. Few questions were rewritten in order to attain better clarity, and to ensure more elaborative answers instead of 'yes' or 'no'.

The questionnaires were sent to people who had either volunteered or otherwise willingly agreed to take part of the study. The data collection happened between 20.12.2016 and 7.3.2017. People were reminded of the participation throughout the winter 2016-2017 which proved to be a bigger task than anticipated. All the responses were collected by email and transferred to Excel for data analysis. More about how the people were contacted is described in previous chapter 5.3 on sampling.

After finalizing the theoretical part in the end of year 2016, I contacted five Finnish organizations that I suspected being interested of my study in early January 2017. After exchanging few emails, and upon returning to Finland in March, I visited The Union of Professional Business Graduates in Finland (TRAL), an organization that was interested of making use of my study. We agreed for them to read and comment my report before final submission, and later to continue discussion of further use of the study. Feedback from TRAL is written in chapter 8.4 on business value of the study, and planned further use is described in chapter 9.3 on next steps.

The methodology, findings, assessment of the study and conclusions were mostly written in March-April 2017. Following the inductive approach of the research, the received qualitative data i.e. the questionnaire answers, was categorized to identify relationships in order to show appearing commonalities (Saunders & al. 2012, 549). Basic attributes of the questionnaire respondents are presented in tables, and reported behavior and opinions are analyzed for common concepts that are presented in tables and figures when helping to read the findings. Limited number of direct quotes are added to illustrate significant themes appearing from the answers. Findings from previous research were used to help classify answers to question on career break motives and accomplishments. The data was categorized following the concepts appearing from existing theory and literature (Saunders & al. 2012, 558). The exploratory nature of the research was however not forgotten, and new categories were allowed to emerge. Other data was grouped according to common themes and topics derived from the data (Saunders & al. 2012, 558). Due to lower number of data received from the HR professionals, most of the data is presented in textual format without classification to larger themes.

6 Research findings

This chapter presents the data collected from career breakers and HR professionals. The findings are presented in the order that the questions were asked in the questionnaires. First chapter introduces the career breaker data, and the second chapter describes information received from the HR professionals.

6.1 Career breaker questionnaire

The questionnaire for career breakers was a set of questions sent to voluntary respondents fitting to the selection criteria. The questionnaire (Appendix 3) asked for basic information of the respondents followed by 10 questions intending to find out career breakers' behaviour and opinions. Following sub-chapters present the findings of the questionnaire starting with the characteristics of the respondents. The three separate themes: motives, benefits and inconveniences, and impacts to respondents' lives are presented in separate sub-chapters.

6.1.1 Career breaker profiles

Sample for the career breaker group comprises of 26 respondents of 12 different nationalities. Three respondents were from North America, three from South America, one was Asian and 19 respondents were from Europe. 18 respondents were women and eight were men. Nine respondents were Finnish, and they were representing the biggest one respondent nationality. Information of the respondents is presented in table 4.

Table 4. Nationality and sex of the respondents

Nationality	Sex of the respondent		Total
	Female	Male	
Austrian	1		1
Brazilian	2	1	3
British	1	1	2
Dutch		1	1
Finnish	7	2	9
German	1		1
Irish	2		2
Lithuanian	1		1
USA	1	2	3
Turkish		1	1
Swiss	1		1
Japanese	1		1
Total	18	8	26

Both nationality and country of living were asked from the respondents. Few people who were currently on career break had difficulties answering in which country they actually live, as they had no address in any country. Four individuals were not living in their own country at the time when they were participating to the study: Brazilian living in Ireland, Irish in the UK, Finn in Malta and British citizen living in Switzerland prior to starting to travel.

Out of the 26 respondents, 10 were currently on career break and 16 had ended their career breaks. The time since career break had ended varied between the 16 respondents. Three had just ended the break, and for the rest 13, the time since the break was between one to 12 years. The number of years since career break was taken is presented in table 5.

Table 5. Years since career break had ended

Years since career break	Number of respondents
0	3
1-2	4
3-5	4
6-10	3
more than 10	2
Total	16

Five respondents had taken more than one career break in their lives. One of the respondents replied to the questionnaire giving information about both of the breaks, and another career breaker on one of the breaks that the person had altogether had three. The rest three respondents were currently on their second career break but answered the questionnaire related to their earlier career break.

The age of the respondents varied between 24 to 47 years. The age presented in the table below (table 6) shows the age of the respondents when they had the career break. The youngest career breaker was 22 years old, and the oldest was 46 years old. The largest number of career breaks were spent between ages 26 to 35 (58% of respondents).

Table 6. Age of the respondents when on career break

Age group	Number of respondents
20-25	3
26-30	8
31-35	7
36-40	3
41-45	4
46-50	1
Total	26

As an approximation, the respondents represented two generations: Generation X and Generation Y (or Millennials). The birth year of the respondents was not asked but calculated from the current age with 1981 used as threshold year. Dividing the respondents from several nationalities to generations is an approximation as the actual threshold year differ from country to country, as explained in chapter 2.1. However, as an estimate, 15 people were Millennials and 11 represented Gen X.

The length of the career breaks taken by the respondents varied between two months to yet to be determined length (table 7). 10 respondents had a career break lasting less than a year, whereas 16 had spent, or were planning to spend, at least a year on a break. Two respondents had not pre-defined the length of the break but the break had started over 1,5 years ago. The nine people having a break for over a year had variation from 16 months to three years and eight months.

Table 7. Length of the career break

Length of the break	Number of respondents
1-3 months	2
4-6 months	5
7-11 months	3
1 year	5
> 1 year	9
not defined	2
Total	26

Apart from two respondents, all had a permanent work contract with full hours prior to taking the career break. Two respondents had temporary contracts that they were not willing to renew. The other respondent was offered a permanent contract when announcing to leave for a career break but employee refused to sign the contract.

The type of career break and the length that was spent on the break are presented below (table 8). 20 respondents resigned from their work when leaving for the break. Two benefited from Finnish job alternation leave act, and one was granted a sabbatical from the company. Two respondents were allowed to have study leave, and one agreed to have an unpaid leave combined with annual leave. The job alternators and people on study leave spent year or more out from work. The only person having accepted to have a sabbatical leave from the company, had a break of two months. The person having a career break as an unpaid leave, spent five months off from work. The respondents who had quit their jobs were more numerous with more variation in the length of the break. 12 respondents in this group were on leave at least for a year, constituting the largest single type of career breakers. The two people on leave for undefined time were also in this group.

Table 8. Type of career break and length of the break

Type of career break and length	Number of respondents
Job alternation leave	
1 year	2
Total	2
Resigned	
1-3 months	1
4-6 months	4
7-11 months	3
1 year	2
> 1 year	8
not defined	2
Total	20
Sabbatical leave	
1-3 months	1
Total	1
Study leave	
1 year	1
> 1 year	1
Total	2
Unpaid leave	
4-6 months	1
Total	1
Grand Total	26

Table 9 combines the information of the type of the leave and if the person returned, or will return, to work for the same organization. All the respondents on job alternation leave, sabbatical leave and unpaid leave returned to their previous work. It needs to be noted that both respondents having taken study leave, were notably reluctant to return to their jobs. There had been high hopes that study leave would have entailed a new job opportunities, not only further education. The 20 people who had resigned from their previous companies, were mostly not returning to their old jobs. One wrote with slight resent of not having the willingness to return as a sabbatical leave had not been granted even if the

person had been working hard six years for the company, and being highly appraised and promoted several times during the employment. 14 gave a clear 'no' to their employers but six were, or had been, considering. One had had an interview to possibly re-enter the previous company but had decided to take a job elsewhere. Two respondents had returned but only temporarily or after working elsewhere several years in between. Three of the respondents currently on career break had kept the previous company doors open, and they were considering the possibility of return.

Table 9. Type of leave and number of people returning to work for the same company

Type of leave and return to work for the same position/company	Number of respondents
Job alternation leave	
Yes	2
Total	2
Resigned	
No	14
No, but had an interview and decided not to	1
Most likely not	1
Might return	2
Yes, returned temporarily to finish a project	1
Yes, but after working elsewhere for 3 years	1
Total	20
Sabbatical leave	
Yes	1
Total	1
Study leave	
Yes, but unwillingly	2
Total	2
Unpaid leave	
Yes	1
Total	1
Grand Total	26

6.1.2 Motives and what really happened during the break

Questionnaire asked about respondent motives for career break with two questions. The first question intended to find out overall reasons for the career break, and the second one asked if the person had specific targets for the break. Respondents were asked to list the motives starting with the most important reason. As expected, many respondents came up with several motives for the break. In order to group the individual motivations of the respondents, those have been categorized according to the list created and presented in chapter 3.2.1.

Figure 1 illustrates how often a motive was mentioned as a reason for the break with ranking. Most of the people listed two or three main reasons but some gave four distinctly different reasons falling to the previously presented categories. Five respondents reported only one reason: two only wanted travel, another two to re-consider the career choice and one to fulfill a life-long goal. The first column for each of the reason shows how many respondents indicated the reason to be the most important motive for the break. Travelling was mentioned eight times as the key reason for the break. Course correction or validation was referred six times, and life enhancement reasons were given five times as the most significant motive. Those three reasons stand out also as second most important reason for the break – as shown in the second column in the figure for each reason. Both travelling and life enhancement reasons were referred six times, and course correction was also mentioned four times as a secondary motive. There was no respondent taking the break for emotional healing or pre-retirement purposes. Only one person was considered to take the break for family reasons.

An addition was required to be made to the motivations list, as five people clearly indicated that recovering or preventing oneself from work related exhaustion was a reason for the career break. This reason did not come up in the proposed categories. In practice, one person wrote burnout being the main reason for resigning and taking a break from working life, and four people gave indication that there was a lack of balance with working life, and the respondents acknowledged needing a break to heal and/or make adjustments. This reason rose to the same level as course correction as a secondary motive for the career break. The primary motive of the four respondents writing about exhaustion or work related health issues was either course correction or life enhancement. Two people sharing their experiences about work related exhaustion before deciding to resign and take a career break:

...“All this lead to my motivation collapsing and I noticed the negative impact in my wellbeing. I thought that there was a significant risk of burning out eventually. I didn't get support from my employer to reduce my workload. I realized that I had to make a major change and I didn't think that switching to another service or project within my current employer was going to be enough.”

...“My work, that I had once enjoyed so much, didn't give much satisfaction and I felt that I was frustrated and angry. I felt very strongly that I would need to rest... ..and take good care of my physical health.”

One person having had two career breaks explained the reasoning for both of them separately. For this reason, the total number of responses in this chapter is 27.

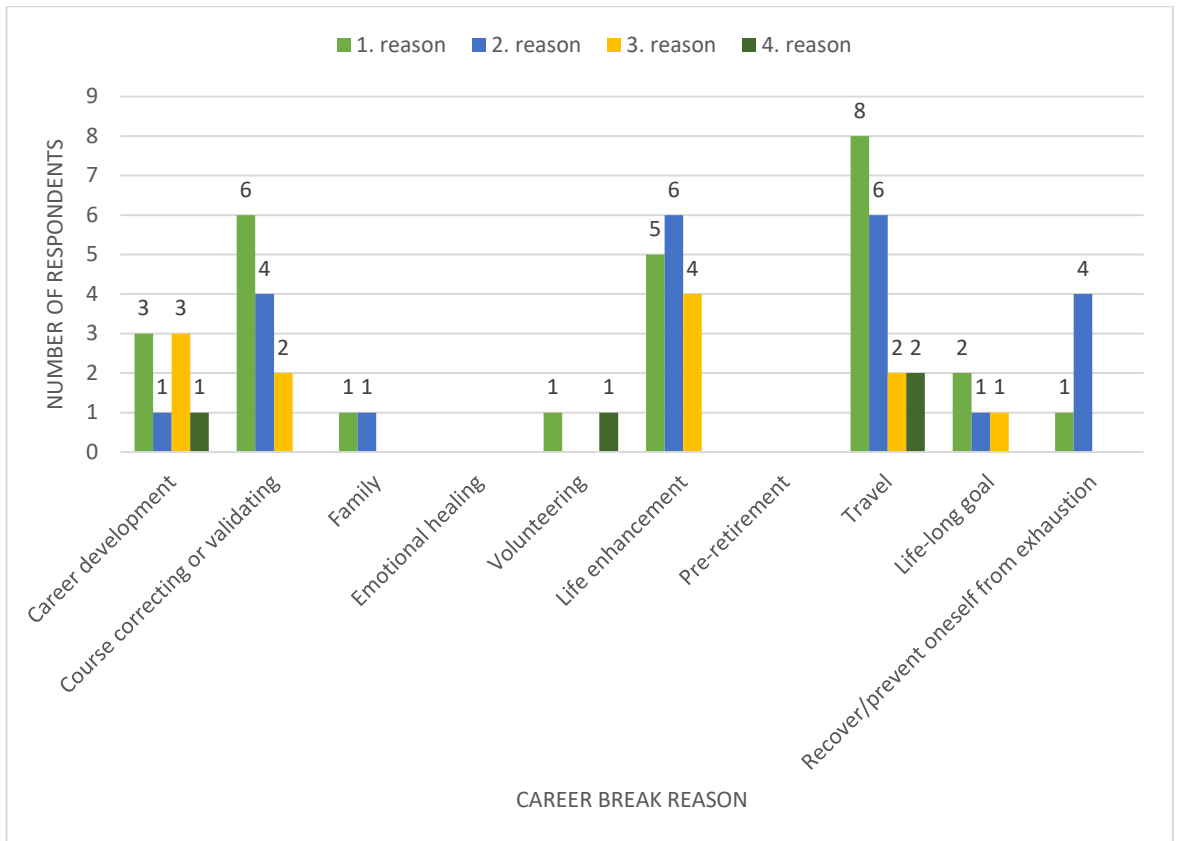


Figure 1. Motivations for career break (n=27)

When comparing the primary motives to the usual reasons in the age groups as presented in table 2 in chapter 3.2, one can see that life enhancement motives are present already in the earlier age group (table 10). Also, the recovering/preventing oneself from exhaustion motive has been added to the table. As majority of the respondents are in the youngest age group, there are respondents missing from the age group 40-50. No respondents aged 60-70 participated the study.

Table 10. Reason for career break of the respondents by age groups

Career break reason	Age		
	20-30 years	40-50 years	60-70 years
Career development	2	1	No respondents in this age group
Course correcting or validating	3	3	
Family	1		
Emotional healing		No respondent	
Volunteering	1	No respondent	
Life enhancement	4	1	
Pre-retirement			
Travel	8	No respondent	
Life-long goal	2	No respondent	
Recover/prevent oneself from exhaustion	1		

The questionnaire asked if career breaker had made specific targets to be accomplished during the break. This question was asked as the literature research had suggested tangible achievements to be vital when re-entering the workforce. Most of the respondents had some targets that they have made for themselves for the break. Only two respondents wrote that they did not have any targets prior to starting the break. In practise, those two respondents all spent most of their break travelling. If the motive of the person was going travelling or reconsidering next steps in career, the targets were often not that tangible. Some however had clear targets also for travelling: moving to another country or travelling certain countries. If a person wanted to validate or possibly make changes in career, it was usually additional time that was needed out from the rat race to reconsider the options. If the motive was life enhancement, respondents usually did not have detailed targets. Giving time to oneself to gain better health was also a reason reported by few. These targets were often connected with worry of exhaustion. The career development targets were usually clear: study to obtain a certain certificate, degree or learn a new profession.

Overall, respondents were distinctly happy to report about their accomplishments. Having done the planning, and now having the time at hand, they had either achieved their targets, or if still on break, they were working on them. Table 11 gives an overview of usual accomplishments reported by the respondents by presenting the accomplishments of the respondents' primary career break motives.

Table 11. Accomplishments for the primary career break reason

Career break reason	Accomplishments
Career development	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Studying, self-analysis on strengths, research on new possibilities 2. Graduating from a business school 3. Pursuing an education and learning in a new field
Course correcting or validating	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 4. Finding work in another type of company abroad (ongoing) 5. Reconsidering options and understanding that only the work environment needs to change, not the profession 6. Finding a new profession 7. Changing to work in a new field 8. Finishing studies, clarifying things that were on-hold, deciding on next steps 9. (One respondent: Not reported accomplishments for primary motive but studying)
Family	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 10. Moving out of the country to support husband getting a position abroad
Emotional healing	
Volunteering	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 11. Serving in Peace Corps
Life enhancement	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 12. Finding out how life is without work identity 13. Taking time for oneself instead of spending all the time at work 14. Taking time to heal, grow and clarify where to live 15. (One respondent: Not reported accomplishments for primary motive but travelling) 16. (One respondent: Not reported accomplishments for primary motive but travelling)
Pre-retirement	
Travel	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 17. Temporarily moving to another country 18. Travelling certain countries in South East Asia 19. Travelling certain amount of time 20. Experience travelling in distance countries 21. Travelling in South East Asia and experiencing new cultures 22. Travelling 23. (No specific targets reported but travelling) 24. (No specific targets reported but travelling)
Life-long goal	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 25. Moving to live in Italy 26. Be free and "buy a one-way ticket to nowhere"
Recover/prevent oneself from exhaustion	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 27. Recovering from burnout

Highlighting some of the secondary and tertiary motives, also following things were mentioned by the respondents as specific motives or accomplishments:

- Taking the break as it is a legal right (job alternation leave, study leave)
- Visiting old relatives
- Learning how to live more simple life

Not everyone was satisfied with the accomplishments. The discontent comments came from the people on study leave from work. They were studying but also had another objective to find a new work during the break. They returned back to their old jobs without achieving their true goal.

6.1.3 Reported benefits and inconveniences

Respondents were asked to reflect the benefits and inconveniences connected to career break. The listed benefits were numerous, and received answers have been compared to the findings from previous research and categorized to show how often the perceived benefits were mentioned. Different type of benefits have been split to three categories emerging from the answers: mental benefits, work-related benefits and practical benefits.

The personal benefits improving career breakers' mental well-being was the largest group of advantages (figure 2). The main benefit that career break had offered to respondents was related to increased understanding on own values and ambitions in life. Having the time and distance to learn about oneself, and consequently make changes based on the new self-awareness was the second most mentioned theme. The word 'perspective' was probably the most used word as career break was considered opening the minds to see the bigger picture. Many respondents were also seeking and finding happier life with the help of the break.

Figure 2. Mental benefits connected to career break



A respondent, who had taken the time and distance, learnt what to do in life with the help of travelling offering new perspectives:

"I finally had time to really think about what I want to do with my life, I had the time to find the right direction. While living in other countries I looked at different models of

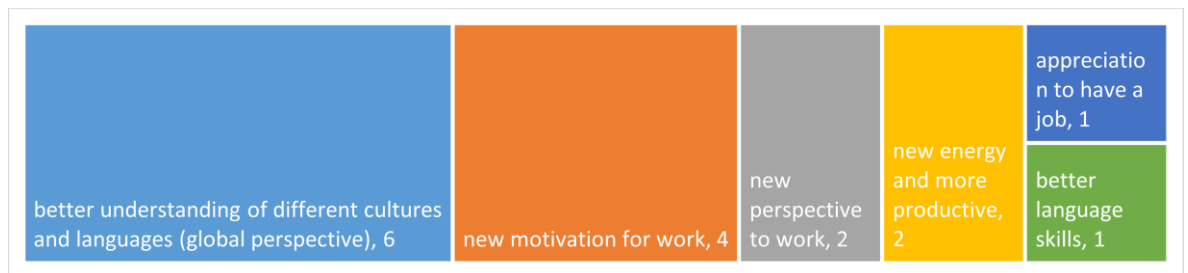
living and earning money. I met many people from different cultures and learned about their views on life.”

Another quote on benefits on career break that the respondent had spent travelling. The capability to make long-term plans benefits both personal life goals as the future employer having an employee willing to be engaged:

“It will also allow me to make longer term plans and commitments back home and I will feel more settled in my home life (as I don't plan to travel for a long time period in the future).”

The benefits that were clearly related to work are collected in figure 3. The most referred advantage came from the people who had spent at least part of the break travelling: career break was seen as giving better understanding of different cultures and languages helping to provide global perspective also in work. Four respondents wrote that career break restored the lost motivation to work. Some claimed that the motivation was higher than ever before.

Figure 3. Work-related benefits connected to career break



Few reported benefits were more practical improving the overall life satisfaction potentially profiting both personal and working life (figure 4). The new knowledge, better physical health and ability to try new things were rewarding career breakers, who now had the time to invest to other activities as they were not spending most of the time awake at work.

Figure 4. Practical benefits connected to career break



All the career break related inconveniences reported by the respondents are categorized and presented in figure 5. The disadvantages were mostly focusing on financial issues or to the uncertainty of not having a job to return to. One respondent had thought about the connected learning – career breaker needs to learn to live with the uncertainty and to trust that new work will be found when the time is right. Another career breaker wrote about being prepared to have difficulties when starting to apply for a new job, having already good arguments to defend the choice, and having decided not to bother about it right now. Three respondents claimed that there were no inconveniences related to the career breaks. It needs to be noted that those career breakers had only months out of work, one of them being on sabbatical, the two having resigned.

Figure 5. Inconveniences connected to career break



An example describing the outside pressure that career breaker may need to face in addition to own insecurities was well written by one respondent:

... “I also faced a lot of suspicious comments about not working, even from close friends/ family. I felt pressured to work, make a career or otherwise I am nothing. For people of my age + older not working is a shameful thing - it means you are ill/ lazy/ ignorant. The prejudices were a huge distress.” ...

The 16 people who were no longer on career break were asked to reply on additional questions on the possible inconveniences related to returning to workforce. Here it makes sense to look at the answers separately from people who had resigned, and the ones who were to return to work to the same employer. The five individuals on leave of absence, all got their jobs back when returning back to work. The minor inconveniences upon return were related to initial lower workload that was later balanced back to normal, and to layoffs that had happened during the career break that impacted the atmosphere. The 11 people who had quit their jobs, needed to find new work. Six reported no issues in finding a work. However, they highlighted the importance of own activity also during the break by keeping up the network. Five respondents had had some difficulties but ended up having work eventually. The mentioned difficulties were related to odd timing and financial crisis in 2008 which forced the person to make compromise with the job offers. Also, one person had decided not to work full-time anymore which created the inconvenience of not having a stable income anymore.

6.1.4 Changes to working and personal life

The last part of the questionnaire was addressed to respondents who had returned back to work from break. Questions intended to understand what were the changes career break brought to their work and personal life. The changes in working life for each of the 16 respondents are summarized in table 12. Seven people reported concrete changes in their careers that they would have not being able to do without the career breaks. Six career breakers explained how the time out from work had changed their behaviour and attitudes towards work. One respondent had planned the change during the break but had not yet implemented the change. The career break was successful as it gave the time to make decisions even if the person returned to the same work. The respondent wrote:

“Overthinking the career is difficult during the daily routine. A break/sabbatical is a good way of getting distance and experience other culture civilization and to broaden one's mind. The break/sabbatical helped me to realize my targets for my career. In the foreseeable future, I would like to work on another field of work.”

Two people reported none or negative changes at work after the break. One noticed upon the return that nothing had changed at the workplace and everything was even worse.

Table 12. Changes in working life after career break

Concrete changes	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Found a more demanding and interesting job and better salary 2. Changed to a new career 3. Got a new position as a manager, feeling more confident 4. Started to work in a completely new business, learning new every day, feeling happier than ever 5. Took a new, more satisfying job even if less paid. Feeling confident, ready to make changes in life if needed 6. Completing a business degree program helped to become a professional, have advances in career and get better understanding on human behaviour that helps at work 7. Felt open to work outside of own country and took a job abroad
Changes with the attitude towards work	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 8. Being better employee and colleague, feeling less stressed 9. Being more motivated to work 10. Being more confident in work 11. Working abroad taught what should be expected from working conditions. Also, that one can be happy with work if conditions are right. Feeling more confident. 12. Understanding that career is not so important anymore, seeing signs of exhaustion more easily 13. Appreciation of work and empathy towards people were emphasized
Non-materialized changes	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 14. Learnt what the new career will be even if returning to the previous job. Planning changes that will require new education.
No changes/negative changes	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 15. Returning to the same work place after the career break means that everything is even worse than prior to the leave 16. No changes

The changes in personal life are summarized in table 13. The overall satisfaction towards life gained with better work-life balance, more relaxed and confident attitude were notably present in eight answers. Four people reflected specific changes impacting distinct part of life, and four respondents reported either no changes or negative implications to family relations.

Table 13. Changes in personal life after career break

Overall changes to satisfaction of life	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Feeling better and being more satisfied with life 2. Having better work-life balance and being less stressed 3. Becoming a more relaxed person, being more confident of own life choices 4. Having better work-life balance, being confident and ready to make changes if needed 5. Having better work-life balance, understanding what is important in life 6. Having learnt to appreciate life outside of work and focus on things that make one happy 7. Feeling happier, finding a new country to live 8. Not much changes but being less anxious of small things
Changes to part of life	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 9. Increased understanding of human behaviour has helped in all relationships 10. Being more interested in travelling 11. Not much changes but having urge to travel 12. Continuing the new hobbies started during the break
No changes/negative changes	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 13. The new way of living is not well understood by the family (person having 2nd career break)

	14. No special changes, just changes with time 15. No changes 16. (No answer)
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An inspiring response from a respondent who was really able to change the career path with the help of the career break, also reported strong personal change, feeling of empowerment:

“I became a lighter and relaxed person, and could understand that everybody can change your life, your way, just need to have an open mind for that.”

One person currently on career leave wanted to comment to this question even if not requested. The answer summarizes well some observations and discussions that I’ve had with people on break. It describes the inner changes of person who decides to detach oneself from common working life:

“I think I have less friends already now. Only my family and the good friends stayed. The rest just disappeared. The decision kind of showed me who my real friends are. Apart from that I live more healthily, I am more quiet than before, at peace with myself, I have a deep satisfaction within and I need less material goods (i.e. not need for shopping or spending money to compensate the lack of time and happiness)”

6.2 HR professional questionnaire

The questionnaire for the HR professionals was shorter and the questions were more precise which will allow presenting all the findings in one chapter. Next, I will present the findings from the questionnaire question by question.

Detailed respondent profiles were not considered material in regards to provided information, and only the type of position, size and type of the organization and country where the respondent was working, are disclosed below (table 14). The six questionnaire respondents were working in nine organizations in Finland or in the UK.

Table 14. Respondents for the HR professional questionnaire

Type of position	Organization(s) working for	Country
Company HR professional	Large corporation and medium-sized private company	UK
Company HR professional	Large organization in public sector	UK
Company HR professional	Large corporation	Finland
Recruitment consultant	Small private company	Finland
Company HR professional	Three medium-sized organisations in public sector	UK
Company HR professional	Large organization in public sector	UK

The purpose of the questionnaire was not to study details of the sabbatical policies. However, two questions were asked about sabbaticals in order to understand how important sabbatical policy is as a recruitment and employee retention tool from HR perspective. HR professionals reported that sabbatical policy was in place in six out of nine organizations that HR professionals were responsible of. All the large organizations had sabbatical policies but there were differences in medium-sized companies: two having a policy and two not having one. Extended leaves were possible to be agreed case by case in the small company. Only two respondents highlighted the importance of sabbatical policy in recruitment. One respondent explained that the usual questions coming up in the interviews are rather about holiday entitlement and pensions, not about sabbaticals. However, all the respondents considered sabbaticals as an essential employee retention tool. The flexibility offered by the employer for employee was considered even very important by two respondents. The employees were understood being engaged to the organization in longer term when having even a possibility of applying for a sabbatical. Also, the positive impact to employee turnover figures was mentioned.

The rest of the questions inquired behaviour and opinions of the HR professionals on career breakers when recruiting. Five of the six respondents had seen career breaker applicants who were searching a new job. Only one HR professional did not recall seeing any such application. A respondent pointed out that HR consultants do not always see all the applications for a position as hiring manager may do the pre-screening. One HR professional explained that there has been a big increase of people taking voluntary breaks in the career:

“More and more people are taking time off travelling, studying or trying out a different career. More and more common is also people taking or getting a package deal from their employer, and using this to take time off and do something else.”

The question if career breakers had been recruited to the organization was already a vague question as HR professionals surely encounter a large number of applicants. It was not expected for the respondents to give an exact figure, rather to hear what were the opinions of HR personnel when recruiting someone who had momentarily voluntarily stepped out from the workforce. Three professionals indicated that the recruitment had happened, and two even emphasized that it has happened regularly, many times. One gave a ratio of 2/100 positions been filled with career breakers. Two respondents did not remember such case, and one respondent was not able to disclose this information. There was no agreement or special treatment or discussion in any of the organizations on how to treat someone applying a position from career break. The selection criteria and competences fitting the advertised position were the key, whether the person was on career break or not.

The next question inquired if voluntary career breakers and other job seekers were ranked differently. Women seeking a job from maternity leave and people who had been previously dismissed were given as examples of other type of breaks. Two respondent did not really answer the question, but rest of the four gave lengthy descriptions of their views and usual behaviour. The themes in the answers emphasized following hiring principles and recommendations for the applicants;

- All applicants are to be treated equally. Suitability for the job bases on skills, experience and competences.
- The ultimate decision is on hiring manager, not HR who can only give guidance
- No matter how the break was used, it is important for the applicants to be able to explain how they have kept themselves up to date on their field of expertise
- Career breaker should present the career break positively, make the reason(s) of the career break transparent and connect the break to the applied position

One respondent explained that especially if a person is returning from maternity leave, it needs to be ensured that the applicant is treated equally with the candidates currently working elsewhere. If the applicant had previously been dismissed, this would be a much bigger concern than the people having a break in their career for other reasons. The applicant would not be automatically excluded but a good, valid reason must be given.

The key question in HR professional questionnaire was about the benefits and inconveniences that employer see in voluntary career breaks. The responses are collected in below table 15.

Table 15. Benefits and inconveniences related to career breaks by HR professionals

Benefits	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Depending on how career break was spent, a person may have learned new skills, knowledge and competences, or developed his/her maturity <ul style="list-style-type: none"> o If the person has been studying, fresh new skills can be brought to the role o If the person has been travelling, there's a potential for longer term commitment and the person having a new acquired skill-set o Both studying and travelling can give better perspective and new ideas and views - New motivation, energy and appreciation for the job - Increased commitment and enthusiasm after having the time to decide if wanting to return to previous job or starting something new - Improved people skills - Increased independence - Can be generally seen as a positive thing but does not bring many benefits to employer - Having a break shows courageousness as the person is willing to step out of the comfort zone to try something new - Sabbaticals: Employer can retain valuable employees if offering sabbaticals as recruiting a new person is costly
Inconveniences	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Long career breaks will make the job specific training out of date which will require re-training to undertake the role - If having several breaks spent e.g. for travelling, employer would question if the person will be able to commit long-term - Career breaks lasting for several years will make it difficult for the person to find a job of the same level - Sabbaticals: Sabbatee might miss relevant information whilst on break and employer has to undergo the trouble finding a replacement

HR professionals' opinion of acceptable length of the break was asked as the last question. Most of the respondents answered the question as a recruiter, determining tolerable length considering when the applicant would no longer be a desirable candidate due to outdated skills. Three respondents stated clearly that it's impossible to give an acceptable length as the situations are individual. Everything depends on the requirements of the role and how well applicant's skills are up-to-date to meet the requirements. If there is a good reason even for longer breaks, they should not hinder the applicant to be shortlisted for the position. Respondents repeated the importance of having the career breaks explained in the CV and/or cover letter. If the applicant can show being active during the break, it can be only seen as a positive sign. Two respondents gave their opinion for the acceptable length, one suggesting 3-6-month break being tolerable, another restricting the break to 12 months. Some of the studied organizations had their own policies for career breaks defining the acceptable length depending on the position of the employee. Lower level employees were able to request up to one year career break at the time accumulating to two years during the time of employment. Higher level employees could take a break up to

five years at the time, totalling five years for the employment. This guidance is likely impacting the tolerable length of the career breaks when a person has resigned and is applying for a new job in the organization.

7 Discussion

After presenting the theory and the findings of the study, this chapter combines together the discussion of the main ideas. Each of the five sub-chapter is dedicated to answer to one research question. The structure follows the plan where research questions and objectives are associated with the theoretical part and questionnaire questions as presented in appendix 6 (Structure of the study).

7.1 Why people take career breaks?

The previous research builds a picture of various reasons to take career breaks. As the reference to historical Sabbath was made earlier in the dissertation, it can be concluded that the underlying motivations have not changed since the biblical times, but the reasons of 21st century career breakers have become more individualistic. People feel more responsible of taking charge on their own lives and make efforts to pursue for a good life that they see fitting for themselves. Young people prove their bold decisions by stating that one only lives once. It might be also fair to ask if it is only natural to have breaks during the working life that is expected to be fifty years long?

Most of the career break motivations revealed in this study were related to desire to travel, overall quality of life enhancement or validation of the current career path. Stepping out of workforce simply to travel was the biggest reason reported by the respondents. Travelling was suspected to be a separate reason even if the most comprehensive book on career breaks considered travelling just to be something done *besides pursuing other goals*. It seems that the interest to see the world is more significant than anticipated. Even if only 12 respondents were met when travelling, at least 22 respondents of the total 26 study participants, had been travelling during their career break. I did not believe travelling to be as appealing way to spend a career break, so no specific question was asked about it. Spending the break travelling came up in the answers to other questions.

Taking a career break may be the only option to have time to do something else than work in life. While most of the European countries have annual leave agreements, and employees are also keeping the vacation days in reality, having a break longer than a week to travel further is not self-evident for example in the US. For the young Westerners, searching for further education, job or life meaning abroad may be an option simply for the reason because they can. Considering the options outside of own country feels only natural in the world where everything and everyone is already globally connected. This study also made it apparent that many travellers were not satisfied with some aspects of their birth

country, and they are willing to check if the conditions of another country would suit them better. I also wonder how much the book and movie *Eat, Pray, Love* has inspired people going to look for life meaning abroad. Low airfares make travelling even to long distance destinations attractive, and strong internet connections make people feel safe when having the possibility to get online. Travelling lifestyle has been made popular with digital nomads working from anywhere where possible to be online. On my travels in South-East Asia, I met both career breakers travelling to see the world, and Westerners working remotely or looking for an online work.

Validating or correcting the career path was the second biggest reason to leave work for career breakers participating the study. Career and studying decisions are made in young age, and interests and priorities may change over time. It is easy to understand that deciding to change the course while working hard is difficult, and taking a break to assess the situation helps to get clarity if the ladders are leaning towards the right wall. As pointed out in the literature, and by the HR professionals participating the study, the break does not have to change the career path – important is to gain motivation and confidence to own life choices.

The third most referred reason to take a career break is related to desire to enhance one's life. Career breaker with this motive does not usually expect to achieve any major life changes. Sometimes, personal time to reflect is needed to regain work or life inspiration, or to have time to enjoy life. Finnish act of job alternation leave gives an opportunity for this type of leave, and it has been seen as a preventive action to keep people in workforce for longer. Some respondents linked a goal to learn to live a simpler life to this motive that can be seen as counteraction to the vicious circle of consumerism and continuous purchasing for more things that needs to be financed by more work. The stress of working life is compensated by shopping, and the respondents were aiming to get back to basics without having the feeling to want more things all the time. This phenomenon has recently made known as downshifting.

A motivation clearly arising from the study on career breakers was related to recovering or prevention from work related exhaustion. Few respondents were worried about work-life balance and possible future exhaustion, and one respondent wrote recovering from burnout to be the main reason for the career break. It is obviously expected that recovering from burnout should happen supported by employer in a sick leave. This is a motive that was not explicitly written about in the articles – even if it was a recorded benefit from many sabbaticals. In reality, it leaves to wonder how many people are in the verge of a burnout, only saving themselves by taking a total time-out from working life, and cannot really talk

about this reason. The advice for the career breakers was not to talk negatively about the reasons, and definitely not to complain of having forced to take a break due to exhaustion to be able to find work again. The study on young travellers by Hirschorn and Hefferon (2013) however discussed about the topic from psychological and existential viewpoints: work has become a modern religion, and when employees are worked out, they lose their faith and leave it all behind to travel to look for a deeper meaning of life.

A more conventional reason for a career break is to go back studying. As having a degree does no longer promise life-time job, one needs to be prepared either to update the education or change the profession during the working life. While studying when working is challenging, it may be impossible if really wanting to change the career. If studying is improving the skills of the employee, employer may be willing to participate to pay tuition fees or grant a sabbatical. Even if eight career breakers did studies during their break, only one reported hoping increased education level improving the salary expectations in the next job. None of the participants of the study were benefiting from studying sabbaticals but two respondents had been granted a study leave and they had their jobs waiting for them. Having a study leave is another Finnish legal right that employee can apply from the employer after certain number of employment years. Even if the employee must study for a degree, it may not always be the only motive for the leave. It seemed that the both people on study leave had secondary motives of finding a new job while studying, and they were reluctant to return to their jobs.

The other motives for the career breaks arising from the previous research did not appear as often in the study. Volunteering seems to be a big trend promoted in internet articles but only two respondents reported having done voluntary work during their breaks. However, while travelling, I did meet and talk with handful of people who were doing voluntary work abroad in Thailand and in Cambodia. I also learned how difficult it is to be accepted to volunteering programs. Most of the met travellers were however more into seeing the different countries and cities than staying in one place working. Family focused sabbaticals occurred in the study only once. I was left thinking how often people are willing, and can afford, to put their work aside for family. Some countries and companies provide other options to support employees with families, such as parental leaves and working part-time. The study on Belgian men having sabbaticals provided an interesting aspect where only the part-time sabbatees used freed time for family related activities – otherwise men just used the time to try out another profession (Vandeweyer and Glorieux 2008). Hobart and Sendek (2014, 40, 96) praise of Millennials to be the most family-centric generation did not show in the study on how career breaks were used. Only one respondent reported reserving time to visit grandparents when having more time. There were no respondents

in the study taking the break for emotional healing or to plan for retirement – probably because the sample was younger than the usual group.

When comparing the motives of different age groups (table 2 and 10), one can notice that the life enhancement reasons are present in the younger age group than the previous research indicated. Do young people demand more from life if needing this sort of a break already in their twenties or thirties? Or are they too weak and spoiled? Or is work just so much more demanding that young people burn out and require more from life? The motive for a break for exhaustion prevention/recovering purposes would advocate for the latter statement to hold some alarming truth. Finding good work-life balance is essential. Getting more perspective to life and employer's requirements may be achieved by taking time for oneself.

Reasons for an individual to take a career break usually consists of several motives. Participants of the study had one to four motives with additional smaller targets or accomplishments that they achieved during the break. Even if pre-planning is recommended, the free time to try out new things, and reflect on past and future is required for a successful career break. Gaining more perspective, confidence and stress-resilience does rarely happen in planned activities but when stepping out of the comfort zone and doing something else. There's a lot of thinking and reflection that can happen, for example when observing people while travelling in local bus in an unfamiliar place freed from the burden of routine.

The options to voluntary step out of workforce sometimes shape the reasons for the breaks. The sabbatical programs that have become a competitive factor in the war of talent, may offer for example a possibility to volunteer work. Joining a company with like-minded people and interesting sabbatical programs may be an attraction factor for a job applicant. Finnish job alternation act may have given an employee a reason to think about having a break even if grand motives did not exist in the first place. Study leave may be less risky and more easily accessible way to try out life without the unsatisfying job as not everyone is eligible to take sabbaticals. I was also left thinking how often a person taking a study leave actually wishes to change jobs?

7.2 Does having a career break make changes to person's career?

The previous research on career break implications focuses on benefits and inconveniences arising from sabbaticals. Numerous studies testify that academics have been recharged with energy to share with students, and other professionals have regained the

motivation and interest to their work. Studies about the changes, where career breaker quits the job to do something else for a while, have not been widely available. The assumption in the previous research has been that the person returns to his/her job, when the advantages and disadvantages are shared with the employee and one employer. The question on career changes have not been asked in those studies. This research collected experiences of people who had taken a career break in the wide meaning of the word. 20 respondents (77%) had resigned from the job to take a break which makes the viewpoint somewhat different. The people who had quit their jobs rarely returned to their previous work – even if the option was kept open. The six people having taken a leave of absence all returned to their jobs.

The questionnaire asked separately about the changes in respondents lives that were happening due to career break, and about the benefits and inconveniences connected to the break. The changes that career breakers reported varied from dramatic changes where a person changed both job and career path to milder evolvement of new refreshed attitudes towards life. Apart from two respondents, all reported either concrete changes in the career, or that the break had positive changes as how they work: how motivated, energized, confident they are at work. While the people having career development or course correction as the prime motive for the break really changed their careers, the alterations with other motives were more temporary or subtler. One can only claim that recovering from burnout also brought a very concrete change to a person's life. 10 study respondents (38%) reported major accomplishments where they really changed their career path. However not everyone was expecting to change their lives. The personal changes reported by the respondents emphasized better work-life balance that improved person's life satisfaction – which can also be seen as a positive career change. Good work-life balance has been proven to promote productivity and employee engagement that benefit both the person and his/her employer.

The question on benefits of career break returned a lot of answers that were compared to the previous research findings. As the available research focused on benefits in connection with continuous employment, the responses of career breakers in this study entailed more personal aspects. The most referred *mental benefit* was career breakers' increased understanding of own values and ambitions in life. Career break provided the time for the self-reflection and possibility to make changes. Several people reported that they gained new perspectives that enabled them to be more confident about the life choices. Many wrote about the joy or happiness that returned to their lives in the career break. These kinds of benefits were only discovered in Hirschorn and Hefferon (2013) study on young travellers. The most mentioned *work related benefit* was the improved understanding of

different cultures and languages mentioned by many but obtained by most, due to popularity of travelling. Respondents considered travelling offering benefits for employer operating internationally or having foreign competition. Some respondents wrote about appreciation of having a job or finding one. These topics did not come up in the previous research. However, increased motivation and energy to work – the other advantages benefiting also employers – were already known from existing research. The respondents did not mention some of the earlier listed benefits but many of those, such as improved communication, problem solving skills and adaptability to different situations, are poorly self-reported benefits. Even the better stress-resilience needed to be read between the lines, but many had understood that they had become more relaxed. The *practical benefits* rewarding career breakers included new gained knowledge, better physical health and ability to try new things when having time to invest outside of work. The first two were expected based on previous research whereas the last one seemed to be one of the advantages that were inducing other life satisfying benefits, such as happiness, perspective and self-awareness. Interesting benefits that respondents wrote about were the satisfaction of controlling own time instead of employer commanding what to do, the ability to make long term plans and commitments after having time for oneself and, very concretely, having time to apply jobs.

The inconveniences related to career break reported in the study were more concrete than the ones appearing from the previous research. The disadvantages seemed to be short-term as they were mostly related to issues that career breakers were facing during the break: financial issues or anxiety of not having a job to return to. Related to the research question, some were worried how difficult it is to let future employer to decide about the schedules, or if gained new perspective will make it impossible to make black-and-white decisions that employer requires. Respondents did not comment about inconveniences related to slower career development, or difficulties that they would be leaving their clients, employees or partners due to the break. This must tell about the dedication that people having already started the break have. Delayed career development is not a problem in person's head if one is not even sure if the chosen career is the right one. Worrying about leaving others in trouble is an issue that should be overcome at any workplace: nobody should be irreplaceable.

As a summary, the study revealed significant changes in respondents' career paths and in their approach to work. Career breakers were content of the accomplishments and changes they were able to do with the help of their temporary step out from workforce. It is difficult to say the order of the importance of the changes: some changes are concrete, but improved stress endurance and work-life balance may bring along well-being and

other long term benefits that are not measurable. It is also worth to mention that apart from career transitions, the perceived benefits and inconveniences did not differ whether the respondent had quit the job or whether the person was on leave of absence.

7.3 How career breaks are viewed by HR and recruiters?

The forth chapter of this report offered an outlook to employers' perspective to understand how companies are matching the new flexibility requirements of the workforce. Millennials, the youngest generation fully in workforce, is no longer ready to sacrifice all their time for work, and this attitude is spreading to all generations in workforce. One means to offer flexibility to changing life situations has been sabbatical programs that have a history in corporate settings since 1960's. Sabbaticals are however not available for all, and being eligible usually requires several years of service in the same company. New innovative companies have now been seen alluring Gen Y with new type of sabbaticals, or even with unlimited vacation days. As the demand of free time to balance the time spent for work is desired by many, but offered by companies only to few, people have been seen taking longer voluntary breaks between the jobs. One of the research questions has been to find out how organizations and HR view this trend.

Human resources department is the front of the people management in the organizations giving guidance to managers. This study asked opinions of HR professionals, and six respondents working for nine organizations shared their views. All the HR professionals were familiar with the sabbaticals and other voluntary career breaks. Sabbaticals policies exists in 2/3 of the organizations that respondents were working for, and their presence was considered important as employee retention method. Participants of the study did not find them meaningful in recruitment or employee attraction. This is interesting as Fortune 100 list has recently added information of sabbatical programs to serve job applicants. Can this be a new trend not yet applied and understood in all organizations? To engage employees, particularly Millennials, in long term, sabbaticals could offer a time of rejuvenation. One makes to wonder how much risks does employee see in offering sabbaticals more easily and not having the employee returning? This worry must be lower in academic world and in certain public sectors, but are corporations afraid that if they give time for employees to look around, they will move on?

Respondents were able to see benefits with career breaks: skills, knowledge, maturity and competences may be increased. Motivation and commitment were mentioned as increasing by few respondents. The benefits seen by HR were however not very clear, multiple or

concrete, and it became apparent that the job seeker should find words to express the advantages gained during the career break. Studying and travelling were mentioned as providing benefits that, when well-justified, could be useful for employer. The main inconveniences HR professionals connected the career breaks was the risk of skills and competences becoming outdated with time – something that career breakers were not worried about. One respondent noted about the uncertainty of job applicant long-term commitment, especially if the person had had several career breaks. Having kept knowledge and skills updated during the career break was one key measures how HR professionals assessed career breakers applying a job. The other factor impacting decision if a career breaker is short-listed for the position was, how the reasons for the break were explained. As recommended in the related articles, also HR professionals noted that it is vital to describe how the break has been spent. An HR professional suggested that the new learnings should be linked to the applied position to create competitive advantage against other applicants. The wow-factor where career breakers were seen courageous, ambitious and desirable applicants, mentioned in one of the older articles, did not seem to appear anymore. Most probably career breakers are no longer so rare that they would impress the recruiters.

The acceptable length of a career break was restricted to less than a year by half of the respondents, two suggesting only 3-6 months to be acceptable. The rest of the respondents stated that acceptable time cannot be suggested as all the cases are individual and valid reasons may exist. Comparing the opinions of HR professionals to career breakers participating the study created a collision as the lengths of the breaks were considerably longer. 16 of 26 respondents had a break lasting at least for a year. Surprisingly many had a longer break. It made to think that once a career breaker does all the effort of getting away from work, the person doesn't want to get back so fast. Longer breaks were also recommended by Allen et al. (2014, 8, 197): even if the offered sabbaticals are usually only maximum three months, the benefits are substantially better if staying on break for a year.

The HR professional opinions on career breaks were generally accepting and positive. At least human resources function seems to understand the length of working lives and that changes requiring a break may happen to anyone – let the motive be any of the ones discussed earlier. None of the organizations had special agreements on how to treat job applicants in career break. Generally, the treatment of career breakers should be no different compared to other job seekers. It was however noted by a respondent, that people applying a job after family-related leave are to be treated with special care which probably puts career breakers in a less favourable situation. Then, if an applicant has been dismissed, a

voluntary career breaker having explained the reasons well, might be in a better situation than the fired employee not being able to justify the lay-off. The career breakers of the study, who had resigned and later returned back to workforce, had all found work after the break. Half reported having found the work easily, even very easily, another half had had a moderate struggle having been forced to make some compromises on the type of work they accepted. All the people who were to return to their work, had their work back even if changes may have occurred during their absence. This fits together with the reported opinions and behavior of the HR professionals.

7.4 Have career breaks become socially acceptable internationally?

Theoretical part of this study started with presentation of different generations in workforce with the emphasis on Millennials. The values and the requirements towards the employer have been seen changing from a generation to another. Attracting and engaging Gen Y has been proven to be more difficult as the previous generations have been driven by more directly work-related factors. Millennials are optimists, they have the better inner security and confidence to ask for more than the previous generations never dared to. The notion work-life balance, created by Gen X, has been embraced by Millennials who expect lucid management practices and more flexibility. With improved socio-economic conditions and confidence built up by parents, Gen Y have more choices to leave the work that they don't feel comfortable. Doing voluntary work, living temporarily on shoestring budget, making a vertical career move or even accepting a lower level job for better quality of life, are no foreign concepts. Without the aspiration of a fancy title, top career or loads of money, that were more important status symbols for previous generations, Millennials are not worried to step out from work temporarily.

One of the research objectives was to find out if career breaks are becoming more common and more acceptable with Gen Y entering the workforce, and while this study cannot provide generalizable result, the available literature on Millennials would suggest that at least it has some impact. Besides making career breaks more known and companies developing methods to engage employees, this new attitude towards work is expanded from children to parents. A son's example of a career break inspires parents to take sabbaticals and joining their child in backpacking. And, grown-up daughter and father travel together to explore foreign countries. At least Baby Boomers, Gen X and Millennials are impacted. Living in a truly global world with affordable travelling costs, makes it possible for Westerners, dedicated to plan and save money in advance, to go and see the world. Seeing

examples from family, friends and media helps to make the decision to try it oneself. It seems quite common, why not to do it?

People live longer than ever, and working life is lengthening by retirement age rising. At the same time the age to start a family is postponed which makes many young people more independent to make riskier career related decisions. Not having a family to support, enables taking bigger financial risks, like quitting a job to do something else for a while. Different life choices are socially more accepted which allows individuals to make personal life decisions. While one has grown-up kids at the age of 40, another goes back-packing. There are definitely more and more adults looking for a care-free break from demanding working life. And couples do it too. The working life seems too long without having respites in between. While travelling, I heard Australian working-holiday visa cut-off age being increased from 30 to 35 from the beginning of 2017, and people were celebrating. It seems that Australian government is replying to the request of the adults.

Sabbaticals have been offered by companies to rejuvenate selected employees having spent number of years in a company. As part of the total compensation package, and sabbaticals can be used also as an attraction method – especially if designed to cater all employees even with lesser amount of employment years. Creative sabbatical programs connected to company social responsibility or other higher agenda, and making sabbaticals available for all employees, can improve the company image showing how management takes care of the employees. This trend made famous by innovative companies increases the acceptability of career breaks as a whole. Research for this study proved that even companies exist that help other companies to design sabbaticals for employees. Here one can however suspect a difference between US-based companies and others: as Americans are not encouraged to take vacations, and sabbaticals may be the only mode of longer break possible and still keep the job. The most innovative sabbatical programs seem to be offered by US-based companies.

In this study, all the large companies had sabbatical policies. There was variation in the medium-sized organizations and small organization did not have one. This study did not focus on details of the sabbaticals but rather on career breaks as a whole. It should however be mentioned that only one respondent to career breaker survey had been granted a sabbatical leave. The questionnaire did not ask if respondents had applied for company sabbatical but based on informal discussions, they are considered as hard to get. Only one respondent wrote having applied for a sabbatical but when not been accepted to have one, the person had resigned. In the traditional companies, sabbaticals seem to be the

option that only older employees can get. Young people are left with options to resign, to ask for unpaid leave, or depending on the country, applying for example a study leave.

Out of the 26 career breakers participating the study, 20 had resigned from their current work. The breaks had been kept between the age of 22 to 47, and study participants are representing Gen X and Gen Y. Most of the career breaks were held in the age group of 26 to 35 years old. While reconsideration of career choice is quite usual during or after the studies, it has probably been more acceptable for young people to take a break in the beginning of their working life to dedicate time for something else before fully throwing oneself to working life. The participants of this study were however not students. Everyone had proper jobs that they decided to leave behind. Based on the frequency of finding career breakers, especially when travelling, must be a sign of either career breakers concentrating in South East Asia, or the number of career breakers really increasing. The respondents were Westerners with the highest number of participants from Europe. There were few people who did not reply in time which would have added new countries of Australia, Chile and Hungary to the list of study participants. I also discussed with few Chinese about career breaks and learned that the concept is also familiar to them. Chinese career breakers had written books about their experiences and become famous – quite like, Elisabeth Gilbert. While not covering the whole world, this study gathered together continents, countries and nationalities with possibilities of taking career breaks.

An aspect to acceptability of career breaks is the ease of the employment after the break. This question was asked from different angles both from HR professionals and from career breakers. Almost all HR professionals reported having seen career breakers applying for jobs. Only one respondent did not recollect having seen any application with voluntary leave in it. One HR professional described the situation changing a lot during her career, and now seeing lot of people taking time off. Half of the HR professionals had regular career break recruits. Based on answers from HR professionals, career breakers are common and normal part of the job applicants who do not enjoy special treatment. The career breakers who had returned back to workforce after resignation, did not report having had issues in finding a job because of the spent career breaks. Finding a suitable job is never easy but at least respondents did not recognize being treated differently because of the break. One did mention that travelling during the break was considered as a merit.

Even if employers are not considering career breakers as particularly brave or desirable employees, it does require courage to step away from normal working life. The dedication of finding a better life for oneself if required to resign requires courageousness and planning to be able to finance the living. The decisions of career breakers were seldom hasty,

and people knew what they were doing; they were willing to deal with the consequences and justifying the breaks to future employers. The career breakers reported feelings of loneliness and having felt like being an outsider from society. The acceptance was not always found even with the family and friends. One aptly noted that travelling enabled to find like-minded people. And when travelling for volunteer work or in popular backpacking destinations may gather together Western career breakers from different countries, the contacts with locals raises the awareness of career breaks to new countries.

Five questionnaire respondents had taken two or more career breaks in their lives. It seems logical that once such a decision has been made one time in life, it is easier to do it again. Career breaks were bringing feelings of empowerment, joy and being in control of own life choices and changes. While career breakers seem to already know that having several breaks is not making them favorable job applicants, this was also mentioned by an HR professional. However, having appropriate reasoning for the breaks, even if there are several of them, might not pose a problem. The acceptable length stated by HR professionals and cited articles make to think what skills does one really lose when being out of work for a while that could not be captured in a reasonable amount of time with fresh motivation?

7.5 What are the implications of taking a career break?

The main research question of this study intended to understand the overall implications of career breaks that are suspected becoming more frequent. The positive impacts of flexible workplace arrangements and employee well-being to productivity and better company results were presented as background to make the connection between contented workforce and company profits. It is a common benefit to have happy and satisfied employees as they work better and longer. This correlation is not yet widely understood but as measures are taken to promote this knowledge, the work flexibility is expected to increase. The problem is particularly noticeable in US-based companies where vacation days are more scarce. Online culture and mobile devices keep people more and more connected to their work 24/7. How long can people sustain being always available and not suffering long term?

In addition to existing research proving the benefits of regular respites, younger generations are taking charge of their lives and denying to dedicate all their time for work. Millennials are forcing companies to think how to keep the workforce engaged. Companies follow as replacing employees costs a lot of money. For example, sabbaticals can be proposed for people about to leave the company to avoid employee turnover. Organizations

need to provide more balanced working conditions, and innovative companies are showing example with flexible working time and place agreements, creative sabbatical programs and bonuses paid for the employees taking offline holidays.

The overall benefits of career breaks to individuals are indisputable. Let the career break be made in agreement with the employer and the person returning to the company after the leave of absence, or the break is between jobs, there are common benefits that an individual may gain. Depending on the personal motivation for the break, a person may change a career path, become more educated and skilled, learn what he/she wants from life, achieve life goals, find meaning for life by helping others, or avoid a prospective burn-out. All of these changes create large chances of person becoming more motivated and confident at work, and overall becoming a better employee as the improved work-life balance has made the person being happier, healthier and more satisfied in life.

When career break is realised in the mode of a sabbatical, job-alternation leave or in other agreement with the employer, and the employee has the job to return to, both employer and employee benefit. Employer needs to however endure the inconvenience of reorganizing the work or finding replacement for the person on leave for the interim period. The organization will be able to retain the trained employee, provide job rotation possibilities for the employees stepping up to cover for the person on leave, and possibly having lowered healthcare costs. Giving the possibility for an employee to have a career break is promoting healthy work-life balance and giving good impression of the organization taking care of the employees, also outside of direct work contribution. Employer risks giving time for the employee to think and compare the options. If the employer suspects that the employee may not return back to work, accepting the break is probably denied. However, employee might leave anyways, and lowered satisfaction to employer's decision may precipitate the decision. The implications to a person's life taking a leave of absence may be significant but they are often less dramatic than of the person who resigns from work. The convenience of having the job waiting to get back to brings more financial security but also ties the person for a predesigned break length. As the risks are lower, the possible rewards are lower. The benefits connected with leave of absences are well researched already, and they are substantial to the individual – even if it has not been proven how long-term the benefits can be sustained. The main disadvantage is the difficulty of having a leave of absence granted by the employer. Only six participants of this study had made an agreement with the employer of a career break. One question that could be asked in the further research is if the 20 people who ended up resigning from their jobs asked for a leave of absence. One career breaker explained without asking that her application was not accepted. A positive implication has been noticed in connection with job alternation

leaves in Finland: the substitutes often find permanent work in the organization after their temporary employment contract. Job alternation leave seems to ease companies hiring more employees.

When career break is kept as an extended leave between the jobs, the benefits to the individual are clear but the implications to employer are split between two organizations. The employer who loses the resigning employee must replace the person in long term which implies that all the costs of employee turnover may be applicable. In practise, employer must decide whether the position is filled with a new recruitment or the work is permanently split between other employees. A resigning employee leaves usually in a lot shorter notice than a leave of absence is agreed, which forces the employer to rush to find replacement to handle the duties. In case the resigning person has not been motivated to work, replacing the employee may be rather positive for the employer. After the ramp-up period, the new employee may bring even better results. The employer who hires the person returning from career break, may consider carrying a risk with recruiting a person who has spent time out from workforce. The skills and knowledge of a person may be outdated, and employer may doubt if the person will stay engaged in long term, or if he/she will take another career break in the near future. The upside contains a possibility of recruiting a motivated, stress-resilient and energized person who has probably developed new ways of out-of-the-box thinking during the break. The person taking a career break without support from the employer carries a big personal risk but also possibility for a higher return. Without any commitment to the employer, the person is more open to consider all the options and possibilities, and seeing life from new perspective. The change may be more drastic than with a few month-long leave of absence. The necessity of achieving the career break goals and the uncertainty of finding a new job before the money runs out, may force career breaker to come up with creative solutions that even the individual was not able to foresee. Such changes and achievements were captured in this study by 20 questionnaire respondents who had affirmed quitting their jobs to take a break. Even if not all the career breaks were finished, nobody regretted for the decision.

8 Assessment of the study

Following chapter 5 that presented the research process and the methodological choices applied in this study and, this chapter evaluates the quality of the study. The assessment includes description of the researcher's role, factors impacting validity and reliability of the findings, and feedback from the sponsor of the study.

8.1 Quality of the study

The intention of this dissertation was to describe a topical phenomenon that combines social sciences and applied business studies. Career breaks and their implication to individuals and organizations were researched from the wide meaning of the word. A special interest was put on career breaks where a person voluntarily quits working to temporarily pursue other endeavours. Due to missing available research on this type of career breaks, existing studies on sabbaticals and job alternation leaves were used as scientific research reference. One of the main books used as reference *Reboot Your Life – Energize Your Career & Life by Taking a Break* by Allen et al. (2014), stated basing to research of 200 career breakers but as the book is not a scientific publication, research methodology is not disclosed. This book was however the best source of types of career breaks and motivations that also helped in questionnaire design. The findings of this study were mostly concurring with the book. All differences are highlighted. Due to contemporary nature of the topic, the other related information sources were mostly found in internet articles. In order to maintain a required quality of a dissertation, only carefully selected sources have been referred and cited.

This dissertation was started without a sponsor from a personal interest to the matter. To ensure the quality and applicability of the findings, the report has been read and commented by an external party, The Union of Professional Business Graduates in Finland (TRAL). It needs to be pointed out that the participation of the organization to the thesis process was agreed after-the-fact, which means that TRAL has been only able to comment the final report without having the possibility to impact the research design.

8.2 Role of the researcher

As this study was performed without an organizational sponsor, the researcher of this study was an internal researcher in an unconventional meaning of the term. While writing about career breakers, I have been a career breaker myself – studying and travelling. Living the situation provided a perfect opportunity to do research, observing career breakers,

finding people in similar life situations, and having informal discussion about the topic to understand the phenomenon and related matters better. Besides finding career breakers willing to participate the study, personal encounters enabled to prove the significance to continue studying the topic, and created circumstances where sensitive personal information was shared. While I had the benefit of time and being able to gain deep understanding of the topic, I have acknowledged that there is risk of bias. I have been working as internal researcher living the same phenomenon investigated. This is a matter I have kept in mind during the research process to avoid mixing my personal situation with the research findings. After all, I consider that being familiar with the research setting and having a personal interest to the topic both from personal situation and from previous experience from corporate world, has helped to capture the multitude aspects of the researched topic.

8.3 Validity and reliability

Validity and reliability assess the research quality in regards to ability of the study to measure what is was supposed to study, and repeatability of the findings (Saunders & al. 2012, 680, 684). *Internal validity* assesses if the findings reflect the reality as expected (Saunders & al. 2012, 429). To ensure the internal validity of the questionnaires, reference to earlier research on the related topic was made. Comparison was mostly made to studies on sabbaticals, as the research on career breaks in the wide meaning of the term was inexistent. Another method to mitigate internal validity issues was pilot testing of the questionnaire. Pilot testing was performed to ensure that the questions were understood as intended, and they were delivering answers that were possible to be used in the research (Saunders & al. 2012, 451). The details of questionnaire pilot testing are described in chapter 5.4. *Content validity* assessment helps to find out if the questionnaire is providing answers to research questions (Saunders & al. 2012, 429). This was considered at the time of questionnaire design when research questions, objectives, related theories and questionnaire questions were organized in a matrix (Appendix 6). The work was refined after questionnaire pilot testing. It was also carefully considered which one of the respondent groups can provide answers to the each of the research questions. Except for one research question, both respondent groups were considered to be able to contribute only to one research question. In the end, complete questionnaire responses were taken into account when answering all the research questions.

The usual *threats impacting internal validity* of the study were mostly not relevant (Saunders & al. 2012, 193). It is impossible to know whether there were significant *past or re-*

cent events that would have changed the respondent behavior. Asking or *testing* participant views should not have impacted the quality of the answers, as all the respondents were voluntary and the study was done independently without relation to any organization. Threats of *instrumentation*, *maturation* or *ambiguity about causal direction* were not considered relevant. *Mortality*, the number of initially voluntary people withdrawing to participate the study, is however considered lowering the quality of the research, as pre-information of the possible participants demonstrated that they would have entailed additional variety to responses. The experiences of 10 career breakers, who initially agreed to participate, and six invited HR professionals are missing from the sample.

External validity or generalizability evaluates if the sample is representing the population and the results can be generalized (Saunders & al. 2012, 194). As the chosen research strategy was a case study, and the nature of the research is exploratory study, there are no great possibilities nor aspirations to generalize the results. The issues impacting external validity have been listed below, and they suggest that the study findings cannot be generalized to the population of career breakers and HR professionals. This study is merely exploring the phenomenon.

Issues impacting career breaker data generalizability:

- Not all countries with career breakers are presented
- There are more women than men participating the study
- Lot of respondents were met when travelling, which makes the findings biased towards career breakers choosing to travel during their break
- There are more Finns participating the study than participants from other countries. Even if it needs to be pointed out that the besides practicalities, such as possibilities to take job alternation leave, the responses did not differ from country to another. The experiences of the career breakers were at the same time unique but universal.
- The age of the respondents was skewed to younger age groups. Only Gen X and Gen Y were presented.
- All the known motives for career breaks did not appear in the sample (emotional healing and pre-retirement). This is due to missing representation of older age groups.
- Comparing the length of career breaks is difficult due to variation of annual leave policies in different countries. Also, the profession has an impact to usual length of holidays and possibilities of taking a career break.
- Data saturation was considered not sufficient to give an exhaustive view to research questions – even if Saunders et al. (2012, 283) recommendation on sample size was followed. However, the study was intended to explore the phenomenon, and as search of previous research demonstrated the lack of existing studies in this field, this dissertation is at least increasing the knowledge and bringing up new ideas for further examination.

Issues impacting HR professional data generalizability:

- Not all countries with people working in HR are presented
- Respondents represent only two countries
- Data saturation was considered not sufficient to give an exhaustive view to research questions – even if Saunders et al. (2012, 283) recommendation on sample size was followed. However, the study was intended to explore the phenomenon, and as search of previous research demonstrated the lack of existing studies in this field, this dissertation is at least increasing the knowledge and bringing up new ideas for further examination.
- It was also noted that HR professionals do not have decision power on hiring. HR function guides, helps and supports hiring managers who have the last call of recruitment decisions. It was however considered that HR function holds the best knowledge of company practices on career breaks, and has more comprehensive view than individual managers working in different departments and fields. This is why the questions were addressed to HR instead of managers.

Reliability assesses if consistent findings would appear when repeating the study (Saunders & al. 2012, 192). One method to ensure repeatability of the results would be to pose the questionnaire the respondents, or at least few respondents, twice, to check if the same results appear (Saunders & al. 2012, 430). This *re-testing* approach was not considered valuable as the questionnaire was formulated with open questions, and respondents were expected to write somewhat different answers if repeating to tell about their experiences. However, *alternative form* approach was used in career breaker questionnaire with questions on motives and changes. (Saunders & al. 2012, 430.) Questionnaire asked about the same matter with two questions – intending respondents to elaborate their answers when focusing on the question twice. It proved to be a good choice to ask the questions from different angles, and most of the respondents gave more detailed answers than one overall question would have given. This choice entailed more practical view to the discussion of motives, accomplishments and changes.

The usual *threats to reliability* regarding participant and researcher errors and biases were assessed during the design and completion of the study (Saunders & al 2012, 192). The only way that was suspected to alter participant performance and creating *participant error*, was reminding the participants to return the questionnaire responses. The reminders did not however seem to irritate the respondents in the way that would have impacted the quality of the responses. *Participant bias* or false responses were monitored in career breaker questionnaire with the question on the time when the career break was held. As the questionnaire hold questions about personal opinions and behaviors of respondents who may have kept the break already a long time ago, there was a possibility that the memories would have faded over time. The time since the break did however not seem to impact the quality of the responses. The level of reflection depended on person, not on

the factor if the person was on break, had very recently finished it, or the break was already more far away in the past. The responses from the people on break were however usually longer as they did have more time to spend on filling in the questionnaire. False responses were also considered in regards to HR professionals replying to the questions on hiring. As explained previously related to validity of the study, HR professionals are not solely responsible of hiring decisions. It was however considered that HR professionals were the best group of people representing employers view in the study. Due to the role of the researcher, *researcher error* posed both advantages and disadvantages. While internal researcher is able to more easily connect to the world of the study respondents, in this case that of the career breakers, this position creates the risk of interpreting or emphasizing respondent views from researcher's perspective. This danger was kept in mind when analyzing the results, and the emphasis on new findings were made against previous research, not personal experiences. *Researcher bias* of recording responses wrongly was mitigated by not recording the answers in an interview but by email. All the responses were captured in written format and not to transcribed. The choice of self-completed questionnaire also brought the benefit of respondent not needing to please the researcher (Saunders & al. 2012, 420). The role of internal researcher impacts also to researcher bias, which was taken into consideration during the completion of the study.

As conclusion to reliability of the study: the phenomenon was studied in 2016-2017 with the support of existing research, and if the study would be repeated, similar results would be expected to be found – provided global economic situation has not changed dramatically.

8.4 Business value of the study

As described in the methodology chapter, The Union of Professional Business Graduates in Finland (TRAL) was interested to hear about study results, and agreed to evaluate the business value of the study.

“TRAL is a trade union for Finnish professionals with a Bachelor of Business Administration or a Master of Business Administration degree. TRAL represents and provides services to its members in matters related to working life and employment relationships. TRAL promotes business administration education and the career development of business graduates. The union has over 30,000 members.” (TRAL 2017.)

Following feedback bases to a telephone conversation and email received from Katriina Matin helmi who works with TRAL in salary and unemployment security counseling, including career counseling. Matin helmi (19 April 2017) writes about the importance of the study in her email:

“Working life has become more versatile during the past decades. The technological advancements have particularly changed the work of employees in specialist positions where the work is no longer tied to certain time or location. These developments create new type of work related problems and solutions. The separation of work and personal life is particularly difficult with knowledge workers because their job is not tied specific location. Measuring work related stress objectively is difficult, and the job strain has only been presumed increasing. It is however certain that the forms of work load have altered when the ways to work have changed. A problematic aspect of this development appears when work and personal life are so mixed that it does not allow sufficient rest period. Career breaks can be seen as a counterattack to this development – a fairly recent phenomenon that intends to find solutions for modern working life problems. It deserves to be researched as any other new working life related development.”

“Career breaks are especially interesting because they emphasize – even more than the career – the personal development aspect of the individual, and the idea that there’s more to life than work. When the target, and the necessity, is to return to workforce, it is interesting to find out what are the implications of a short career break – the time off from work is after all short when considering the total career length.”

Matin helmi (19 April 2017) considered interesting to read about generations in workforce and their attitudes towards work. Understanding how employees of different ages think about work, and what are the underlying reasons and experiences creating the opinions, are beneficial in the work supporting union members. The most useful chapter was the one presenting the data collected with the questionnaires. She agrees that the results are not generalizable, but considers the collected information valuable. Existing information about this recent phenomenon is scarce, and all new research is beneficial.

Matin helmi (19 April 2017) presumes the study being most useful for people considering taking a career break. Even if the number of study participants was reasonably low, she does believe that the list of motives, benefits and inconveniences is comprehensive and even generalizable. Matin helmi claims (19 April 2017):

“I do not believe that larger number of respondents would have provided more variation to the emerging themes. I think that the topics arise similarly in a smaller sample. If there were more participants, the percentages might have been very different, but I do not consider it relevant in regards to use of the study findings. It is essential to have different situations and viewpoints comprehensively presented with the respondents, and I think this is well realized in the study.”

Regarding the findings collected from HR professionals, Matin helmi (19 April 2017) also raises the issues of generalizability, but also of the position of the respondents where they have partly shared their personal opinions being at the same time tied to the views of their

employer organization. However, she considers that both theoretical framework on employer views, and the study findings, could be useful in career counseling of the union members. Any information on how employer views career breaks can be valuable for the union. Matinhelmi points out that it will be comforting for the career breakers to know the view of the HR professionals, that if the time off from work is rationally explained, it should not pose an issue for reemployment. Even if the number of responses is low, this behavior should be universal part of human resource work ethics.

Matinhelmi (19 April 2017) agrees that the study has managed to answer to research questions, and has generated useful information that could be researched further as described in chapter 9.2 on study recommendations – either with deep interview techniques or quantitative methods. She highlights an additional further study aspect where career breakers would be studied as a longitudinal study to understand what were the long-term career implications of the break. It would be interesting to find out how, for example the improved work-life balance has been able to be maintained. The career breakers could be interviewed five, 10 and even 20 years afterwards.

9 Conclusions

Last chapter of the dissertation concludes the research outcomes and recommends how the studied phenomenon could be researched further. Also, the deficiencies related to this study are disclosed. The agreed next steps with the sponsor are described before finishing the report with the reflections on personal learnings.

9.1 Outcomes

This research project met the research objectives as expected. The chapter dedicated to discussion combines the existing knowledge of career breaks with findings emerging from this study, and replies to research questions as set in the beginning of the study. The main findings conclude that life aspirations of younger generations have exceeded the basic need to work. After dedicating long hours for work, career breakers take the time to enjoy life, and they are particularly interested in travelling. Surprisingly many study participants had quit their jobs, and were having year-long break from working life. Sabbaticals granted by organizations were rare. The changes that career breaks entail depend on the motives, and besides travelling, many are changing career paths, obtaining additional education or simply taking measures to improve overall life satisfaction. Improvements to work-life balance were reported by many. Human resource professionals are willing to recruit career breakers as long as the motives are described and the skills are kept up-to-date. This was proven also by the evidence of former career breakers finding new work without specific issues. This study did not provide generalizable results but based on available literature, career breaks are becoming more common – which at the same time is making them more acceptable as well. Career break entails positive implications for an individual. If career break is realised as a leave of absence, the same employer carries the benefits and inconveniences. If an employee resigns, he/she carries greater risks but has potential for higher gains. Most of the inconveniences remain with the previous employer, and the new employer, hiring the person after career break, will have more motivated, confident and stress-resilient employee.

The key take away is for career breakers to reserve time to verbalize the learnings and increased qualifications gained during career break. Many had not planned clear targets for the career break, and while they can be defined afterwards, they are crucial when applying a job. While having a break often means free time for career breakers, some planning and goal setting should be done to ensure smooth return to workforce. Career breakers were content over their accomplishments and experiences but are they valued similarly by employers is not that simple. Travelling as such is not a good enough reason to satisfy

employer, even if it is a personal accomplishment. Tangible achievements and smart wording connecting the new skills to applied position should not prevent the employment after career break.

9.2 Recommendations

The research questions did not ask, and the study conclusions do not directly provide, any recommendations for future actions based on the study results. I am however keen to repeat the suggestion, appearing in several articles cited earlier in this dissertation, that companies should consider offering voluntary sabbaticals during recession to lower number of layoffs and keep personnel engaged (Davies 2009; Rhodes 2009; Done 2010). These measures are unheard at least in Finland, and might make good publicity for the company who would avoid compulsory personnel reductions usually ending up in news. However, after discussing with Matinhelmi (19 April 2017), I understand that the practical execution of such sabbaticals may be difficult to realize, at least in Finland. The legal status of the sabbatical taker should be clearly documented and understood by all parties. The person would not for example be eligible for unemployment benefits. The employees should not feel threatened or forced for sabbaticals in any terms.

The constraints of this project were mostly related to inexistence of previous research. Certain topics were arisen during the research that complicated the analysis of the findings. Firstly, it was a conscious decision to allow different type of career breakers to participate the study. However, afterwards it might have made more sense to exclude sabbatical takers. The number of respondents having resigned from previous job was larger than anticipated, and the study could have concentrated only on one type of leave. Second, there were few additional questions that could have been asked to draw better conclusion on career break success and relation to sabbaticals. Such questions could have been:

- What was the planned length of the break? (versus how long the person spent on break)
- Was it worth to take a career break or do you have any regrets?
- If resigned from previous job, did you first apply for a company sabbatical or other type of break in agreement with your employer?

Related to employer view on career break, it was a disappointment to receive such a low number of respondents to HR professional questionnaire. The means to engage HR professionals to participate the study were poor to start with, but for people to find the time to share their view proved to be even harder. Having HR professionals to fill in the questionnaire as an electronic survey form might have increased the number of responses.

The exploratory nature of the study provides however plenty of new interesting areas to be researched in the future. This project suggest that study prospects could deepen the answers from career breakers in the mode of interviews to capture more insights of motives and changes. Future research could concentrate on certain countries, or for example compare if there are differences between the continents. The experiences on fast rising economies, like China would be interesting, as well as hard-working Japan, or work-a-holic United States. Different age groups might also bring along new angles, and focusing on one group or motive would deepen the understanding on this phenomenon. As travelling was found to be the top reason, a specific study on this motive could concentrate more on the reasons why people go travelling, and what are really the benefits. Investigating enabling factors, such as family situation or how career breaks are financed would be interesting, although sensitive topics. And, when this study had the target to explore the phenomenon with reasonably small number of participants, further studies could take profit from the motives, benefits, inconveniences and changes, and publish an electronic survey for a larger audience with response options. This further study could be analysed with quantitative research methods. Also, it might be beneficial to split the participants according to the type of career break they were having: career break between the jobs and sabbatical with agreement to return to work. The Finnish specialty of job alternation leave would fall into the second category. Study leave is a topic that could deserve a separate study, or it could be considered as type of sabbatical as it practically is.

The future research topics related to employer perspectives would benefit from being performed in cooperation with an organization having more leverage to necessitate respondents participating. It was proven hard to collect responses from companies as an independent researcher. It would be important to continue this research, and collect more responses from different countries to be able to draw conclusions. Whereas researching voluntary career breaks between the jobs creates a new area of interest, also corporate sabbatical programs could be studied more: what is the eligibility criteria, how often they are applied and granted, is there a difference between men and women having sabbaticals, what kind of organizations offer sabbatical programs, and is there differences between countries on these factors? Are the sabbaticals merely a reward method or a real part of employee well-being consideration? Also the existence and application of the new kind of sabbatical programs (innovation, green, research) promoted by yourSABBATICAL.com could be researched for practical details. Finally, analysing how to successfully verbalize learnings, new skills and qualifications achieved during a career break, and be hired, would create a beneficial, practical guide for career breakers. Employer requires valid reasons and proof of tangible benefits, and career breakers should be prepared.

As of today, no actions have been taken to continue this study following any of the proposed further research paths.

9.3 Next steps

This study created interest in The Union of Professional Business Graduates in Finland (TRAL), and few activities have been planned to be followed up after finalizing this report. As described in the chapter 8.4 focusing on evaluation of business value of the study, TRAL considers study findings beneficial in their work supporting Finnish business graduates. In practice, Matinhelmi (19 April 2017) has already asked from the company responsible for union member career counseling of their interest of having a summary of the study findings for their disposal. Even if the topic does not come up very often in career counseling, the questions are expected to revolve around the researched topics. People considering career breaks would benefit hearing the experiences of other career breakers. Matinhelmi proposes: “Study findings and theoretical framework could be used to build a ‘toolbox’ for the career counselors that they could use to support people considering career breaks and helping them to process their own motives, benefits and challenges”. Matinhelmi also underlines the common difficulty of job seeker verbalizing the competences and learnings when applying for work – something that career counselors can help as well. These troubles are usual for people in the beginning of career, and if a person has been working in the same company for a long. The same applies for the career breakers who need to explain the situation and the achieved learnings benefiting a new employer.

Another planned next step is to compose an article to be published in union magazine, internet pages or virtual networking platform. Matinhelmi (19 April 2017) writes: “The article could focus on the career break motives and experiences based on study findings which are the most valuable information for our members. Also, theoretical framework could be used to pick up pointers on how to negotiate a career break with own employer”. Matinhelmi points out that sabbatical policies are common only in large Finnish companies, and union members may rather be in the situation where they need to sell the idea of a sabbatical to their employer.

9.4 Reflections on learning

I consider having the possibility to get more familiar on the studies on different generations, their work-related expectations and motivations was very beneficial. The management, leadership and HR practices must meet the requirements of all generations, and still be equal. I had considered text books on human resource field somewhat difficult to apply to reality, and writing this dissertation helped me to link human resources theories to work and to a current phenomenon.

Researching for this study allowed me to ask and discuss about personal work-life related questions with people from different countries. This reassured me that people are the same all around the world, and young people are willing and able to search for more fitting opportunities to fulfill their life expectations. The world is very global, and there are many people who are keen on learning about the other cultures and world.

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Appendices

Appendix 1. Example sentences: Sabbatical, Sabbatical leave (Oxford Dictionary)

- *'C. W. Woodworth spent his sabbatical from the University of California, Berkeley, at the University of Nanking in 1918.'*
- *'I know the only person in my department I have any interest in working with; she will be on sabbatical for the fall semester.'*
- *'A stint as a teaching assistant for an accounting class led him to substitute for the same professor the next year when that professor went on sabbatical.'*
- *'Larrinaga plans to take a year's sabbatical to travel and study.'*
- *'And Robredo chose to take a two-year sabbatical to study at Harvard University.'*
- *'Prof Malcolm Ludvigsen, a visiting lecturer at York University, took a sabbatical from Linkoping University in Sweden with the intention of finishing his second book.'*
- *'He thanks P. Hoffman for inviting him to spend his sabbatical at Harvard University, where this paper was completed.'*
- *'This includes scientists and researchers working on government grants or on sabbatical.'*
- *'Metcalf, 47, is on sabbatical from Lawrence University, in Wisconsin.'*
- *'For starters, he not only negotiated full professorship and the Jackman Chair in Philosophy, plus a paid sabbatical.'*
- *'Early in 1984, David took a short sabbatical to the University of Siena where he worked with other scientists interested in the application of biomarkers to wildlife toxicology.'*
- *'Many of the most resource-intensive types of activities, such as conference travel and sabbaticals, were available only to full-time instructors.'*
- *'She has been recalled from her sabbatical at the University of California to serve as the senior civilian on a Pentagon taskforce.'*
- *'Hearing visiting scholars lecture on general relativity at the university, Weber decided to use his 1955 sabbatical to study the subject in more depth.'*
- *'While on sabbatical in 1997, the scientist collected preserved leaves from university and museum collections in Europe and the Americas.'*
- *'The paper was written whilst on sabbatical at Pennsylvania State University, where much logistical support and scientific stimulus was given by D. W. Burbank and colleagues.'*
- *'The project started because I was on sabbatical from the University of California at Davis.'*
- *'If they choose to go on sabbatical for a full semester, they will receive full pay.'*
- *'I spent 2 years as a professor at Acadia University replacing those on sabbatical.'*
- *'In 1990 Bellcore created the idea of a Fellow who would spend a sabbatical at a university.'*

- *'She was studying in an English school where all the teachers are Americans who are on a sabbatical leave from a different elementary school.'*
- *'But, I also needed a sabbatical experience that would be beneficial for both SFU and myself.'*
- *'As scholar in residence, he will implement the sabbatical program.'*
- *'However, the dean has been on sabbatical leave since resigning and will officially depart at the end of the year.'*
- *'Many pastors find a new creative outlet during their sabbatical time through painting, pottery, music, or some other previously undiscovered or underdeveloped talent.'*
- *'I have a male friend who spent a post-tenure sabbatical leave writing his second book as well as caring for his newborn, while his wife returned to her law practice.'*
- *'Dean Methuen, 57, who was appointed to Ripon in October 1995, will go on sabbatical leave until he officially leaves Ripon Cathedral at the end of the year.'*
- *'Most of this book was written in a sabbatical semester in the autumn of 2001, and I would like to thank my Head of Department, Professor Noel Thompson, for granting me this leave.'*
- *'Anbar decided to take some R&R through his company's sabbatical program, which allows consultants to take one or two months off per year - in addition to vacation time.'*
- *"He added: 'We can run more sabbatical courses for priests and that would allow us to maintain the facility.'"*
- *'A Mellon sabbatical grant allowed me to develop and add to the course a laboratory section focused on survey research and participant observation.'*
- *'Julie Jones, a 26-year-old consultant at Accenture's Chicago office, was among one of the first to sign up for the company's sabbatical program.'*
- *'Only two of the paid sabbatical positions were contested, adding to concerns raised during the hustings that OUSU was failing to display its relevancy to the student body.'*
- *'Stephen Stokes is currently on sabbatical leave.'*
- *'During a sabbatical term at the Institut des Hautes Études Scientifique in Paris in 1985 she studied Gromov's work on elliptic methods which became the basis for much of her later work.'*
- *'For instance, during a sabbatical stay in Scotland, a Scotsman kidded me good-naturedly about Americans worshipping cars.'*
- *'His studies in a small town in Kansas during two sabbatical leaves at Wichita State University confirmed the structural differences he expected from the literature.'*
- *'Faculty often bounce ideas off each other about potential sabbatical plans, and I certainly was no different in planning mine.'*
- *'Continuing research initiated during the sabbatical leave of Professor Hildebrand, a series of research projects are exploring the issue of bus safety in Australia.'*
- *'For the next academic year, the author was on sabbatical leave and hence no data are available for the 1994-1995 year.'*

Appendix 2. Example sentences: Career break (Oxford Dictionary)

- *'Women should be contributing about 15 per cent more to their pensions than their male colleagues, particularly if they have taken a career break of several years to raise children.'*
- *'I had taken a three-year career break to bring up my daughter'*
- *'Alas, the majority of women have problems with saving for retirement, thanks to lower wages, part-time working and maternity and career breaks.'*
- *'Sean is a 50-year-old who has taken a three-year career break and is deciding how to fund the shortfall in service to maximise his pension benefits.'*
- *'The flip side, of course, is that it will show up any career breaks so you'll need to be prepared to talk about them.'*
- *'A career break can be provided for up to five years with the job guaranteed when the employee returns.'*
- *'Service before and after a career break may be added together for the purposes of determining a full year of service.'*
- *'People who are on a career break, rearing children or who are unemployed, or those who move from job to job, are also suited to the new products.'*
- *'However, whilst bringing up my children I had a 10-year career break.'*
- *'Equally surprising was the finding that 88 per cent of respondents were planning to take a career break at some point in their working lives.'*
- *'Non-economically active women include a large proportion who are voluntarily outside employment, notably mothers looking after children, as well as women taking a career break or careers.'*
- *'I have looked on the past three years as a career break, and thought that when our youngest child was in playschool, I would look for work.'*
- *'If either of them has the career break or abandons work outside the home altogether when children arrive, it will be her.'*
- *'Well gap years aren't just for students - a YouGov survey has shown that one in seven adults have taken a career break to travel.'*
- *'Employees can take a "career break" of up to one year as part of the company's standard human-resources policy, though they do forfeit their benefits.'*
- *'Most of them want to travel abroad during their career break.'*
- *'For women, deemed more likely to take career breaks, the minimum saving requirement is likely to be higher still.'*
- *'On the whole women earn less (even now), take longer career breaks, retire earlier and live longer than men.'*
- *'What he needed was a career break.'*
- *'His wife, while on a career break, set up an organic box delivery business modelled on an existing London company.'*

Appendix 3. Questionnaire to Career Breakers

Hello!

I am preparing my thesis on career breaks and sabbaticals for Haaga-Helia University of Applied Sciences in Helsinki, Finland, <http://www.haaga-helia.fi/en/frontpage> in International Business Management degree program to achieve Masters in Business Administration (MBA) title. My study focuses on personal motivations and changes that career break brings to person's career. I am also interested in finding out how voluntary career breaks are viewed by recruiters. I have two questionnaires: one for people having had/on career break and one for people working in HR/recruiting. I appreciate extremely your time to answer to following questions to support my study of this highly interesting topic. Note that all responses will be kept anonymous. As answers may be personal, I will not list the names of the respondents – your answers will only be referred with gender, age and/or nationality. Your responses email will be read only by me and they will be deleted after completion of this study. If you wish, I can submit you the final dissertation later in 2017, just let me know ☺ Please contact me with any questions that may arise: nvuorine@gmail.com or +35850 4873771. Please just simply reply to the email and add your answer after each question.

Background question

- Gender
- Age
- Nationality
- Country of living
- Age when on career break/sabbatical
- Year when on career break/sabbatical
- Duration of career break/sabbatical

Questions on career break/sabbatical

- What was your work situation prior to career leave? Did you work with permanent or temporary contract or as freelancer etc.
- Did you return to work for your previous employer? If you are still on leave, please comment if you know whether you will return or not.
- Please describe the reason(s) for taking the career break/sabbatical. If there are several reasons, start with the most important one.
- Did you have specific targets for this break/leave prior to starting it? If yes, what were they?
- Have you accomplished the pre-set targets? If you are still on leave, please comment if you have already accomplished some targets.
- Which benefits you see resulting from your career break/sabbatical?
- What kind of inconveniences you link to your career break/sabbatical?

Questions for the people who are no longer in sabbatical/having career break

- Have you encountered difficulties with employment due to your career break, e.g. finding a new job, getting your old job back?
- Please describe what changed, if any, in your working life/career after returning from the leave?
- Please describe what changed, if any, in your life outside of work after returning from the leave?

Thank You for taking the time to respond to the questions!

Appendix 4. Questionnaire to HR Professionals

Hello!

I am preparing my thesis on career breaks and sabbaticals for Haaga-Helia University of Applied Sciences in Helsinki, Finland, <http://www.haaga-helia.fi/en/frontpage> in International Business Management degree program to achieve Masters in Business Administration (MBA) title. My study focuses on personal motivations and changes that career break brings to person's career. I am also interested in finding out how voluntary career breaks are viewed by recruiters. I have two separate questionnaires, out of which the company view related questions are below. I would extremely appreciate your time to answer to following questions to support my study of this highly interesting topic. If you wish, I can submit the final dissertation to you later in 2017, just let me know ☺ Please contact me with any questions that may arise: nvuorine@gmail.com or +35850 4873771.

Please just simply reply to the email and add your answer after each question. If the question is not applicable from your position point of view, please mark N/A.

- Do you have a sabbatical policy in your organization?
- How important do you see having the policy in place from recruitment and employee engagement perspectives?
- Have you seen applicant CV's with voluntary career breaks in them?
- How often have you recruited someone returning from career break?
- Do you have an agreement within the organization on how to treat someone currently in career break and applying a position? If you do, can you tell more about it?
- How do you see the difference between job seeker who has previously been on maternity leave, dismissed or on a voluntary career break to do something else for a while, e.g. travel, volunteer, study?
- What benefits and inconveniences do you relate to recruiting a person who has been on career break?
- Is there a certain time period that is, in your opinion, acceptable to be on career break?

Do you allow to use your name and organization name in the study? If not, please describe how you would like to be cited e.g. *HR Consultant in mid-sized company in banking industry in Finland*. In case you don't allow your name and organization to be named, I can assure that your responses will only be viewed by me. All the data will be summarized and deleted after completion of this study.

Thank You for taking the time to respond to the questions!

Appendix 5. LinkedIn posts

Career breakers:

Searching career breakers to respond to the questionnaire with personal post in LinkedIn newsfeed with following post, December 2016:

Subject: Looking for career breakers to answer a short survey for MBA thesis

Text: Have you taken a career break to do "something else" for a while? Would you be interested to participate my study that I'm writing about people taken career breaks and what it changed in their lives? I am writing my MBA thesis and looking for people to respond to my survey. If your career break/sabbatical wasn't forced and you didn't take it to raise children, I'd be pleased to get your email address and to send you my questionnaire. Please contact me via LinkedIn or niina.vuorinen@outlook.com Thank you!!

The same text was used to search for career breakers to respond to the questionnaire with conversation started in a closed LinkedIn group "Connect - Work - Thrive: Return to Work After a Career Break", January 2017:

HR professionals:

Searching HR professionals to respond to the questionnaire with posts in four closed LinkedIn groups for HR professionals, January 2017:

- HR Jobs and Ideas - Human Resources, talent management, hiring tech, networking group
- Human Resources (HR) Professionals
- Recruitment Consultants and Staffing Professionals group
- HR.com

Subject: How are career breaks and sabbaticals viewed by HR and recruiters?

Text: I am writing my MBA thesis about career breaks which are becoming ever more common. Besides interviewing career breakers, I'd like to connect with HR professionals internationally to ask few questions in an short email survey. If you'd be interested in supporting my study in this topical subject, please contact me via LinkedIn or niina.vuorinen@outlook.com. I can submit you my completed report afterwards (latest May 2017). Thank you!

Appendix 6. Structure of the study

Research question	Research objective	Theory	Questionnaire for Career Breakers	Questionnaire for HR professionals
Why people take career breaks?	To identify the motivations for career break	3.2 Personal motivations for career break	3 Please describe the reason(s) for taking the career break / sabbatical. If there are several reasons, start with the most important one.	
Does having a career break make changes to person's career?	To describe the implications of a career break for individual's career	3.3 Personal implications of career break from previous research	4 Did you have specific targets for this break/leave prior to starting it? 5 Have you accomplished the pre-set targets? If you are still on leave, 6 Which benefits you see resulting from your career break/sabbatical? 7 What kind of inconveniences you link to your career break/sabbatical? 8 Please describe what changed, if any, in your working life/career after returning from the leave? 9 10 Please describe what changed, if any, in your life outside of work after returning from the leave?	
How career breaks are viewed by HR and recruiters?	To understand how career breaks and sabbatical leaves are viewed by companies and particularly by HR professionals	4.3 Employment after career break	8 Have you encountered difficulties with employment due to your career break, e.g. finding a new job, getting your old job back?	5 Do you have an agreement within the organization on how to treat someone currently in career break and applying a position? If you do, can you tell more about it? 6 How do you see the difference between job seeker who has previously been on maternity leave, dismissed or on a voluntary career break to do something else for a while, e.g. travel, volunteer, study? 7 What benefits and inconveniences do you relate to recruiting a person who has been on career break? 8 Is there a certain time period that is, in your opinion, acceptable to be on career break?
Have career breaks become socially acceptable internationally?	To understand if career breaks are becoming more common and more acceptable with Generation Y entering the workforce	2 Changing attitudes towards work 4.2.1 Sabbatical leave as benefit 4.2.4 Companies supporting sabbaticals	1 Do you have a sabbatical policy in your organization? 2 How important do you see having the policy in place from recruitment and employee engagement perspectives? 3 Have you seen applicant CV's with voluntary career breaks in them? 4 How often have you recruited someone returning from career break?	1 Do you have a sabbatical policy in your organization? 2 How important do you see having the policy in place from recruitment and employee engagement perspectives? 3 Have you seen applicant CV's with voluntary career breaks in them? 4 How often have you recruited someone returning from career break?
What are the implications of taking a career break?		4.1 Work-life balance promoting productivity and employee engagement 4.2.2 Employee turnover costs 4.2.3 Business impacts of sabbatical programs		