



Understanding the influencers of work arrangement changes

A qualitative interview study on why young professionals are leaving for non-standard work

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Abstract:

The aim of the study is to explore the phenomenon of young professionals making significant changes to their work arrangements and identify what factors influenced their decision. The understanding of this phenomenon can give answers to organisations that have experienced the loss of such talents and serve as guidance for new strategies and processes which better meet the needs of generations Y & Z. The literature review was conducted using both academic and recently released business sources, to allow for both historical research and very current knowledge about the theories and current be combined in establishing a more complete understanding of the studied phenomenon. The two research questions were: 1. Why do young professionals commit large changes to their work arrangements and practices? and 2. Under what circumstances would these same professionals likely return to standard work arrangements? The research strategy was a qualitative study conducted through semi-structured interviews, and the data was analysed utilising thematic analysis. The scope included seven young professionals who had recently made the decision to leave their normal employment relationships in favor of non-standard work arrangements. From the data, initial statements were compressed to twenty-one (RQ1) and seven (RQ2) 2nd order. The 2nd order themes were further combined into aggregate dimensions. There was five aggregate dimensions related to research question 1: Desire for self-agency & empowerment, Desire for personal fulfilment, Assessment & tolerance of risk, Employment pessimism, Negative work environment, and Negative incidents. These dimensions were further organised into three additional groups: desire dimensions which are positive elements which those interviewed pursued through their decision making, aversion dimensions which influenced the participants' choices through being elements which participants left work-arrangements to avoid , and neutral dimensions which offered support in decision making and related to a sense of safety. The aggregate dimensions related to research question 2 were: Financial needs, Social influence, and "Perfect opportunity" and offered the circumstances and influences which those interviewed stated would determine their willingness to return to standard work.

Keywords:

Non-standard work arrangements, Great Resignation phenomenon, generational differences, Generation Y, Generation Z, Psychological contracts, Work satisfaction

Contents

1	Introduction	5
1.1	Research aim & research questions	8
1.2	Scope and limitations of the research	9
1.3	Thesis structure	9
2	Literature review and prior research	10
2.1	Cohort behaviour in attributes and values	10
2.1.1	Digitalisation & COVID-19 as defining experiences for Gen Y & Z	12
2.2	Generational traits of Generations Y & Z	15
2.2.1	The increasing importance of meaningfulness & purpose at work	16
2.2.2	Flexibility of work arrangements & labour	17
2.2.3	Work arrangements and needs	18
2.3	Psychological contracts within work	19
2.3.1	Making sense of under fulfilment and breaches within psychological contracts	21
2.4	Conclusions of prior research	24
3	Methodology	27
3.1	Research approach and method	27
3.1.1	Data collection	28
3.1.2	Reasoning for data collection method	29
3.1.3	Choice and Criteria of interviewees	29
3.1.4	Interviews and interview guide	30
3.2	Data analysis	31
3.3	Research and data quality evaluation	32
4	Results	34
4.1	Desire for self-agency & empowerment	36
4.2	Desire for personal fulfilment	38
4.3	Assessment & tolerance of risk	41
4.4	Employment pessimism	44
4.5	Negative work environment	47
4.6	Negative incidents	51
4.7	Financial needs	54
4.8	Social influence	57
4.9	“Perfect” opportunity	58
5	Discussion	60
5.1.1	Desire dimensions	62
5.1.2	Aversion dimensions	63
5.1.3	Neutral dimensions	65
5.2	Practical implications	66
5.3	Limitations	67
5.4	Recommendations for future research	68

Conclusions	69
Appendices	71
APPENDIX 1: Pre-Defined Semi-Structured Interview Guide	71
APPENDIX 2: Data-Aggregation Structure	72
APPENDIX 3: Conceptual framework for understanding research results	74
References	75

1 Introduction

Recent years have seen the rise of terms such as "The Great Resignation" and "The Great Attrition" in the media, meant to describe the mass of workers globally who are leaving their jobs for more fulfilling arrangements. The loss of skilled and educated employees from the traditional workforce is naturally detrimental to companies requiring labour. Such losses are even more noticeable in those sectors which are already struggling to fill empty roles. As such, it is of great strategic importance to understand the studied phenomenon and have the ability to respond to new needs and dynamics. The most popular of the monikers for the phenomenon is "The Great Resignation", which was first coined in 2021 by Anthony Klotz, the associate professor of management at Texas A&M. Klotz lent his expertise to business experts looking to understand and predict what was happening in the post-pandemic job landscape (Cohen, 2021). Klotz said the Great Resignation describes how the COVID-19 pandemic overturned the long-held notions of the meaning of work and how it should be done (Cohen, 2021). The year 2022 saw the introduction of additional terminology around the same and similar trends; 'quiet quitting', referring to doing the minimum requirements of one's job and putting in no more time, effort, or enthusiasm than absolutely necessary (Formica & Sfodera, 2022) being the most popular.

The pursuit of job satisfaction, especially through leaving one's employment, has become a trending topic, led by the "younger" professionals of Generations Y and Generation Z, born between the year of 1981 and 2010, who have seen their early careers marked by a global pandemic, economic downturns, and, ultimately, a looming recession (Kuzior et al., 2022). Especially for Generation Z, having a role which gives them a sense of purpose is a crucial factor of job satisfaction, as 42% prefer roles at a company where they experience a sense of purpose than one with a higher salary, in contrast with previous generations who accept less-meaningful, but well-compensated, positions more regularly (Lever, 2022). When employees feel that their employers fail to measure up ethically, morally, or socially, they not only see a desire to leave their jobs, but also tell peers in their networks to do the same (Simon et al., 2023). A survey of 1,200 full-time employees by Lever found that professionals belonging to Generation Z are more than two times as likely to leave their current job in the next month (13%) as compared to Millennials (5%), Generation X (3%) or Baby Boomers (6%) (Lever, 2022). Additionally, a disconnect seems to exist currently between employees and

employers, where needs of one group are misunderstood and being left unmet, leading to discontentment. When surveyed in 2021 by Pew Research Center (Parker & Horowitz, 2022), employers identified better jobs, compensation, and work-life balance elsewhere as the primary reasons for their employees' resignations. However, the employees' responses revealed a contrasting perspective: among their top reasons for quitting were a lack of appreciation from the organisation or their managers and a sense of not belonging in the workplace. The employees emphasised the importance of relational factors, highlighting the need for purposeful roles, recognition, and a supportive work environment (Simon et al., 2023).

A workforce unsatisfied with their current job is bad for business. The adverse effects of both high turnover and low job satisfaction amongst a company's workforce have been observed and confirmed through academic research. Porter (2011) found that employee turnover causes downtime, recruiting, interviewing, orientation, and training, all of which can cause significant costs for an organisation. These costs, when calculated for a single entry-level position, can add up to 50% to 100% of an employee's yearly wage (Porter, 2011). In addition to the high costs associated with hiring a new employee, an organisation with high turnover can also see a reduction in the quality of customer service and other customer-facing operations, which can have a direct negative impact on customer satisfaction and the perception of the organisation (Curtis & Wright, 2001). The correlation between low job satisfaction and low job performance has also been established (Ziegler et al., 2012), meaning that even those employees who stay in a job role despite low satisfaction are negatively impacting their organisation through diminished performance in their tasks.

The traditional approach of prioritising compensation, job title, and financial security alone to maintain workforce satisfaction is no longer effective. Mindsets towards employment in different generations are also seen to be shifting. According to recent research conducted by McKinsey & Company (2023) on *The State of Organizations*, the perception of traditional jobs as the sole source of income has changed. People now recognize the emergence of various alternative opportunities such as becoming gig workers, online small-business owners, and social media influencers. As a result, organisations recruiting for traditional, standard, roles are not only competing amongst themselves for the best of the talent pools, but also with non-standard forms of employment (Simon et al., 2023).

Previous research has largely been conducted via surveys (Grous, 2022,; Felstead & Henseke, 2017,; Lever, 2022) with researchers looking to gather answers and concrete, measurable, and changeable factors for both general employee and generational cohort specific turnover. Responses given by young professionals who had recently left their jobs included dissatisfaction with the job or company itself, a lack of satisfactory compensation, a lack of career growth and learning opportunities, and a lacking or troublesome organizational culture (Ngotngamwong, 2019). These reasons can be simply summed up as the search for a “better job” elsewhere, the hope that another company or role would be more fulfilling to the employee and their needs. The willingness of younger generations to leave unsatisfactory jobs persists even in the face of a decrease in job security; AbouAssi et al. (2021) found that Generation Z and Millennials surveyed agreed that they would rather be unemployed than stay in a job they hated.

Whilst there is much research still being conducted on the “Great Resignation” phenomenon, the existing research on the topic and younger generations points to these shifts in mental schemas and perceptions about work (Hess & Jepsen, 2009). Additionally, the global events which have taken place in 2020, 2021, and 2022 and their lingering effects, such as the Covid-19 pandemic, have led to further changes in mindsets around work and careers for everyone, but have been particularly significant for younger generations (Cascio & Montealegre, 2016; Clauson, 2020; Shoss et al, 2020). Organisations looking to attract and retain top talent will have to react to these new ways of working, and can benefit from learning from professionals who have first-hand experience making the decision to leave their jobs or careers entirely.

The research conducted in this thesis aims to gain an understanding of how young professionals have come to decisions regarding ending or changing their employment. The research identifies individuals who have made changes to their work arrangements by changing from standard arrangements (such as full-time employment) to non-standard arrangements (including, but not limited to, freelance, gig, part-time, entrepreneurial, or seasonal work). The research looks to uncover on what factors contribute to large changes made by young professionals, the result of these changes, and their intentions for future work arrangements. The research will have practical applications for business leaders and human resource specialists who desire a deeper understanding of the reasons motivating the “Great Resignation”. The experiences of those who drive this phenomenon can empower such leaders to design appropriate engagement

strategies, ways of working, and company culture that appeal to, re-engage with, and meet the needs of modern young professionals.

1.1 Research aim & research questions

This thesis explores the phenomenon of young professionals leaving standard work arrangements in favor of non-standard arrangements. It aims to enhance the understanding of the underlying circumstances that influence such changes and, by investigating the factors that contribute to these changes, this research aims to provide valuable insight for companies looking to improve their internal practices, strategic planning, and talent management to better suit the needs and preferences of the emerging workforce.

To achieve the research aim, the following research questions will be addressed:

- Why do young professionals commit large changes to their work arrangements and practices?

This question delves into the motivations and drivers behind young professionals' decisions to transition from traditional work arrangements to non-standard arrangements. By exploring their perspectives, aspirations, and expectations, the research aims to uncover the underlying reasons that lead to such shifts.

- Under what circumstances would these same professionals likely return to standard work arrangements?

This question investigates the factors and conditions that may prompt young professionals who have embraced non-standard work arrangements to consider returning to standard arrangements. By examining the potential triggers and incentives, the research aims to identify the circumstances under which individuals are more inclined to re-evaluate their work preferences.

1.2 Scope and limitations of the research

The chosen research method for this study is qualitative research, performed via a series of semi-structured interviews with young international professionals who have recently made changes to their work arrangements. The findings of this research are based on personal experiences that aim to explain the studied phenomenon from the perspective of individuals having undergone the aforementioned change. As such, this thesis should not be viewed as an objective overview on the phenomenon, but rather aims to build understanding around the phenomenon based on the interviewees' personal experiences.

1.3 Thesis structure

This thesis consists of 5 chapters and a conclusion. Following the current introductory chapter, this thesis will present a literature review providing the necessary background for the conducted study, including an overview of the prior research which is relevant to the topics. Within that chapter, the current state of work arrangements is examined, as are psychological theories related to employment relationships and generational differences in perceptions about work and career. In the following third chapter, the methodology and approach of the conducted research is described. The qualitative data gathering techniques and analysis methods are defined. The fourth chapter sees the findings from the gathered data analysed and presented as the results of the research. In the fifth chapter, the findings of the study are discussed in the context of earlier research. Additionally, this chapter addresses the limitations of the current study and provides recommendations for future research that can benefit industry practitioners. The final chapter offers concluding remarks and provides a comprehensive conclusion to the thesis. The chapter serves as a conclusion of the conducted research, encapsulating the main insights and providing closure to the study.

2 Literature review and prior research

This chapter reviews literature and prior research which is relevant in understanding the phenomenon central to this study. First, how quantifiable differences in mindset and values between generations are formed through shared experiences is explained. This is followed by an examination of generations Y & Z and the generation-defining experiences they have undergone, including the COVID-19 pandemic. Second, the impact of these generational differences are examined within a work context, both in how work is performed and how such differences can influence work arrangement preference. Finally, the theories of psychological contracts and social exchange theory are presented.

By examining the factors, such as global events, generational traits, and the existence of psychological contracts, this chapter aims to provide readers with a comprehensive understanding of the contextual factors that shape feelings of career satisfaction and decision-making processes among younger generations. This theoretical foundation equips readers with the knowledge and insights necessary to comprehend the complexities of modern career and work perceptions and lays the groundwork for the conducted research and findings.

2.1 Cohort behaviour in attributes and values

A generation can be described as a collective group of individuals who share similar birth years and age locations, as well as experiences during critical developmental stages (Kupperschmidt, 2000). While the specific start and end dates of each generational cohort vary slightly amongst different researchers, there is generally agreement that there are four broad generations which make up the current workforce. The four broad generations categorized by Hammill (2005) are as follows:

Veterans. Born between 1922 and 1945. Also classified as seniors or traditionalists. This generation will retire almost entirely from the workforce within the coming years.

Baby Boomers - Born between 1946 and 1964

Generation X - Born between 1965 and 1980.

Generation Y - Born between 1981 and 1995. Also classified, and commonly referred, to as Millennials.

Generation Z - Born between 1996 and 2010. This generation is the newest entrant to the workforce.

It should be noted that not all researchers agree with the categorization of individuals into generational cohorts (Rudolph & Zacher, 2020a). Their argument rests on the premise that generations are a social construct, and that we do not have a methodology or statistical/analytical framework that could be used to unambiguously identify “generations” (i.e., birth cohort effects) from two other time-varying influences: chronological age and contemporaneous period effects (Rudolph & Zacher, 2017). This thesis will refer to generational cohorts, but does so with the reasoning that the shared life experiences that members of a generation share have been observed to shape the group’s views, beliefs, and attitudes, and these shared experiences often distinguish one generation from another (Jurkiewicz & Brown, 1998). These shared experiences and life events create a unique shared personality and mindset within each “generation”, which then influences the way individuals view authority and organizations, how they plan to achieve their goals and desires, and how they perceive the role and significance of their work and career within the context of their lives (Kupperschmidt, 2000). As posited by Ryder (1965), Baltes, Reese, and Lipsitt (1980), and Kowske, Rasch, and Wiley (2010) in Lub et al., (2016)., life experiences contribute to the formation of patterns and mental schemas, which endure and remain relatively stable throughout an individual's life. These mental schemas play a crucial role in shaping how individuals respond to situations in a variety of contexts, including their employment relationships (Rousseau, 2001). Inglehart's (1997) intergenerational values change theory further supports the notion that societal events and trends influence the development of generational identities.

This theory is built on two assumptions: the "socialisation" hypothesis, which asserts that adults' fundamental values reflect the socio-economic conditions they experienced during their childhood and adolescence, and the "scarcity" hypothesis, which suggests that the socio-economic aspects that were in short supply during a generation's childhood and adolescence hold high value (Inglehart, 1997). Empirical evidence, as presented by Schuman and Scott (1989) and Schuman and Rodgers (2004) through their time-lag studies, indicates that significant social events are remembered differently by cohorts who experienced them during their formative life-stages. Furthermore, events occurring during these crucial life-stages possess the potential to influence the interpretation of subsequent events, highlighting the

significance of these periods in shaping an individual's future perspectives on life (Schuman and Rodgers 2004). Hence, life events encountered during formative stages shape individuals' values and beliefs, and these beliefs undergo transformations in newer generations as society evolves over time (Hiltrop 1996; De Meuse et al. 2001).

Existing literature and research about generational differences and changing career needs amongst different generational cohorts have largely focused on the differences between Baby Boomers, Generation X, and Generation Y (Millennials) (Smola & Sutton, 2002). This current lack of research about the youngest generation is likely due to Generation Z's more recent inclusion in the job market (even the eldest of Generation Z are currently 27 years old). The huge advancements in digitalization and technology which have taken place over the last several decades have resulted in different skill sets between generations which has separated Generation Y from their predecessors (Kowske et al, 2010). In Generation Z's case, digitalization has continued to increase in integration and technological capabilities, setting the stage for Generation Z to be the most technologically capable generation to date (Bolser & Gosciej, 2015). While this viewpoint was already presented in research conducted prior to the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020 (Bolser & Gosciej, 2015, Puiu, 2017; Tulgan, 2013), the boost to digitalization observed as a result of the pandemic can almost undoubtedly be seen as a further influence on the generational traits of current young professionals, an assumption which we will explore further.

2.1.1 Digitalisation & COVID-19 as defining experiences for Gen Y & Z

Digitalisation within the context of organisations and work processes refers to “the sociotechnical process of leveraging digitised products or systems to develop new organizational procedures, business models, or commercial offerings” (Saarikko, Westergren, & Blomquist, 2020; Brennen & Kreiss, 2016). Digital technologies including, but not limited to, websites, social media, smartphones, content-sharing platforms, e-procurement systems, blockchain, automation technology, robotics, and wearable devices, have facilitated businesses in effectively engaging with innovation and R&D activities while also capitalising on new market opportunities (Lupton, 2020). The COVID-19 virus pandemic which started in 2020 has been referred to as “the great accelerator” in fast-tracking the existing global trend towards embracing modern technologies (Bradley et al., 2020). Social distancing mandates intended to

slow the spread of the virus, lockdowns, and general uneasiness about in-person interactions influenced the already strong trend of digitalization of business models and the shift of commercial activities from predominantly offline and brick-and-mortar outlets to online outlets (Ng et al., 2021)

This shift to performing work digitally was perhaps most notable in the shift from employees working in offices to working remotely. Remote work refers to carrying out tasks for an employing organisation from a distant location, rather than from the office (Wang et al., 2021). While many remote work-enabling technologies have existed for at least a decade, most companies have been hesitant to adopt them or have limited their use to select employees (Wang et al., 2021). Such reluctance may stem from concerns about potential loss of control, distrust in employees exercising autonomy responsibly (Miele & Tirabeni, 2020), or an unwillingness to abandon tried-and-tested solutions (Amankwah-Amoah et al., 2020). Even organisations which had previously shown resistance to the idea of remote work were forced to adapt to the new reality of work in a pandemic. Existing organisational practices had to change quickly in response to social distancing and lockdown measures introduced to protect public health and curb the spread of the virus through limiting human contact (Rai, 2020). As employees were legally required to stay at home, employers had to provide alternative ways for their workforce to continue to remain productive, often via the adoption of remote work enabling technology (Hadidi & Power, 2020). As such, COVID-19 can be seen as a “catalyst” in advancing the adoption and increasing use of various technologies which enable digital remote-first interactions (Ng et al., 2021). Companies faced an immediate need to conduct their business and work online or halt operations due to public safety mandates (Amankwah-Amoah et al., 2021).

Employees themselves were also subject to a great deal of change to how they conducted their work (Andersen & Kelliher, 2020). The move to online and remote work impacted employees as abruptly as their employers. The widespread adoption of remote work during the pandemic highlighted the feasibility of productive work from home, leading to a greater acceptance of and appreciation for flexible work arrangements (Hadidi & Power, 2020). These rapid changes naturally required individuals to be flexible and adaptable in their approach to work (Wang et al., 2021). Many had to quickly learn new technologies, adapt to remote collaboration tools, and embrace virtual communication methods, regardless of their initial levels of comfort with such tools (Rai, 2020). An unintended consequence of the abrupt shift to remote work was a

blurring of the boundaries between work and personal life: many individuals found themselves working from home while maintaining household responsibilities and caregiving (Wang et al., 2021). This experience highlighted the importance of work-life balance and the need to create professional and personal boundaries to maintain well-being (Schudde et al., 2022). While many workers became more mindful of setting limits, establishing routines, and finding ways to prioritise self-care and personal time amidst work demands, others struggled with the circumstances and saw negative repercussions like a diminishment in their mental health (Schudde et al., 2022). Ultimately, this experience has been proven to be net positive, with the pandemic found to have fostered a mindset of adaptability, openness to change, and willingness to learn new skills to thrive in uncertain and dynamic work environments (Schudde et al., 2022).

While the digitalization boom and way of working mandates left very few workers unaffected, the pandemic and the changes it brought are considered to have been particularly influential on younger generations (Wiedermann, 2020). This has been theorised by researchers to be due to the stage of their careers at which the COVID-19 pandemic occurred. Eilam-Shamir and Yaakobi (2014) found that individuals whose early careers saw them exposed to the experiences of being laid off themselves, witnessing the layoffs of their colleagues and/or peers, or facing situations where they had to accept reductions in pay or status, viewed employment as being highly transactional and had lower relational expectations from their future employers. This was not found in individuals who had not been exposed to such experiences. These same individuals also anticipated a higher level of job insecurity in their future employment (Eilam-Shamir & Yaakobi 2014). The COVID-19 pandemic saw mass layoffs globally, with the EU seeing 3.0 million people affected by temporary lay-offs in Q1 of 2020; this was a steep uptick compared to the steady 0.5 million temporary lay-offs in the years previous (Eurostat, 2021). The number of individuals who globally faced a layoff or cuts to their compensation is estimated to be within the tens of millions (Rudolph & Zacher, 2020a). From these sums, it is not unseasonable to assume that every employee was confronted with the prospect of either being laid-off themselves or seeing their colleagues, peers, friends, and/or family members affected. As such, those individuals who were at the beginning of their careers, largely Generations Y and Z, would exhibit the attitudes identified by Eilam-Shamir and Yaakobi (2014), that of a sense of work being highly transactional, holding low relational expectations for employers, and anticipating higher levels of job insecurity. Psychological contracts will be explored in more detail later in this thesis, but it is valuable to note now that

employees who have transactional psychological contracts are considered as seeing their employment as more temporary and transactional rather than long-term and built on mutual commitment and trust (Grimmer & Oddy, 2007; Rousseau, 2004). This is in contrast to a relational psychological contract based on mutual loyalty and stability, where both the employee and the employer feel committed and obligated to support each other according to their needs, interests and well-being (Grimmer & Oddy, 2007).

Jiskrova (2022) found that the experiences of the pandemic prompted individuals to reflect on their own career priorities and reconsider their values and goals in the face of both possible unemployment and sickness. Job security, stability, and the alignment of personal values with organisational values gained significance due to them being threatened by COVID-19 (Jiskrova, 2022). Many workers sought more meaningful work, re-evaluated their career paths, and pursued opportunities that better aligned with their passions and purpose; inspired via new skills becoming easier to acquire, with the shift to digitalised learning, and newly acquired free-time due to being laid-off or fired (Tessema, 2022). With these conditions many sought to upskill or reskill themselves to adapt to the changing job market and take advantage of new opportunities in digital and remote work (Tessema, 2022). The experience of remote work during the pandemic also highlighted the benefits of flexibility and autonomy, and led many individuals to gain an appreciation for the freedom to set their own schedules, eliminate commuting time, and work in environments that suited their preferences (Jacks, 2021). This led to an increased desire for flexible work arrangements, such as hybrid work models or remote work options, even beyond the peak of the pandemic (Jacks, 2021).

2.2 Generational traits of Generations Y & Z

All human behaviours can be attributed to the fulfilment of various human needs, which remain consistent across individuals regardless of gender, nationality, age, or religion (Doyal & Gough, 1984). The fulfilment of needs is not only vital for individual functioning but also a key factor in achieving personal growth, integrity, and overall well-being (Van den Broeck et al., 2010). According to human need theory, when individuals are able to satisfy their needs, they experience a state of well-being, leading to enhanced productivity and satisfaction in both personal and professional domains (Doyal & Gough, 1984; Diener & Lucas, 2000). Understanding and addressing the diverse array of human needs can foster a positive work

environment and contribute to the overall success of individuals and organisations alike (Doyal & Gough, 1984). Recognising and meeting the needs of employees then is crucial in cultivating a strong sense of belonging and commitment within organisations (Doyal & Gough, 1984; Ryan & Deci, 2000, 2017).

Born of their experiences, Generations Y and Z have been studied as having traits unique to their schema (Pasko & Sodnick, 2020). While these traits are by no means exclusive to Generations Y and Z, they have been regarded as being more or most prominent in these generations. (Bulut & Maraba, 2021). The most prominent of these generational traits that are more strongly held by younger generations include an increased valuing of meaningfulness and purpose at work, and an increased desire for flexibility (Pasko & Sodnick, 2020; Bulut & Maraba, 2021). As this thesis is conducting research within the realms of Business Management, these factors will be described within the context of work and employment and examined closer.

2.2.1 The increasing importance of meaningfulness & purpose at work

Studies have shown that, in the present day more than ever, the work one undertakes has become a crucial aspect for individuals seeking meaning in life (Allan et al., 2015; Baumeister, 1991; Steger & Dik, 2009). The desire for meaningful work is present across generations, but there are noticeable differences in how younger generations approach work and prioritise their values and goals (Seemiller & Grace, 2019). Those belonging to Generations Y and Z have been studied as placing a value on making an impact on the world that goes beyond providing for their families, which was the primary goal for earlier generations (Mahmoud et al., 2021). They seek work that aligns with their values and allows them to contribute to a greater cause (Eisenberger et al., 2010; Staw & Cohen-Charash, 2005). This emphasis on meaningful work reflects a shift in priorities and highlights the influence of purpose and fulfilment in the workplace (Wrzesniewski et al., 1997).

The importance of meaningful work, defined as the personal experience of finding one's work existentially significant and valuable (Both-Nwabuwe et al., 2017; Martela & Pessi, 2018), has been highlighted in relation to work-life quality and occupational health psychology. Martela et al. (2021) identified various studies which have linked meaningful work to several outcomes,

including: job satisfaction (Littman-Ovadia & Steger, 2010), work engagement (Steger, Littman-Ovadia, et al., 2012; Yasin Ghadi et al., 2013), organizational commitment (Geldenhuis et al., 2014), reduced turnover intentions and absenteeism (Leunissen et al., 2018; Soane et al., 2013), customer satisfaction (Leiter et al., 1998), supervisor-rated performance (Harris et al., 2007), and behavioral involvement (Montani et al., 2020). A recent meta-analysis examining the impact of meaningful work concluded that the results strongly support the notion that individuals who find their work meaningful experience both enhanced performance and well-being (Allan et al., 2019). Numerous studies have even shown that people are willing to accept lower salaries for work that they perceive as being more meaningful to them (Achor et al., 2018; Hu & Hirsh, 2017). Younger generations, including Millennials and Generation Z, are more likely to prioritise passion and personal fulfilment over financial rewards and traditional benefits when it comes to their work (Twenge et al., 2010). 42% of Generation Z and 40% of Generation Y would rather be employed at a job that gives them a sense of purpose than one that pays more, compared with just 32% of their predecessors, Generation X (Lever, 2022).

2.2.2 Flexibility of work arrangements & labour

Spreitzer et al. (2017) propose a framework that categorises flexibility in work arrangements into three dimensions: scheduling flexibility, location flexibility, and employment relationship flexibility. For instance, individuals in standard employment with flexible schedules have the ability to determine when they perform their work, known as flextime work schedules. Those with location flexibility typically work full-time with a fixed schedule but have the freedom to work off-site, such as telecommuting or working from a home office, often due to responsibilities outside of the workplace. As a result of the pandemic, many individuals transitioned to working remotely from home offices, even as they adapted their working hours to accommodate interruptions and distractions often stemming from family obligations (Jacks, 2021).

A longitudinal study conducted over 10 years with multiple nationalities found that both Gen Y and Gen Z indicated that the factors of greatest importance that they considered when selecting a workplace was flexibility, with work-life balance marginally behind as their second

consideration (Grous, 2022). Work-life balance has emerged as a critical determinant of job satisfaction and overall well-being (Felstead & Henseke, 2017). Young professionals seek greater integration between their personal and professional lives, aiming for a harmonious blend that enables them to fulfil their commitments to both (Felstead & Henseke, 2017). Flexible work arrangements, such as remote work options, flexible working hours, and work-task autonomy, facilitate this integration (Spurk & Straub, 2020).

2.2.3 Work arrangements and needs

Work arrangements, defined as "agreements between those who perform work and those who provide jobs," are typically categorised as either standard or non-standard (Howard, 2017). Standard work arrangements pertain to traditional employment where individuals maintain long-term, full-time jobs with a single employer and have the opportunity for career advancement over time (Ng et al., 2021). Work arrangements that deviate from this pattern in one or more aspects are considered non-standard or flexible work arrangements (Ray et al, 2017). Examples include independent contracting, remote work, telework, temporary help agency work, freelance work, on-demand or gig work, part-time work, and others (Ng et al, 2013). In recent years, work arrangements have undergone significant transformation, driven by a combination of economic opportunities, societal needs, and changing employee demands (Mawardi, 2022). The influences of digitalization and the COVID-19 pandemic have played substantial roles in this transformation (Bradley et al, 2020). The pandemic particularly, with its widespread impact on traditional work settings and the necessity of remote work, further accelerated the shift towards flexible work arrangements through exposing employees to remote work (Amankwah-Amoah et al., 2021).

Traditional full-time employment often follows a structured and predefined set of tasks and responsibilities (Ray et al, 2017). The rigid schedules and limited flexibility of traditional full-time jobs can restrict individuals from pursuing their desired work-life balance or engaging in activities outside of work that bring them fulfilment (Grous, 2022). This lack of flexibility may leave individuals who value flexibility, such as those from Generations Y and Z, feeling constrained and unfulfilled in terms of meeting their personal needs for autonomy and a sense of control over their time and life (Mawardi, 2022; Grous, 2022). In response to these unmet needs, individuals may seek alternative work arrangements (Langerud et al., 2022). Non-

standard work arrangements offer greater autonomy and flexibility to individuals, allowing them to shape their work according to their personal preferences and values (Jacks, 2021). These arrangements can provide individuals with opportunities to engage in projects or tasks that align more closely with their sense of purpose, allowing them to experience a greater sense of meaning and fulfilment in their work (Mawardi, 2022).

Non-standard work arrangements can also present challenges, particularly in that perceived job insecurity has a profound negative effect on well-being (Aliyev, 2022). As non-standard work arrangements often lack consistent income as can be expected from standard, full-time employment, individuals can experience fluctuating income and subsequent stress (Mawardi, 2022).

2.3 Psychological contracts within work

The concept of a psychological contract is often attributed to the foundational work of Argyris (1960) and social exchange theory (Homans, 1958). Homans (1958) proposed social exchange theory as a theoretical framework that examines social behaviour through the lens of interactions between two entities, who conduct a cost-benefit assessment to evaluate risks and rewards. This theory also encompasses economic relationships, as the cost-benefit analysis takes place when each participant possesses resources or goods that hold value for the other party (Homans, 1958). This social exchange is also present in working relationships, as there is an exchange of resources such as time and skill for money in the form of a salary, and is the framework with which psychological contracts can be explained (Blau, 1964). Rousseau defined the psychological contract as: “An individual’s belief in mutual obligations between that person and another party such as an employer” (Rousseau & Tijoriwala, 1998).

Academic literature identifies four separate types of psychological contract based on the nature and duration of the agreements: transactional; relational; balanced; and, transitional (Rousseau, 1989). The transactional psychological contract involves short-term exchanges of employment agreements with specific performance terms, focusing primarily on economic aspects and lacking elements such as training and development opportunities (Rousseau, 2000).

This type of contract is characterised by narrow and limited agreements that revolve around economic terms and conditions (Blau, 1964). In contrast, the relational psychological contract entails long-term exchanges in employment agreements with non-specific performance terms. It emphasises the employer's commitment to providing stable wages, long-term employment, and support for the well-being and interests of employees and their families (Rousseau, 2000). The relational psychological contract places importance on both social and economic exchanges within the agreement (Blau, 1964). The balanced psychological contract involves agreements with long-term and specific performance terms. Employers are expected to provide continuous training and enhance the overall development of workers, both within and outside the company (Rousseau, 2000). This type of contract encompasses socio-emotional and economic aspects, emphasising the conditions and relationship between the parties involved in the agreement (Hui, Lee, & Rousseau, 2004). Lastly, the transitional psychological contract refers to agreements with short-term exchanges that lack specific performance terms (Rousseau, 2000). However, it is worth noting that transitional contracts do not establish a true psychological contract as they lack commitment from either party (Hui et al., 2004).

The study of the psychological contract has experienced substantial growth over the past decade, largely due to the influence of Rousseau (1989, 1995, 2000, 2001). The theory posits that social relationships are built on unspecified obligations and an unequal distribution of power resources (Blau, 1964). This concept is evident in the works of Argyris (1960), Levinson et al. (1962), and Schein (1965, 1978) in the context of organisational analysis. Argyris (1960) referred to the "psychological work contract" to describe how the perception values and held by both the organisation and the individual in the employment relationship relate to each other. This earlier literature highlights that employment relationships are shaped by both social and economic exchanges (Fox, 1974). Levinson et al. (1962) developed this further by viewing the psychological contract as a set of mutual expectations, which the parties involved may not fully comprehend, but nonetheless govern their relationship. As per the findings of Zhao et al. (2007) and Bal et al. (2008), an employee holds a perception that the employer is obligated to fulfil certain duties towards them. In turn, the employee reciprocates by displaying positive work attitudes, such as effective commitment, organisational citizenship behaviour, or an intention to stay with the organisation. While the mere perception of these obligations may trigger positive work attitudes in anticipation of their fulfilment, it is the actual fulfilment of these obligations that serves as a catalyst for positive work attitudes, as observed by Montes and Irving (2008) and Montes and Zweig (2009). Schein (1978) expanded on this idea by proposing

that the expectations between the organisation and individual employee do not only cover the work performed for pay, but also include a range of duties, benefits, and entitlements. Schein's contribution warns us that violations of the psychological contract can lead to labour unrest, employee dissatisfaction, and worker alienation. These outcomes are frequently camouflaged as specific concerns regarding topics like salary, working hours, and employment terms, constituting the foundation of a negotiable rather than psychological agenda. This is a theory which will see further exploration later on.

As per Rousseau (2001), employees form mental frameworks concerning their psychological contracts, drawing from various sources such as societal influences like social contracts and norms, as well as formative pre-employment factors like motives and values. These mental frameworks significantly influence how reciprocity and mutuality, which are expected from both parties involved in the contract, are interpreted (Dabos and Rousseau, 2004). The impact of these diverse mental frameworks on the psychological contract of different generations can manifest in two primary ways: firstly, as generation-specific perceived obligations on the part of the employer (Hess & Jepsen 2009, Lub et al. 2012, 2014) analogous to the relationship between general values and work values (Elizur & Sagie 1999); and secondly, in the varied responses exhibited by different generations towards the fulfillment of employer obligations (Lub et al. 2014). Applying the reciprocity principle as posited by Gouldner (1960), it can be inferred that while all generations assess the extent to which obligations are fulfilled, their evaluations are coloured by their experiences during their formative years, and their subsequent reciprocity is influenced by these evaluations. As a result, different generational cohorts, with their varying needs, have different expectations regarding, and respond differently to, the fulfilment and breach of psychological contracts (Lub et al., 2016).

2.3.1 Making sense of under fulfilment and breaches within psychological contracts

It is important to recognize that psychological contracts are subjective in nature, consisting of beliefs and perceptions regarding promises and acceptance rather than objective facts. This means that the boundaries of these contracts and their fulfilment are highly individual and may vary between parties (Robinson & Rousseau, 1994). Each party believes that both sides have made promises and accepted the same terms, but it does not necessarily mean they share a

complete understanding of all contract terms (Robinson & Rousseau, 1994). Each party holds their own interpretation of the contract, resulting in potentially different and unique beliefs about their reciprocal obligations. These beliefs can stem from: explicit promises made during the recruitment process; interpretations of past exchange patterns; vicarious learning from observing others' experiences; and, various factors that are taken for granted such as good faith and fairness (MacNeil, 1985).

Unlike mere expectations, the psychological contract involves a belief in the employer's obligations based on perceived promises of reciprocal exchange (Dabos and Rousseau, 2004). A violation occurs when one party perceives the other to have failed in fulfilling their promised obligations (Robinson & Rousseau, 1994). The assessment of psychological contracts can be done by examining the extent of reported obligations from both employers and employees (Robinson & Rousseau, 1994). Alternatively, one can assess the interplay between employer and employee obligations (De Cuyper et al., 2008; Shore & Barksdale, 1998), which indicates the equilibrium or mutuality in perceived obligations between the two parties. In a balanced relationship, both the employer and the employee have comparable levels of obligations, whether high or low. An imbalanced relationship arises when one party is perceived to bear a greater obligation than the other. This imbalance can manifest in two ways: the employee being perceived as having lesser obligations than the employer (employee underobligated), or the employee being perceived as having greater obligations than the employer (employee overobligated) (Rousseau, 1989).

Rousseau (1989) does see a distinction between psychological contract violations and simple unmet expectations or perceptions of inequity. Employees often begin with unrealistic expectations and, when these expectations are not met, they may become less satisfied, perform poorly, and become more likely to leave the organisation (Lub et al., 2016). However, when a psychological contract is violated, the responses tend to be more intense than in cases of unfulfilled expectations. This intensity arises not only from unmet expectations of specific rewards or benefits but also from broader beliefs about respect, codes of conduct, and other relationship-related behaviours (Rousseau, 1989). For instance, if an individual expects to be paid fair-market wages in exchange for hard work and that expectation is not met, they may feel disappointed. However, if someone was promised fair-market wages for their hard work but does not receive them, they feel betrayed. Broken promises evoke anger and erode trust in the relationship, leading to more significant repercussions than unmet expectations alone

(Robinson & Rousseau, 1994). When the actual experience does not align with expectancies or equity beliefs, employees may feel let down or dissatisfied. However, the violation of a psychological contract, involving a breach of promise and trust, goes beyond disappointment and generates feelings of betrayal. Failing to honour a contract creates a sense of wrongdoing, deception, and betrayal, which has profound implications for the employment relationship (Rousseau, 1989).

The concept of a psychological contract breach pertains to the perception of employees regarding the degree to which their employer has failed to fulfil its obligations towards them (Conway & Briner, 2005; Rousseau, 1994). In their research, Parzefall and Coyle-Shapiro (2011) detail the consequences of a psychological contract breach. They refer to research studies which have established a negative impact on various employee emotions, attitudes and behaviours, including decreased levels of organisational commitment (Lester et al., 2002), elevated turnover rates (Maertz & Griffeth, 2004), diminished in-role and organisational citizenship behaviours (Hui et al., 2004; Turnley et al., 2003), and an increased propensity for deviant behaviours (Kickul, 2001) consequent to the occurrence of a breach. After a breach occurs and the employer fails to fulfil their obligations, employees may decrease their perceived obligations (inputs) to create equity in the relationship (Hui et al., 2004; Turnley et al., 2003). Moreover, in response to a breach, employees have the tendency to augment their perceived entitlements or employer obligations (outcomes) as a form of compensation (Conway & Briner, 2005). The employee seeks to address the employer's failure in meeting their obligations by imposing an even higher level of obligations to "compensate for" the initial obligations that the employee believed were rightfully owed to them (Kickul, 2001).

Such a contract breach taking place, and the resulting changes in perception experienced by the employee, can be understood through the basis of understanding sense-making (Chaudhry, 2009). According to Brockner and Wiensfeld (1996), individuals have a desire to make sense of environments and situations in response to events that are unexpected, deemed to be negative in nature, or both. Louis and Sutton's (1991) model of this cognitive sense-making process presents the argument that when an individual believes that their employment relationship is undergoing a change in a manner which they deem as unfavourable to them as an employee, that employee is more likely to engage in systematic cognitive processing to understand "why this change occurred" and "how the change can and will affects me." The employee will then make changes and decisions regarding the nature of their psychological contract and

employment based on the outcome of this sense-making process (Chaudhry, 2009). Chaundry's (2009) theoretical framework for understanding the sense-making process breaks the process down into three components: the contextual component, the cognitive component, and the behavioural component. The contextual component of this model examines the contextual factors that are present within a contract breach and the employee's perceptions of changes in the extent to which the organisation is or is not fulfilling its obligations to the employee. The cognitive component focuses on the role of salient cognitions that underlie employee sensemaking. The behavioural component references employee responses to changes, which can include a change in loyalty, neglect of job responsibilities (so called "quiet quitting"), or an exit from the employment relationship. As such, breaches to a psychological contract will result in consequences, be it an adjustment to the contract, the employee's behaviour, or the employment relationship (Chaudhry, 2009).

2.4 Conclusions of prior research

Generational cohorts, defined by similar birth years and shared experiences during critical developmental stages, play a significant role in shaping individuals' views, beliefs, attitudes, and behaviours in the workplace (Kupperschmidt, 2000). The four broad generations in the current workforce include Veterans, Baby Boomers, Generation X, and Generation Y (Millennials) (Kupperschmidt, 2000; Hammill, 2005). These generational identities are influenced by shared life experiences and events, which contribute to the formation of distinct personalities and mindsets that impact individuals' perceptions of authority, organisations, goals, and the significance of work and career (Kupperschmidt, 2000; Jurkiewicz & Brown, 1998). The younger generations, Y and Z, are characterised by their high technological capabilities and are likely to be influenced by the further boost in digitalization resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic (Bolser & Gosciej, 2015; Puiu, 2017). This increased digitalization has significant implications for the traits and behaviours of young professionals, shaping their perceptions of work and career (Tulgan, 2013).

The COVID-19 pandemic and the resulting digitalization boom have had a significant impact on younger generations, particularly in shaping their views on work and career (Wiedermann, 2020). The pandemic has influenced the younger generations' perspectives on work, emphasising the importance of job security, alignment of values, and flexibility in their career

choices (Wiedermann, 2020; Jiskrova, 2022; Jacks, 2021; Tessema, 2022). The experiences of layoffs, pay cuts, and job insecurity during the pandemic lead individuals, especially those in the early stages of their careers, to view employment as highly transactional and have lower relational expectations from employers (Eilam-Shamir & Yaakobi, 2014). The pandemic has also prompted individuals to reflect on their career priorities, reconsider their values and goals, and seek more meaningful work aligned with their passions and purpose (Jiskrova, 2022). The shift to remote work has highlighted the benefits of flexibility and autonomy, leading to an increased desire for flexible work arrangements even beyond the pandemic (Jacks, 2021).

Various elements have been identified as being particularly important factors to Generations Y and Z. The younger generations, including Millennials and Generation Z, place a strong emphasis on finding meaningful work that aligns with their values and allows them to make a positive impact (Seemiller & Grace, 2019; Mahmoud et al., 2021). Meaningful work is associated with various positive outcomes, including job satisfaction, work engagement, organisational commitment, reduced turnover intentions, and improved performance (Littman-Ovadia & Steger, 2010; Steger, Littman-Ovadia, et al., 2012; Allan et al., 2019). Research has shown that individuals are willing to accept lower salaries for work they perceive as more meaningful, and younger generations prioritise passion and personal fulfilment over financial rewards (Hu & Hirsh, 2017; Twenge et al., 2010). In fact, a higher percentage of Generation Z and Millennials prioritise a sense of purpose over higher pay compared to Generation X (Lever, 2022). This reflects a shift in priorities identified by Martela et al. (2021), with younger generations seeking work that provides them with a sense of purpose and fulfilment (Allan et al., 2015; Baumeister, 1991; Steger & Dik, 2009).

Younger generations have also been found to value flexibility. Both Generation Y and Generation Z prioritise flexibility when selecting a workplace, considering it as a significant factor, followed closely by work-life balance (Grous, 2022). Work-life balance is crucial for job satisfaction and overall well-being, and young professionals seek to integrate their personal and professional lives harmoniously (Felstead & Henseke, 2017). Flexible work arrangements, including remote work options, flexible hours, and task autonomy, support this integration (Spurk & Straub, 2020). Work arrangements can be categorised as standard and non-standard, with non-standard work arrangements offering more flexibility and autonomy (Howard, 2017; Ray et al., 2017). The COVID-19 pandemic and digitalization have accelerated the shift towards flexible work arrangements, including remote work (Bradley et al., 2020; Amankwah-

Amoah et al., 2021). Traditional full-time employment may limit individuals' work-life balance and fulfilment due to rigid schedules (Ray et al., 2017; Grous, 2022). Generations Y and Z, who value flexibility, may seek alternative work arrangements to meet their autonomy needs (Mawardi, 2022; Grous, 2022). Non-standard work arrangements, such as freelancing or gig work, provide individuals with greater control over their work, allowing them to pursue meaningful tasks (Jacks, 2021; Mawardi, 2022). However, non-standard work arrangements can also lead to job insecurity and fluctuating income, which negatively affect well-being (Aliyev, 2022; Mawardi, 2022).

How employees match their expected obligations with their working relationship is explained using the theory of psychological contracts. The psychological contract refers to the mutual obligations between an individual and their employer (Rousseau & Tijoriwala, 1998). The concept of a psychological contract can be traced back to social exchange theory and the works of Homans (1958), Argyris (1960), and Schein (1978). Violations of the psychological contract can lead to dissatisfaction and unrest (Schein, 1978). Mental schemas formed by individuals influence their interpretation of reciprocity and mutuality in the contract (Rousseau, 2001; Dabos & Rousseau, 2004). Psychological contracts are subjective and individual, based on beliefs and perceptions rather than objective facts (Robinson & Rousseau, 1994). Different generational cohorts may have distinct mental schemas and thus can be expected to hold different expectations regarding employer obligations and their responses to fulfilment (Hess & Jepsen, 2009; Lub et al., 2012, 2014, 2016).

Perceived psychological contract violations evoke intense responses compared to unmet expectations (Rousseau, 1989). Broken promises lead to anger, erode trust, and generate feelings of betrayal (Robinson & Rousseau, 1994). Breaches have profound implications for the employment relationship, impacting emotions, attitudes, and behaviours (Conway & Briner, 2005). Employees may decrease their perceived obligations or increase their perceived entitlements to restore equity (Hui et al., 2004; Turnley et al., 2003; Conway & Briner, 2005). Individuals seek to make sense of negative changes and engage in cognitive processing to understand the impact on themselves (Chaudhry, 2009). The outcome of this process influences adjustments to the psychological contract, employee behaviour, and the employment relationship (Chaudhry, 2009).

While the process of undergoing change to the psychological contract is largely unavoidable (Robinson & Rousseau, 1994), the avoidance of breaches which negatively impact employment relationships is naturally favourable for businesses and their HR practices looking to maintain positive relationships with their employees.

3 Methodology

In the following chapter, the chosen research design and methodology is presented. The selected methods, which include a qualitative approach with semi-structured expert interviews, and the data analysis method of thematic analysis, are described, justified, and evaluated. The discussion encompasses considerations of ethicality, trustworthiness, and the applicability of the research. Utilising the gathered data, the research aims to answer the following research questions:

- Why do young professionals commit large changes to their work arrangements and practices?
- Under what circumstances would these same professionals likely return to standard work arrangements?

3.1 Research approach and method

The prior research presented in chapter two establishes the existence of influential global occurrences, generational differences, and social exchange relationships which can impact an individual's perception of their work arrangement. This theoretical body justifies further research around the topic and phenomenon being studied. As the phenomenon of young professionals making changes to their work arrangements is still underway, a true understanding and documentation of these individuals' experiences has not yet been established in academic or business publications. Given the research topics' present situation, it is not possible to accurately evaluate the phenomenon and answer the question of why it is happening solely from existing academic literature. As such, gathering data directly from

young professionals in the form of in-depth semi-structured interviews allows for analysis, categorisation, and understanding of the phenomenon. The research aims to fulfil and gain a deeper understanding of relationships and patterns that can support or question existing theoretical frameworks. It focuses on qualitative data, which has the potential to reveal connections and dependencies among different elements relevant to the research. As such, the research takes an inductive approach, seeking to understand the research problem in-depth through thematic analysis (Saunders et al., 2019).

The qualitative method of conducting research is suitable when there is a need to delve into the meaning of certain behaviour and its contextual nuances. It enables the researcher to capture observations of a situation while also considering factors related to an individual's past experiences and development. The more in-depth the study of the individual and the situated activity, the more compelling the rationale for employing a qualitative research method (Hirsjärvi and Hurme, 2010). As the aim of the research is to understand why individuals make certain decisions regarding their employment and work arrangements, a qualitative method is required in order to allow interview subjects the opportunity to speak freely and openly about their lived experiences and decision-making processes.

The interview serves as a flexible research method, enabling the interviewee to express their viewpoints unhindered and contribute to a clearer and deeper understanding of the topic. It allows for the exploration of motives behind answers. The interviews in this study were conducted using a semi-structured approach, which grants participants the freedom to respond in their own words, without being restricted to specific options. Further details regarding the selection of interviewees and the interview guide are provided later in this chapter.

3.1.1 Data collection

In-depth interviews with young international professionals make up the primary method for collecting the research data during the spring of 2023. The intention is to explore the dilemma from the viewpoints of various business stakeholders who can shed light on the factors contributing towards young professionals' decisions to change work arrangements. The interviews were recorded to ensure accurate transcriptions, translations, and subsequent processing and analysis. Detailed notes, including observations and noteworthy points from

the interviews, along with the interview records, served as a foundation for identifying significant themes within the data.

3.1.2 Reasoning for data collection method

As the research focuses on why individuals make certain decisions regarding their work arrangements, direct interviews with such young professionals was deemed as the most effective method of data collection. As the state of work arrangements has been shifted due to recent global circumstances such as digitalisation and the Covid-19 pandemic (Bradley et al, 2020), and due to the generational differences observable in younger generations (Hiltrop 1996; De Meuse et al. 2001), previous research into adjacent topics such as talent retention and employee churn intention could not be used to accurately answer the research questions.

Open-ended questions and semi-structured in-depth interviews allow the researcher to elicit descriptions and interpretations of individuals' lived experiences and are regarded as fundamental components of qualitative research (Yeo et al., 2013). By employing semi-structured interviews, respondents are given the opportunity to articulate their personal perspectives on various phenomena. This approach enables the researcher to identify patterns, unmet needs which contributed to decision-making, and explore complex phenomena that might otherwise remain hidden (Saunders et al., 2019).

3.1.3 Choice and Criteria of interviewees

The criteria for the interviewees was established prior to beginning the search for participants. As the research questions pertained to “young professionals”, this was determined to include individuals who were born between 1981 and 2000, namely those belonging to generations Y and Z. Additional criteria required the interviewees to have undergone a significant work arrangement change within the last 3 years. Such a significant change was described as:

- Leaving a full-time position to pursue freelance work
- Changing from full-time work to part-time remote work
- Changing from permanent to contract-based work

- Any other traditional to non-traditional work arrangement change

Key to the interviewee criteria was a previous standard work-arrangement and a recent shift to a non-standard arrangement. Interviewees were primarily found through online channels. Posts asking for interview participants were made by the researcher on LinkedIn and Facebook groups for people who identified as “Digital Nomads”. This concluded in an interviewee pool which consisted of individuals both known and unknown to the researcher. The interview pool was also diverse in terms of nationality, with participants including Britons, Germans, Finns, South Koreans, and Australians. Several individuals who responded favourably to the announcements did not match the required criteria and were not interviewed.

3.1.4 Interviews and interview guide

A total of 7 interviews were conducted and recorded, with explicit consent from the participants. The interviews were conducted entirely in English. The interviews ranged in duration from 45 to 60 minutes and were conducted remotely using the teleconferencing service Google Meets. To ensure confidentiality, all interviews were transcribed anonymously, as agreed upon with the interviewees.

The interviews were conducted utilising an interview guide, which was developed based on relevant literature. The purpose of the guide was to ensure comprehensive coverage of important topics throughout the interview process (Tracy, 2019). The interview guide can be found in Appendix 1 of the thesis. While all interviews touched upon all of the themes outlined in the guide, the sequence of questions within each interview remained flexible to foster a conversational and informal atmosphere. This approach aimed to encourage discussion and enable the exploration of more insightful and potentially probing follow-up questions. After the initial interview, the questions in the guide were updated to include additional inquiries prompted by the first interviewee's unprompted discussions. The researcher deemed these topics valuable to explore further with subsequent interviewees. These additional questions specifically addressed perceived support from friends, family, or other communities or systems, as well as the potential willingness to return to standard work arrangements.

#	Work arrangement description	Code
1	Online Content Creator	Participant # 1
2	Freelance Consultant	Participant # 2
3	Online Language Teacher	Participant # 3
4	Financial Trader	Participant # 4
5	Online Shop Owner	Participant # 5
6	Fitness & Business Freelancer	Participant # 6
7	Online Business Coach	Participant # 7

Table 1. Interview participants

3.2 Data analysis

The analytical process employed in this study utilised a thematic analysis approach to analyse the interview data (Gioia, et al., 2013). The analysis progressed through several stages, including transcription of the interviews, categorisation and codification of data, comparison and combination of categories, and synthesis and interpretation of the findings. These systematic steps allowed for a rigorous and comprehensive analysis of the data.

The interview transcripts were analysed by examining gathered data through explained human experiences utilising the thematic analysis method, which is applicable for studying thematic semi-structured data as determined by Guest, MacQueen, & Namey (2011). By employing this method, it becomes possible to uncover latent themes that are embedded within the data with the researcher's active involvement deciphering the contextual meanings of these themes. The conveyed meanings are manifested through themes, subthemes, or categories that the researcher identifies during the analysis process (Vaismoradi et al., 2016). To identify such themes using the Gioia method, the interview transcripts served as the foundation for establishing codes and categories. The researcher systematically compared, combined, and interpreted the data to generate first-order codes in the form of initial statements relevant to the research questions. These initial statements were then organised and categorised into second-order themes based on similarity, and then into overarching aggregated dimensions. These analytical components serve to visually illustrate the connection between the raw data and the underlying theory (Gioia et al., 2013). During the final stage of analysis, the identified codes,

themes, and theoretical dimensions were consolidated into a cohesive "data structure". This structured representation serves as the foundation for developing a comprehensive model of the phenomena being studied.

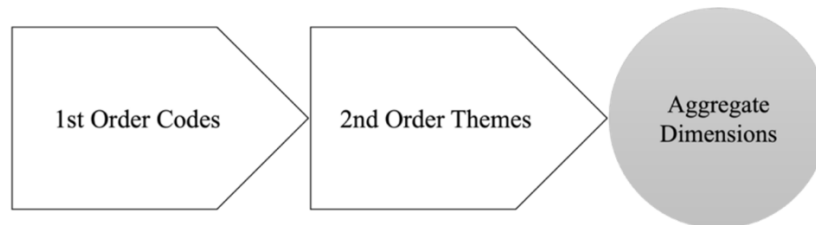


Figure 1: Data analysis according to the Gioia Method (Gioia et al., 2013)

3.3 Research and data quality evaluation

The conventional assessment of research encompasses the evaluation of its quality, reliability, and applicability beyond the specific study context (Eriksson and Kovalainen, 2008). This evaluation is not restricted to the conclusion of the research process but is an ongoing process throughout the entire study (Hirsjärvi and Hurme, 2004). While semi-structured interviews offer advantages to the research process, they do face criticism for potentially introducing subjectivity through the mutual exchange of "stories," interpretations, and biases between the interviewer and interviewees (Tracy, 2019, Saunders et al., 2019). The subsequent subchapter aims to demonstrate the high quality of the conducted research by providing a thorough account of the data collection process. The quality of a study is frequently gauged by assessing the quality of its various components (Bergman and Coxon, 2005). Through this detailed description, the research's reliability, validity, trustworthiness, and rigour can be substantiated within the given context. In the context of this study, overall quality is assessed by considering the quality of selecting interview candidates, conducting data collection, and performing interpretation (Bergman and Coxon, 2005). In addition to ensuring that interview candidates met the predetermined research criteria, suitable candidates were further assessed during the interview when they were asked to state their background and to give descriptions of their work arrangement history. Interviews were transcribed immediately following the interview, ensuring that codification captured the original, intended meaning of the interviewees' comments to the best of the researcher's ability.

The credibility of a study is often assessed based on two fundamental concepts: reliability and validity (Hirsjärvi and Hurme, 2004). Reliability is determined by the extent to which the research can be replicated by the same researcher, investigating the same phenomena, and producing consistent outcomes (Hirsjärvi and Hurme, 2004). The claim of reliability is presented by the researcher, who has provided an extensive and thorough description of the research approach and methodology, thus enabling the potential replication of the findings. It is worth noting, however, that the field of study is considered nascent and subject to future shifts. Additionally, the perspectives and opinions expressed by the interviewees may undergo changes over time. Furthermore, as the studied phenomenon involves influence from global events which were recent to the research being conducted, any research conducted in the future may not see the same influence.

As the second concept presented by Hirsjärvi and Hurme (2004), validity plays a pivotal role in determining the credibility of the research results, thus making it a fundamental criterion to evaluate the trustworthiness of the study. The researcher ensures the validity of the research by conducting the interviews meticulously and selecting knowledgeable informants to gather high-quality data. A strategy of piloting the interview guide with one participant, making necessary modifications, and then conducting subsequent interviews further enhances the validity of the collected data.

4 Results

In this chapter, the results and key findings of the study are presented using thematic analysis principles. The chapter is structured into sub-chapters based on the main aggregate dimensions derived from the interviews, aiming to provide a comprehensive overview. Detailed findings and evidence of the dimensions from the interview are presented for each contributing factor.

The main aggregate dimensions encompass various categories, which are the essential points gathered from the interviews. These categories include the interviewees' past and current work arrangements, how they arrived at their current work situations, and their perceptions of future developments in their work arrangements. During the thematic analysis, several similarities were identified in the answers, indicating common themes among the participants. While there were some variations and distinct perspectives, the majority of the findings could be linked to larger themes. By combining the first-order codes into second-order themes and further into aggregate dimensions, it was possible to gain a deeper understanding of the interview data. The identified six main aggregate dimensions were desire for self-agency & empowerment, desire for personal fulfilment, assessment & tolerance of risk, employment pessimism, negative work environment, and negative incidents.

Many of the identified codes and themes overlapped and could be associated with multiple aggregate dimensions. This suggests that the phenomenon under study is complex and encompasses multiple aspects of individuals' lives. To provide a clear overview of the findings, the research results are presented in Figure 2 and Figure 3 below. This thesis delves into the results by discussing the aggregate dimensions, elaborating on their content, and providing interview statements that support these categories.

The results of the two research questions will be presented separately. Results for research question 1 (RQ1), “Why do young professionals commit large changes to their work arrangements and practices?” will be presented first, followed by the results for research

question 2 (RQ2) “Under what circumstances would these same professionals likely return to standard work arrangements?”.

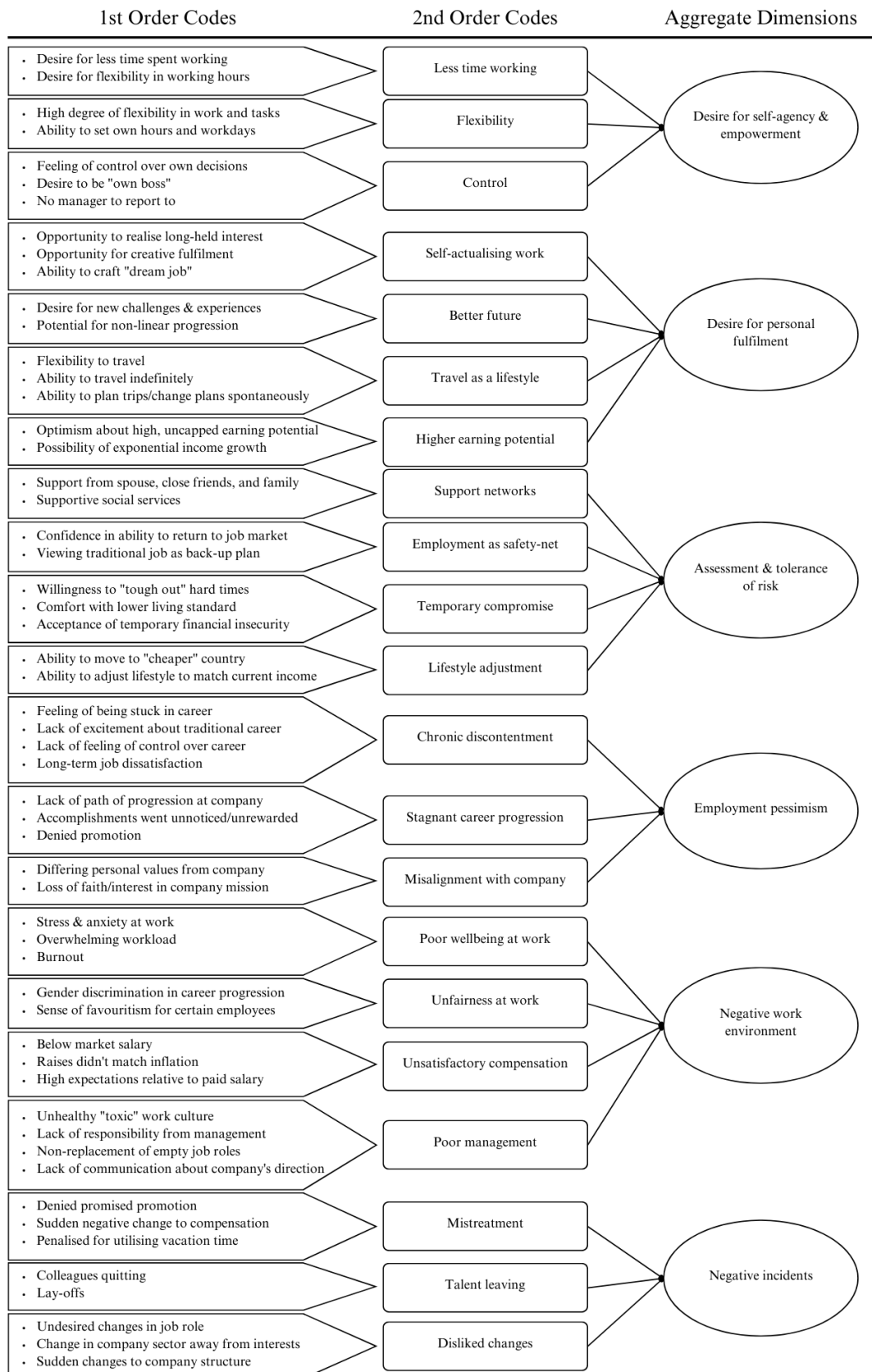


Figure 2. Result of the interview analysis for RQ1

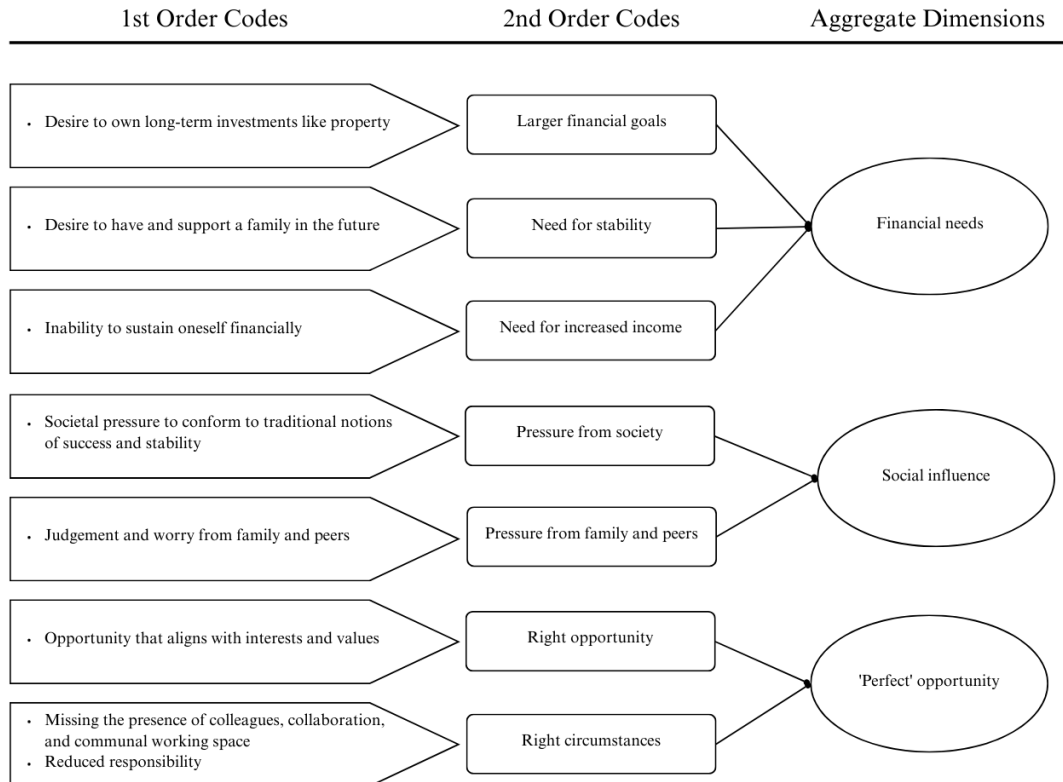


Figure 3. Result of the interview analysis for RQ2

4.1 Desire for self-agency & empowerment

The initial dimension for RQ1 that emerged from the analysis revolves around the aspiration for self-agency and empowerment as a primary impetus for young professionals to seek a change in their work arrangements. In response to inquiries regarding their expectations from non-standard work arrangements, a substantial majority of participants expressed a shared desire to deviate from the conventional working practices. Their responses consistently centered on three core themes: the yearning for reduced working hours, the pursuit of flexible work schedules that accommodated their preferred time and location preferences, and the profound sense of autonomy and mastery over their own lives and career trajectories.

Less time working

A considerable number of individuals interviewed who experienced a change in their work arrangements resulting in a significant reduction in working hours compared to their previous

standard arrangement exhibited a clear disapproval of adhering to the traditional 40-hour work week.

“I don’t like how much time we spend working. With technology and how efficient we’ve become, we should be able to work less while still earning enough to live comfortable. Of course, I can do it. But do I have to? I don’t think so.” (Participant #5)

The allocation of a substantial portion of one's daily routine to professional endeavors has traditionally been perceived as a hindrance to the allocation of time toward engaging in enriching hobbies or social interactions. The appreciation for leisure time has been esteemed and regarded as a more valuable use of time compared to the commitment to traditional work-related activities.

“I didn't want to work, like, 40 hours a week and just work all time. I think there's so many different things in life. When you're not working so much you just have time for yourself or have time for other people. Or just for doing nothing.” (Participant #3)

Flexibility

The notion of flexibility emerged as a recurring theme and a noteworthy advantage in the narratives provided by all participants during the interviews. The advantages associated with having work arrangements tailored to their individual needs and preferences were perceived as exceptionally valuable.

“I can work from anywhere in the world. I can make my own schedule. If I don't want to show up that day, or if I don't want to teach a class, I can cancel it, I just have a lot more control over my situation I did before, and that's very invaluable.” (Participant #6)

Given that a considerable proportion of the interviewees were individuals who engaged in frequent travel, the significance of flexibility in their work arrangements was underscored to the extent that it was regarded as an indispensable prerequisite for accommodating their current lifestyles.

“One huge benefit that working like this supports my situation in particular of someone who wants to continue to travel. Traveling so much means possible sort of flaky infrastructure like wifi connections. And Layovers and airports. So that means occasionally so unusual travel time. In terms of where we want to be physically located is still up in the air too. So I need the utmost flexibility in my working regiment right now. After my experience working for companies, I think that flexibility is something that I'm not willing to compromise on.” (Participant #5)

Control

The concept of control over one's personal and professional life emerged as another salient theme that was reiterated by multiple interview participants. The capacity to exercise agency in making decisions pertaining to various aspects of one's life was regarded as a significant achievement or milestone that had been successfully attained.

”I really think that that's the number one benefit, that my time is my own and it was really what I was seeking.” (Participant #7)

This sense of control was further exemplified through the deliberate manner in which participants adeptly fashioned their newly acquired work arrangements to align with their unique needs and personal preferences.

“There's a lot more responsibility on me now, but at the same time it's also a lot less stressful because I'm in control. I can decide if I want to do something, or don't want to do something rather being given and having to do tasks at work even if I don't see any personal benefit to them.” (Participant #1)

4.2 Desire for personal fulfilment

The second dimension of RQ1 that emerged as a notable determinant of participants' inclination towards non-standard work arrangements pertained to their pursuit of personal fulfilment through their work. The individuals interviewed demonstrated a distinct perspective wherein they perceived their work not solely as a means of income generation but rather as a strategic instrument for facilitating and actualising their envisioned lifestyles.

Self-actualising work

Each of the interviewees articulated a profound sense of alignment between their newfound work arrangements and their genuine aspirations, either through enabling a higher degree of time free from work or through the work itself aligning with their personal and professional interests. Their responses consistently highlighted how these non-standard work arrangements not only brought them closer to their envisioned professional trajectories but also provided

them with the required time, energy, and money to actively pursue their true passions in parallel with their income-generating endeavors.

”I feel my life has fundamentally changed. I see my life as a journey to self-actualisation now. Something I'm actively persueing. Life isn't just happening to me. My work supports that, instead of blocking it.” (Participant #5)

“My work actually makes me happy now. That’s worth more than a steady paycheck, I think.” (Participant #7)

The participants' newly established work arrangements afforded them, or were viewed as having the potential to afford them, a unique opportunity to allocate substantial amounts of time, energy, and resources towards the pursuit of their genuine passions, in parallel with their primary income-generating work.

“Now I can play drums for three hours a day and make my music. I have the time for that.” (Participant #3)

“My ultimate goal is to be able to actively pursue art as basically a full-time artist once I know my income stream is secure. I don’t want the pressure of having to make money from my art, so that would be ideal.” (Participant #4)

Better future

Interview participants expounded upon their motivation to seek new challenges and pursue better future prospects as another factor that prompted them to depart from roles in which they were seemingly performing well. They acknowledged a proactive inclination to embrace novel opportunities and elevate their professional trajectories, recognising that the prospect of stagnation within their current positions could impede their long-term growth and hinder the realisation of their professional aspirations.

”I think I made quite a good performance in that company, but there's still, I was having this something in my mind. It's like, this isn't ”it”. The job or like work, it's not challenging to me anymore.” (Participant #2)

Travel as a lifestyle

The capacity and inclination to engage in extensive travel experiences emerged as another prominent factor influencing the decision of interview participants to pursue changes in their work arrangements. Conventional employment options typically fail to provide the necessary flexibility to accommodate a lifestyle centered around frequent travel. In the perspectives of the participants, travel was widely regarded as a profoundly enriching and meaningful pursuit, capable of imbuing their lives with a sense of purpose. Consequently, the desire to incorporate travel into their regular routines motivated individuals to seek alternative work arrangements that afforded them the freedom and adaptability to embrace their passion for exploration.

“We decided to relieve ourselves of all our belongings and go traveling indefinitely. And now we're sort of in the midst of that lifestyle and seeing how it works with us across a variety of continents. It's brought a lot of new experiences and perspectives to our lives.” (Participant #4)

“Now I have time. I'm quite healthy, I can do sports, I do what I want to do. I see who I want , when I want and I have to opportunity to travel as much as I want.” (Participant #3)

Higher earning potential

The prospect of attaining enhanced financial rewards through non-standard work arrangements surfaced as a noteworthy consideration in multiple interviews. Participants expressed the belief that their current work setups offered a viable avenue to achieve comparable or even significantly higher levels of income in comparison to their previous roles. This perception stemmed from their conviction that their revised work arrangements allowed them to capitalise on lucrative opportunities, leverage their unique skills and expertise, and tap into income streams with greater earning potential. Consequently, the participants perceived their current work arrangements as a means to not only maintain their financial standing but also to potentially surpass their previous income levels, thereby aligning their professional aspirations with their financial objectives.

“If I'm sensible about it and I could make an outsized reward in a very short time frame. So my reward is not tied to my time put in and that's very attractive to me because I have a lot of other interests and aspirations and ambitions and I would really love my work to be something that pays the bills but doesn't consume my life in the way that working full-time does.” (Participant #4)

“It only takes a couple of clients to earn in a month what I was earning as a salary. If I wanted to, I could take on even more clients and make even more money. I have that option.”
(Participant #7)

Although a significant number of interviewees had not yet achieved their desired earnings objectives, a prevailing sense of optimism was palpable regarding their capacity to progressively augment their income. The participants exuded confidence in their abilities to cultivate and expand their financial resources within their current work arrangements.

”I’m not anywhere near earning the same amount that I was previously, but it’s been some good progression like, in terms of percentage growth month on months. So I’m hoping that that will continue and maybe by the end of this summer I should be back in at least a similar sort of financial position and I would love slightly better, actually. And it should only grow from there.” (Participant #1)

4.3 Assessment & tolerance of risk

A distinct third dimension of RQ1 emerged from the analysed interviews, characterised by the evaluation and acceptance of risk. The decision to depart from a conventional career trajectory, particularly one that had attained success by traditional standards, was not taken lightly by any of the interviewees. Those interviewed spoke of being supported by people and systems around them, and the measures they took to support themselves during transitory periods.

”I know I can be like somebody very brave to jump from one thing to the other, but I also need to consider my like other obligations.” (Participant #2)

Support networks

A prevailing theme that emerged from the interviews was the presence of robust support networks that facilitated the decision-making process and served as effective mitigators of the risks associated with departing from traditional work arrangements. The participants universally highlighted the vital role played by various support systems, including government social care programs, in providing a safety net during their transition. The presence of supportive loved ones and the assurance of social security measures were perceived as

instrumental factors that bolstered their confidence and enabled them to undertake the calculated risk of leaving their previous jobs.

“My wife was incredible. She encouraged and advocated for me to have the confidence to feel that I could do it differently than what I've been told or brought up on.” (Participant #4)

“I think I was very influenced by my surroundings at work and everything else that was going on at the initial point, then having conversations with my partner and other people I think it kind of supported the idea of moving into this new space. It gave me kind of confidence to proceed with that.” (Participant #1)

The interviewees expressed a sense of security, knowing that they had the backing of their loved ones in their decision-making process, as well as the knowledge that governmental social security programs were available to mitigate potential adversities such as unemployment or unforeseen significant events. This supportive infrastructure played a crucial role in alleviating apprehensions and augmenting their willingness to embrace non-standard work arrangements.

“I'm kind of living on the edge, but Germany always takes care. So that's why we are kind of safe, you know? I've got the safety somehow. I just need to fly back.” (Participant #2)

Employment as safety net

Additionally, interviewees derived a sense of reassurance and confidence in their choices to depart from standard work arrangements by virtue of their belief in their ability to reenter the employment market if necessary. The individuals interviewed demonstrated a high level of educational attainment, with each possessing at least a bachelor's degree. Moreover, two participants held master's degrees, and another participant held a prestigious PhD qualification. Given their exceptional educational backgrounds, the interviewees' confidence in their desirability within the job market is substantiated by their robust qualifications. The acquisition of advanced degrees and their corresponding expertise served as strong indicators of their professional competency and competitiveness. Consequently, their confidence in their attractiveness to prospective employers was well-founded, bolstering their conviction that they possessed the necessary skills and credentials to secure reemployment should the need arise.

“I know I can always return to a normal job if I have to. I have good experience and am easily employable, But since I don't have to yet, I won't.” (Participant #6)

”I knew I can definitely go with my cv and just do what I want and still find a new job later. I'm not lying, but I have at least at least 18 if 19 interviews waiting. So, I know that I can just immediately find something again.” (Participant #2)

Temporary compromise

Considering their perception of the transition to non-standard work arrangements as a progressive journey towards the attainment of their ideal professional situations, many participants acknowledged the realistic understanding that this process would necessitate a significant investment of time and effort. To navigate this transitional period effectively, interviewees shared how they had implemented temporary measures to ensure their financial stability and support themselves during this transformative phase.

“I'd like to live a more lavish lifestyle than I do now. I've cut down on my spending so I can be out of employment for longer. But yeah, I view it as temporary.” (Participant #4)

Such adaptive measures entailed making adjustments to their standard of living to one aligned with their current income. In addition, participants spoke of resorting to alternative income-generating activities, such as engaging in shift work or undertaking other temporary employment opportunities, to supplement their financial resources. These pragmatic measures were viewed as strategies to sustain themselves financially while actively pursuing their desired work arrangements and gradually progressing towards their envisioned goals.

“I had to pick up jobs to support myself sometimes, while I was working on getting my own projects off the ground. That was just not sustainable or what I wanted to do, but I did it.”
(Participant #6)

Lifestyle adjustment

Nevertheless, it is important to note that not all lifestyle adjustments were perceived as mere temporary sacrifices by the interviewees. Specifically, some participants considered the act of relocating to a country with a comparatively lower cost of living and embracing the local standards as a desirable and enduring change. Such a move was viewed as an opportunity to

align their living expenses with their current financial circumstances, thereby achieving a greater sense of financial stability and even an improved quality of life.

”I can get by through lowering my monthly expenditures where I live now. I used to spend about 2,500€ per month on my living costs, now that number is below 600€. And that’s honestly enough.” (Participant 7#)

Moreover, the prospect of being able to travel to and work from a tropical country was deemed a significant advantage that accompanied the flexibility afforded by their non-standard work arrangements. This unique privilege allowed them to experience the benefits of a conducive work environment amidst scenic surroundings, thereby enhancing their overall work-life balance and well-being.

“I prefer to live here, where it’s cheaper, you know? The sun is shining, the people are nice, the food is good. I think it’s better than Germany.” (Participant #3)

4.4 Employment pessimism

The first negative dimension of RQ1 that emerged as a collective dimension pertained to the pervasive sense of pessimism and discontentment surrounding traditional employment among the interviewees. Participants expressed dissatisfaction with their experiences of working in conventional employment settings, often spanning across multiple positions and various companies. They articulated a profound sense of disillusionment, unable to comprehend the absence of enthusiasm and fulfilment that societal norms implied should accompany their prospective careers. This dissonance between their actual experiences and the societal expectations of professional contentment engendered feelings of confusion and introspection among the interviewees, prompting them to question the misalignment between their personal sentiments and the anticipated fulfilment associated with traditional employment paradigms.

“They tell us that you're supposed to climb this ladder at work. I'm the youngest person that's ever been hired at this corporate office. I'm supposed to feel really good about myself for that. Everybody praises me and values me for that. This is what people in America are supposed to do and I did it and I'm being successful at it and I hate it.” (Participant #6)

Chronic discontentment

The interviewees consistently conveyed a palpable absence of enthusiasm when contemplating the trajectory of their existing careers. Having endured years of grappling with the demands and challenges presented by various roles within different organisations, they had become weary of the daily struggles inherent in positions that left them emotionally and creatively drained.

“I had tried so many different jobs and so many different roles. I was tired of hoping that the next job would be the one where I finally felt satisfied.” (Participant 4#)

“Between my own interest and my own kind of study and personal wishes, I wasn't satisfied. I didn't think any job would really match me.” (Participant #2)

This protracted state of disillusionment had eroded their sense of inspiration and had engendered a prevailing sense of dissatisfaction. Those who voiced this sentiment found it arduous to envision a transformative shift in their outlook without undergoing a fundamental change to their work arrangements. The realisation that their current career paths were unable to evoke a renewed sense of purpose and motivation reinforced the notion that a substantial alteration, such as embracing non-standard work arrangements, would be indispensable in reshaping their professional experiences.

“I wasn't excited at the prospect of my career. It felt like leaving offered the only change at finding something meaningful to me.” (Participant #5)

Stagnant career progression

Interviewees who articulated a sense of pessimism about their career prospects also highlighted the issue of slow or stagnant career progression. This lack of advancement was attributed either to the inherent limitations within their current roles, which offered limited opportunities for growth and failed to present enticing new pathways forward, or to their own reluctance to commit to a particular career trajectory due to a lack of genuine interest. In the former case, participants expressed a sense of frustration and disillusionment, as their current positions failed to provide the necessary challenges and developmental opportunities that would fuel their professional growth.

“I couldn't see how my career would progress at that company. There was only one promotion I could get, and it wouldn't have even changed my role significantly. When I looked at people in

my field 15 or 20 years my senior, they were still doing the same kind of work. It wasn't inspirational, it was depressing." (Participant #7)

In the latter scenario, individuals struggled to identify a career path that truly resonated with their passions and aspirations, thereby hindering their ability to make definitive choices and embark on a fulfilling professional journey. This confluence of factors underscored the participants' realisation that a fundamental departure from their existing work arrangements was imperative to overcome the stagnation and achieve a more dynamic and fulfilling career trajectory.

"Because I kept switching roles, I kept, basically, starting from zero to very little experience in that new role. I had something like 6 years of experience but only 1 or 2 years in each job role. And I was still searching for that perfect role, so I was never actually progressing." (Participant #4)

Misalignment with company

In several instances, the interviewees underwent a transformation of personal values in their lives, often attributed to gaining a better understanding of the world and oneself. This transformative process exerted a profound influence on their perception of alignment with the companies they worked for.

"As I started seeing more of the world, I felt like I was seeing more of the different ways people lived and my value system started to shift. And I started finding passion and things that were outside of, the traditional norms." (Participant #6)

Over time, the interviewees discovered that their evolving personal values no longer aligned with the missions and objectives established by their employers. As they matured and gained a deeper understanding of their own priorities and aspirations, they experienced a perceptible shift in their perspectives, recognising a misalignment between their personal values and the overarching goals of their respective organisations. This disconnect led to a diminishing interest in wholeheartedly dedicating themselves to advancing the missions set forth by their employers.

"I didn't use to feel this way, but now I don't want to make money for someone else anymore. It feels like exploitation, you know? And our clients were actually exploitive too. It felt like everyone was just operated by greed and I hated that." (Participant #5)

4.5 Negative work environment

The next dimension of RQ1 that emerged as another highly influential factor in the decision to pursue a change in work arrangements was the experience of a negative work environment within the participants' previous workplaces. Virtually all the interviewees, with the exception of one, unanimously conveyed their accounts of being subjected to a work environment characterised by negativity, which had detrimental effects on their mental well-being, the overall company culture, and their overall job satisfaction.

Participants vividly described the adverse consequences of operating within an unsupportive, toxic, or dysfunctional work environment. They detailed the adverse impact on their psychological state, including elevated stress levels, decreased motivation, and a compromised sense of overall well-being. Furthermore, the detrimental effects of the negative work environment extended beyond their personal experiences, permeating the broader company culture. This pervasive negativity eroded employee morale, stifled collaboration and innovation, and hindered the creation of a positive and harmonious workplace atmosphere.

Poor wellbeing at work

During the interviews, the participants extensively shared their accounts of the detrimental experiences they endured within their previous workplaces and work arrangements, recounting overwhelming workloads, excessively high expectations, and persistent stress levels. These adversities cast a profound impact on their mental well-being, as well as that of their colleagues. The interviewees described the weighty burden imposed by an excessive volume of work, often exceeding manageable limits. They narrated how their daily tasks, deadlines, and deliverables were unrelenting, leaving them with limited time for personal rejuvenation or pursuing activities beyond work. These demanding workloads, combined with the accompanying pressure to consistently meet and exceed expectations, engendered substantial stress and anxiety among the interviewees.

“I was under a lot of like stress and work anxiety once I started working, which was something I hadn't really experienced before and was very unpleasant at certain times.” (Participant #1)

“It felt like the expectation was to work overtime, you know?. We officially were told not to, of course, but multiple of my colleagues had racked up weeks worth of overtime. People were being very vocal about them having to work 12 hour days in the coming week to meet

expectations but the management did nothing to support them. And missing those client deadlines wasn't an option, so you were pretty much forced to work like that if you wanted to meet the expectations." (Participant #5)

The repercussions of such stressful work environments extended beyond individual experiences, permeating the collective well-being of the participants and their colleagues. The interviewees expressed their concern and empathy for their coworkers who similarly suffered from the adverse effects of these overwhelming work conditions. Witnessing the toll it took on their colleagues' mental health further reinforced their conviction that a change in work arrangements was necessary to alleviate the pervasive suffering endured by themselves and their coworkers.

"Speaking frankly, I definitely ended my previous employment with disgruntlement. I felt that my position in that company was requiring a lot more than what was agreed upon the efforts and overextension of my abilities without any sort of real recognition of it. I would say that I left that job and under the duress of repeat burnout, I think. Other people at the company had already burnt out." (Participant 4#)

Unfairness at work

In addition to the aforementioned challenges, the interviewees extensively discussed their encounters with instances of perceived unfairness within their previous work environments. These accounts detailed specific events that were recalled at length, and were distinctly experienced by the participants as acts of betrayal.

The interviewees described incidents in which they perceived treatment or decisions to be unjust, deviating from established norms of fairness and equity. These instances of unfairness encompassed a wide range of grievances, such as unequal distribution of workload, favoritism, biased decision-making, lack of transparency in promotions or compensation, and inadequate recognition of their contributions. The interviewees conveyed a profound sense of disappointment, hurt, and disillusionment stemming from these experiences of betrayal, where their trust in the organisation and its leadership was shaken.

"I had to kind of step up and perform a role that I wasn't being paid for that was higher than the one in which I was hired for. And then when it came time to officially fill that role, I remember

being told, "You're a young beautiful woman." Like, your time will come. I was just kind of dismissed in that way." (Participant #6)

"It really felt like the CEO had favourites in the team. They would go on trips to his house in France and got a high degree of freedom in their projects and working hours. Actually, I was even advised by some of my teammates who had been there for longer to cozy up to the CEO, because being his friend would benefit me." (Participant #7)

Unsatisfactory compensation

Another prevalent theme that emerged from the interviews related to negative work environments was the perception among the participants that they had been subjected to unfair compensation practices in their previous positions. Their narratives reflected a widespread sentiment of being inadequately remunerated, with multiple aspects contributing to this sense of unfairness. Specifically, the interviewees highlighted below-market salaries, denials or unsatisfactory raises, and a perceived misalignment between the expectations imposed by their employers and the corresponding compensation provided.

"After 2 years I was offered a raise of 2% because I "deserved it", but the rate of inflation was 5%. The company was raising its prices to match inflation but couldn't give raises to at least match inflation too?" (Participant #7)

In addition, the interviewees perceived a dissonance between the expectations placed upon them by their employers and the corresponding compensation provided. They expressed the belief that their employers demanded high levels of performance, commitment, and achievement, yet failed to offer commensurate financial rewards. This perceived misalignment between expectations and compensation deepened the sense of dissatisfaction and contributed to their decision to seek alternative work arrangements that would provide more equitable remuneration.

"I didn't like that was being asked me because I didn't feel that I was being compensated fairly. I was being compensated below market rates yet being asked to work too much. I didn't have any ownership in the company, so it kind of came down to "what is really in this for me?". They're getting a lot out of my labor but I'm not getting a lot in return." (Participant #4)

Poor management

The interviews revealed a prevailing theme of poor management, which significantly influenced the perceptions and experiences of the majority of participants. They perceived their previous workplaces as being afflicted by mismanagement, leading to adverse effects on the work environment and overall employee experiences. The participants considered the lack of responsibility exhibited by management as a profound failure, particularly when it came to making decisions regarding human resources that resulted in placing themselves and colleagues in stressful and unfair situations.

“The company wasn't making money and the employees were blamed for it, despite the fact that we were all working very hard, selling a lot, and billing a lot of consultation hours. The company wasn't making money because the operating costs were so high but obviously us employees couldn't influence that. Later, the CEO who blamed everyone else was replaced and the company started instantly turning a profit.” (Participant #5)

“I was working in a very small team for context. It was my line manager, myself and one other direct report. And then everyone around me last left the company, but wasn't replaced. I was literally a one-man team doing it all. From July until December, basically. I did finally end up with additional support in the form of new starters, although I then was also expected to train them, which is a job in itself. That was really stressful.” (Participant #1)

The interviewees expressed their disillusionment with the management practices within their previous organisations. They cited instances where management failed to assume their responsibilities effectively, leading to detrimental consequences for both the work environment and individual employees. The perceived lack of accountability and leadership engendered an atmosphere of frustration and dissatisfaction among the participants. They highlighted specific instances in which management decisions adversely affected the well-being and professional experiences of their colleagues, further exacerbating the negative impact on overall work satisfaction.

“One really clear case I can remember is the customer success team was I think halved from five or six down to two people in span of several months. One person voluntarily left and another was laid off. You now had two people managing I'm not even sure how, maybe 80 accounts each, which is astonishing when you think about it. Management acted like it wasn't a problem even though they were struggling.” (Participant #4)

Moreover, rumors of poor management practices had a pervasive influence on the participants' perceptions, even if they themselves had not been direct victims of such mismanagement. The mere knowledge or awareness of widespread dissatisfaction and negative experiences stemming from management-related issues further contributed to a sense of apprehension and disillusionment. The prevalence of these rumors within the organisational context further eroded trust and confidence in management, compelling the participants to seek alternative work arrangements that offered more competent and responsible leadership.

“Even though I wasn’t really personally affected by it, I heard from my colleagues the horrible things our bosses had said to them. People were asked to sign NDAs when they left so they couldn’t talk about their negative experiences with the company.” (Participant #7)

4.6 Negative incidents

The final dimension of RQ1 that emerged as a significant motivator for young professionals to change their work arrangement was the experience of specific negative incidents within their workplaces. This dimension shed light on the pivotal role played by these incidents in prompting individuals to seek alternative work arrangements. The interviews revealed that a significant subset of participants had encountered distinct negative incidents during their tenure in their previous workplaces. These incidents encompassed a range of adverse experiences, such as incidents of discrimination, harassment, bullying, or toxic work environments. The participants described these incidents in detail, highlighting the detrimental impact on their well-being, job satisfaction, and overall professional development.

The negative incidents experienced by the participants had a profound influence on their decision to pursue a change in their work arrangement. They regarded these incidents as serious breaches of trust, affecting their sense of psychological safety, dignity, and professional growth. The negative incidents not only had an immediate and tangible impact on their day-to-day experiences but also reverberated through their long-term career aspirations.

Mistreatment

The interviews revealed personal accounts of specific incidents of mistreatment they experienced within their previous employment relationships. These incidents were

characterised as profoundly influential in their decision to leave those particular workplaces. The narratives surrounding these events shed light on the pivotal role played by these instances of mistreatment and the subsequent feelings of betrayal experienced by the interviewees. The interviewees recounted instances where they had personally faced mistreatment within their workplaces. These incidents were described as deeply impactful, both emotionally and professionally.

“It was discussed that I would get promoted by a certain time, but then that time came and it never happened. When I brought it up, no clear answer was given and I felt very dismissed. I felt I deserved the promotion. That was kind of the last straw for me.” (Participant #5)

The interviewees emphasised the significant influence of these mistreatment incidents on their decision to sever their employment relationships. The experience of betrayal created a rupture in the employer-employee relationship, eroding the trust and loyalty that underpin a healthy work environment.

“Within a day of coming back from my vacation, I had been written up for basically, what came down to a typo in some project I had finished before I left. It was viewed as me just rushing to get to my vacation, even though it was just an honest mistake. And since I was “prioritising my vacations more than my job”, they felt like they should write me up to let me know that that's not kind of culture they were trying to create and that I didn't value my job. So, that lead to a lot of negativity in me. And then I remember I was sitting in my cubicle after that, and I was just so unhappy, I just had the most beautiful colorful, wonderful experience on vacation and I'm sitting in this grey office taking s*** for things that I just no longer cared about.” (Participant 6#)

“The company announced it like it would be a positive thing, but the change to the bonus made it varied from person to person depending on their bonus achievements historically and just left a bad taste in my mouth. I was going to be paid less for the same work but other people would earn more for the same work.” (Participant #1)

Talent leaving

The departure of close colleagues emerged as another influential factor that motivated individuals to seek alternative work opportunities. This dimension shed light on the significant impact of colleague departures on an individual's decision-making process, regardless of whether the departure was voluntary or enforced. The interviews revealed that the departure of

close colleagues was regarded as a catalyst for considering other employment options due to the anticipated changes in the working environment.

When close colleagues voluntarily left their positions, the interviewees acknowledged the impact of their departure on the dynamics and culture of the workplace. The absence of these colleagues was seen as a significant event, signaling a shift in the team's composition and potentially altering the interpersonal relationships and collaborative dynamics. As a result, the interviewees were inspired to explore other opportunities, recognising that their own work environment would inevitably change due to the absence of these valued colleagues.

“My director announced that he was leaving the business and that was kind of the final straw, shall we say. It kind of made me make that executive decision and get the h*** out of there and start doing something completely different.” (Participant #1)

“It felt like I lost all my closest colleagues in a few months, either because they quit or got laid-off.” (Participant #4)

Alternatively, when departures were enforced by the company, such as through layoffs, the impact was even more profound. In these cases, the departure of colleagues due to company-driven decisions created a sense of despondency and eroded trust in the organisation and its management. The interviewees perceived these departures as a negative reflection of the company's trustworthiness and its ability to provide a stable and supportive work environment. This further fuelled their motivation to seek alternative opportunities, as they questioned the long-term viability and commitment of the company to its employees.

“A few months prior to my own leaving, there was a round of layoffs which was only more demoralising on such a small team. It seemed very sudden, like, that's what the company is doing. It's good for the company. But when it's such a small team and you don't feel included on big decisions that affect the livelihood of people you've grown close just by proximity because they're so few team members it can start to feel the company is actively hostile towards its employees. But we're just trying to help it succeed.” (Participant #5)

Disliked changes

The interviews further revealed that changes to company processes, structure, and direction could evoke negative sentiments among employees. The participants shared specific instances

where decisions made by the company were met with disapproval, ultimately playing a role in an employee's decision to leave the organisation.

One particular type of change that generated dissatisfaction among employees was those that directly impacted their compensation or benefits. Instances where changes resulted in a reduction in financial remuneration, decreased benefits packages, or alterations to incentive programs were commonly cited as negative changes. Such changes were perceived by employees as having a direct impact on their overall job satisfaction and sense of fairness. The participants emphasised that these unfavourable changes, to compensation and benefits, particularly when not communicated with understanding to their significance to employees were often viewed as a breach of the psychological contract between the company and its employees, leading to a reassessment of their commitment to the organisation.

“The management changed the bonus structure which resulted in a almost 10% pay decrease for me. The way the change was delivered was very much like, "We're doing this, deal with it."”
(Participant #1)

In addition, changes in company direction that compromised the alignment of the company's values and missions with those of employees were significant factors influencing their decision-making process. The interviewees expressed a strong desire to work for organisations whose values resonated with their own. When changes in company direction resulted in a shift away from these shared values, it created a sense of cognitive dissonance for employees. They felt a growing disconnect between their personal beliefs and the direction the company was taking, prompting them to reconsider their commitment and contemplate seeking alternative employment.

“Some of my projects were still aligned with my personal values but the company was moving away from that kind of work and more towards a sector which I didn't have an interest in and which didn't align with my values.” (Participant #7)

4.7 Financial needs

The first dimension that emerged from the results of Research Question 2 (RQ2) is related to financial needs. Although the majority of interviewees expressed satisfaction with their current income streams or held positive outlooks regarding their financial prospects, they did

acknowledge certain circumstances under which they would actively seek additional financial resources or benefits from their employment. These circumstances often revolved around meeting specific financial obligations or goals, or specific circumstance such as qualifying for loans.

Larger financial goals

Interviewees acknowledged the potential influence of larger financial goals on their decision to consider returning to standard employment. One significant financial goal that emerged in these discussions was homeownership, which often requires individuals to secure mortgages from financial institutions. Participants recognised that maintaining steady employment and a stable income are crucial factors when seeking approval for a mortgage. They highlighted that non-standard work arrangements, such as freelancing or gig work, may be perceived as less stable or predictable by banks and lending institutions. As a result, individuals in non-standard work arrangements may face challenges when attempting to secure loans for purchasing a home.

“I’d love to buy a home, yeah. Maybe in order to do that, to get a mortgage, I’ll have to have a job. I don’t know. (Participant #7)

Need for stability

In addition to discussing the significance of stability for achieving homeownership, interviewees also recognised the importance of stability in supporting a family. They acknowledged that their current lifestyle and financial situation, resulting from their non-standard work arrangements, may not be conducive to meeting the needs and responsibilities that come with starting or supporting a family.

Participants expressed concerns about the unpredictable nature of non-standard work arrangements, including fluctuating income levels, irregular working hours, and limited access to benefits such as health insurance and parental leave. They acknowledged that these factors could pose challenges in providing a stable and secure environment for raising a family. The absence of reliable income streams and comprehensive benefits packages was perceived as a potential barrier to adequately addressing the financial, emotional, and practical needs of a growing family. Moreover, interviewees recognised the long-term financial obligations associated with raising children, including education expenses, healthcare costs, and childcare support. They acknowledged that their current financial situation, shaped by non-standard work

arrangements, may not provide the necessary resources to meet these familial responsibilities effectively. The lack of financial stability and limited access to family-oriented benefits and support systems were identified as key factors that could impede their ability to provide for a family's well-being.

“Someday I want to have a house and support a family, you know? Right now, that’s not possible for me. So, I know I will have to end this lifestyle and go back to work to do that.”
(Participant #3)

“My husband and I are thinking about maybe having kids soon, which obviously has an impact on how I can work. Right now I wouldn’t get any family benefits.” (Participant #6)

Need for increased income

Interviewees openly acknowledged the current unsustainability of their financial situations and expressed a pragmatic approach to address this concern. They recognised the need to augment their income by adding employment as an additional source of financial support to ensure the fulfilment of their various financial obligations. This recognition emerged from a realistic assessment of their financial circumstances and the realisation that their current non-standard work arrangements might not provide sufficient financial stability, at least yet. The decision to seek additional employment was viewed as a short-term or part-time solution, with the intention of eventually transitioning to a point where their primary source of income would be derived from their initial non-standard work arrangement.

“You could say I’m running against the clock. It’s possible my savings run out before I can financially sustain myself. If that happens, I’ll get a job. Probably something part time.”
(Participant #5)

“If I feel like I need more money, I’ll go back to Germany to work and get a high salary. Like get a job in a company, just to save money and just get stable. I can always do this kind of thing, you know, depending on the life situation. Doing this typical working thing for some years, and then maybe again breaking out.” (Participant #3)

”I think the positives definitely outweigh the negatives at the moment and the decision to go back into a traditional work environment would be very much financially driven.” (Participant #4)

4.8 Social influence

The second dimension that emerged from the analysis of RQ2 delves into the impact of social influences on individuals' intentions to potentially revert to more standard and traditional work arrangements. Among the interviewees, a sentiment arose amongst a small subset regarding the awareness of their families' skepticism or outright lack of support for their chosen lifestyles. It became evident that familial dynamics and societal pressures pose the possibility of significantly influencing an individual's decision-making process concerning work arrangements, both in making and not making a significant change.

Pressure from society

The influence of societal norms on individuals' behavior was a recurring theme highlighted by the interviewees. They emphasised that societal norms wield a considerable power in shaping our actions and decisions, particularly when it comes to deviating from the established standards. The interviewees recognised that living outside the bounds of what is considered normal within society can subject individuals to judgment, scrutiny, and, in extreme cases, even ostracisation. The weight of societal expectations and conformity was evident in the interviewees' narratives. They acknowledged that society often constructs predefined notions of what constitutes a "normal" lifestyle, including traditional work arrangements. Departing from these norms by opting for non-standard work arrangements can be met with skepticism or disapproval from others. The interviewees expressed concern about the potential consequences of deviating from societal expectations, as it may result in being labeled as unconventional or going against the grain. The discomfort from such consequences could lead some to return to more traditional work-arrangements that fit the societal norm.

“ I think a lot of people be like, “What are you doing that? You’re gambling with your finances and your life path!” that seems crazy and it also possible people would assume that I’m sort of shallow and naïve that I don't wish to work a job. But that's the way of the world.” (Participant #4)

”I think it was difficult to have considerably less money and considerably less security and to be in such a different life place and be at the same age as other people. I was noticing that people I knew were starting to get married and purchase houses and do these very traditional things that made them look very secure. And at the time, I was living in a hostile bunk bed, trading my time for money. So it was just such a big gap between where I was at in my life and where they

were at in their life. It definitely felt on a traditional sense if you compared the two of us, I would be deemed to be a failure by those standards.” (Participant #6)

Pressure from family and peers

The role of friends and peers as influential factors in decision-making processes emerged as a notable aspect during the interviews. The interviewees recognised that the opinions and concerns of their family and peers hold significant weight in shaping their choices, particularly when contemplating unconventional decisions. While the support of family and peers was touted as a strong influencer towards making changes to one’s work arrangement, the potential of disappointing or causing worry among loved ones due to a non-traditional work arrangements could instil a desire to seek a form of employment that aligns more closely with societal expectations and does not cause discomfort among their social circles.

“Our parent’s generation, they don’t understand. They usually stayed in a one company for many, many years and then retired from that company, that's kind of a typical way to do it.” (Participant #2)

4.9 “Perfect” opportunity

The final aggregate dimension of RQ2 delves into the perspective that young professionals who have transitioned to non-standard work arrangements may consider returning to the standard workforce if they encounter what they perceive as the "perfect" opportunity. The definition of the "perfect" opportunity is subjective and varies among individuals, as highlighted in the conducted interviews. However, common themes emerged regarding the elements that would make an opportunity feel right and enticing to these professionals.

Right opportunity

One significant aspect of the "perfect" opportunity is the alignment of values. Interviewees expressed the importance of finding a work environment that resonates with their personal beliefs, where their core values are reflected in the company's mission, culture, and ethical practices. This alignment contributes to a sense of purpose and fulfilment in their professional lives, making the opportunity more appealing.

“I would consider a job that I felt really aligned with my values. I’ve seen some people talking about different profit sharing company models on TikTok and that’s interesting to me.” (Participant #5)

Right circumstances

The notion of the "perfect" opportunity entails the presence of specific circumstances that meet the desired elements identified by the interviewees. These elements include the desired level of responsibility, the opportunity for growth and advancement, and the potential for meaningful collaboration with colleagues. Interviewees emphasised the importance of having a challenging and engaging role that allows them to make a significant impact and continually develop their skills and expertise. The opportunity should also provide a supportive and collaborative work environment, fostering teamwork and the exchange of ideas.

“But then there's also like a cooperation side. One of the big things I have missed so much is having colleagues. I miss it so much. So that's why I like to work in a coworking space to at least like to meet someone nearby. Like, it's not in our team, but it's more like a peer company in the same field.”

(Participant #2)

5 Discussion

This chapter provides a further analysis and discussion of the research conducted, drawing upon relevant literature to contextualise the findings. Moreover, it critically examines the limitations inherent in the study and proposes future research directions to address these gaps. The aim of the study was to explore the phenomenon of young professionals making significant changes to their work arrangements and identify what factors influenced their decision. The understanding of this phenomenon can give answers to organisations that have experienced the loss of such talents and serve as guidance for new strategies and processes which better meet the needs of generations Y & Z.

Through the analysis of the 1st order codes and subsequent identification of 2nd order themes, the study has yielded insightful and significant findings. Notably, the research questions have been encapsulated by overarching dimensions, which serve as fundamental constructs in understanding the motivations and experiences of young professionals undergoing substantial changes in their work arrangements and practices. These dimensions are derived from a synthesis of the interviewees' perspectives and insights from prior studies, establishing a robust foundation for this study's conceptual framework.

In particular, the dimensions associated with the first research question (RQ1) can be categorised into three distinct types: desire dimensions, neutral dimensions, and aversion dimensions. The desire dimensions capture the aspirations and preferences expressed by the interviewees, representing the elements they seek to enhance or cultivate in their work arrangements and practices. Conversely, the aversion dimensions encompass the undesirable aspects and negative experiences that young professionals aim to minimise or avoid in their

pursuit of fulfilling work arrangements. The neutral dimensions, on the other hand, pertain to factors that do not fundamentally exhibit strong positive or negative inclinations but play a significant role in shaping decision-making processes through support and safety.

The conceptual framework introduced by the researcher in this chapter to present these findings provides a valuable lens through which to interpret and analyse the research results. It highlights the polarity between desires, aversions, and neutral factors, shedding light on the various dynamics surrounding young professionals' decisions to commit to transformative changes in their work arrangements. The framework is presented in figure 4 below.

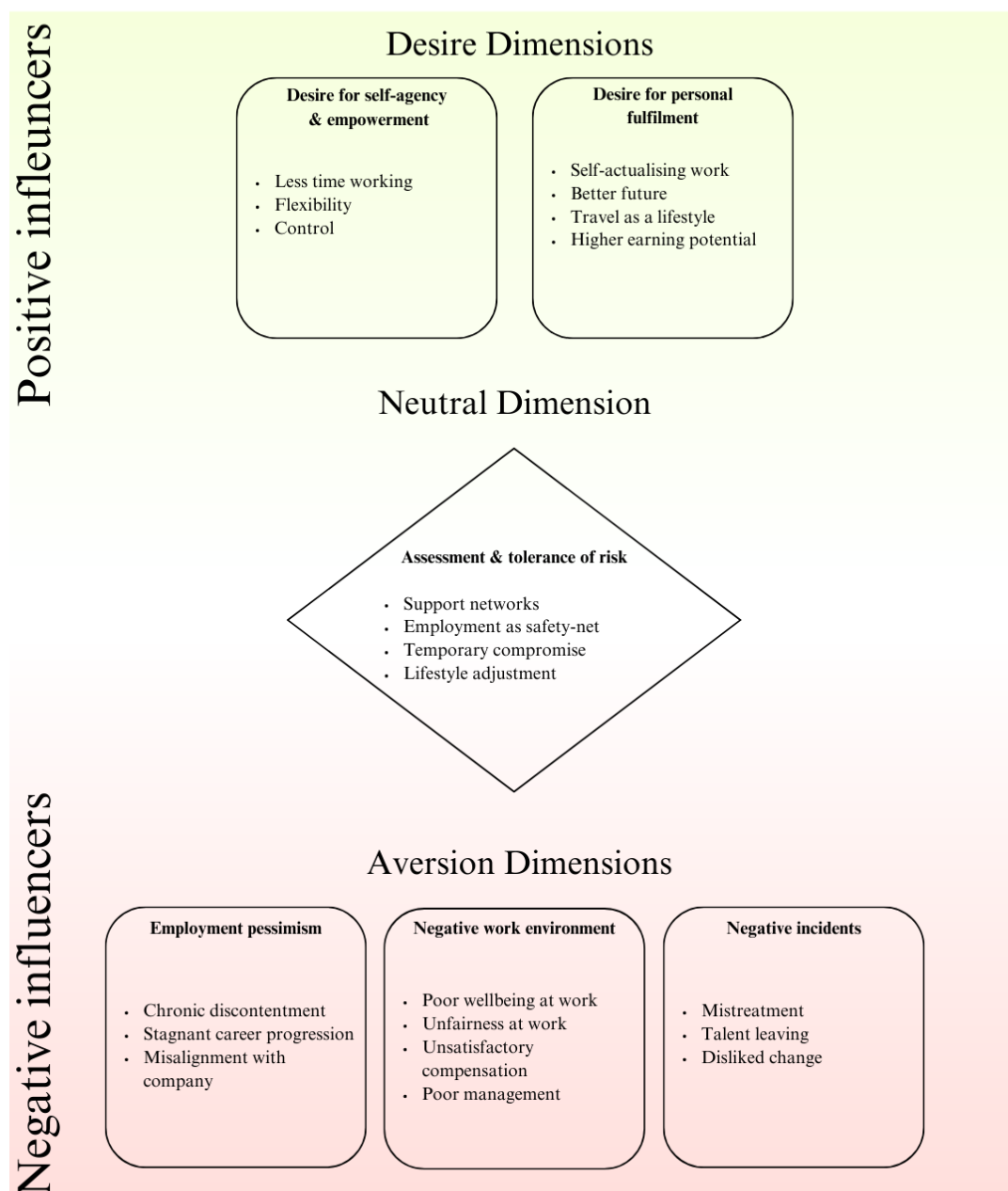


Figure 4. Conceptual framework for understanding research results

5.1.1 Desire dimensions

Desire dimensions within the conceptual framework comprise the expressions of aspirations and preferences (desired for aspects) articulated by the interviewees, reflecting their earnest pursuit to enhance and cultivate specific elements through their decisions regarding work arrangements and practices. Two distinct desire dimensions emerged from the analysis: the desire for self-agency and empowerment, and the desire for personal fulfilment.

The desire for self-agency and empowerment encompasses the fundamental yearning of young professionals to exercise greater control over their work and personal lives. This dimension encapsulates the 2nd order themes identified through the analysis, which include the desire to spend less time engaged in work-related activities, the longing for increased flexibility in work schedules and arrangements, and the aspiration to assert autonomy over important life decisions. Fulfilment of needs, whatever they may be for an individual, is supposed by research as being a key factor in overall wellbeing (Van den Broeck et al., 2010).

Participants expressed a strong inclination towards reducing the time devoted to work, enabling them to allocate more energy and attention to other aspects of their lives. The benefits of autonomy flexibility within a work context is also supposed in research, in that a sense of control over one's time and life is especially important for Generations Y & Z, who can feel a lack of such flexibility and control to be constrictive and unfulfilling (Mawardi, 2022; Grous, 2022). Furthermore, the desire for enhanced flexibility was emphasised as a means to strike a harmonious balance between work and personal responsibilities, allowing individuals to adapt their schedules to accommodate personal needs and aspirations. Research supports work-life balance as being a critical determination of job satisfaction and overall wellbeing (Felstead & Henseke, 2017). Additionally, the pursuit of self-agency and empowerment was closely associated with the desire for greater control over life choices, encompassing decisions related to career development, professional growth, and personal fulfilment. Both personal and professional domains, which were found to be deeply intertwined in those interviewed, saw benefits in brother productivity and satisfaction when an individual's needs were met (Doyal & Gough, 1984; Diener & Lucas, 2000). As such, it is natural for those looking to elicit positive

change in their work arrangements to craft such arrangements that fostered the ability to prioritise their needs for flexibility, control, and personal fulfilment.

5.1.2 Aversion dimensions

Aversion dimensions, as the other strong element of the conceptual framework, shed light on the undesirable aspects and negative experiences that young professionals strive to minimise or avoid in their quest for fulfilling work arrangements. These dimensions encapsulate the elements perceived by individuals as detrimental and often serve as compelling reasons for their departure from standard work arrangements. The identification and analysis of aversion dimensions within the research provide valuable insights into the factors that young professionals consider undesirable, allowing for a deeper understanding of their motivations and decision-making processes. As research has established that humans seek arrangements that support their needs being met (Doyal & Gough, 1984; Ryan & Deci, 2000, 2017), it can be established that environments that don't support or actively neglect an employee's needs would be deemed undesirable.

The aversion dimensions recognised in this study encompass employment pessimism, negative work environment, and negative incidents, all of which resonate strongly with the interviewees as unfavorable elements driving their desire for change. Employment pessimism, as a salient aversion dimension, encompasses the 2nd order themes of chronic discontentment, stagnant career progression, and misalignment with the company's values and mission. Participants expressed feelings of discontent and disillusionment with their current employment situations, perceiving a lack of enthusiasm and fulfilment in their prospective careers. The experience of stagnant career progression either within their current roles or due to a lack of interest in committing to a specific career path was a prominent factor contributing to their employment pessimism. Such feelings can be founded in research as disappointment over unmet expectations (Dabos & Rousseau, 2004). Misalignment with the company's values and mission generated a sense of dissatisfaction and disconnection, as observed by Rousseau, (1989). This dissatisfaction can prompt young professionals to seek alternative work arrangements that align more closely with their personal aspirations and beliefs, another example of need fulfilling behaviour (Doyal & Gough, 1984; Ryan & Deci, 2000, 2017). Dissatisfaction has been studied to become chronic due to compounding expectations, where every failure to meet an

expectation is met with an even greater level of expectation to "compensate for" the initial obligations that the employee believed were rightfully owed to them (Kickul, 2001).

The aversion dimension of negative work environment encompasses 2nd order themes that resonate with the adverse experiences encountered by young professionals in their workplaces. These themes include poor well-being at work, unfairness, unsatisfactory compensation, and poor management. Participants expressed concerns about the detrimental impact of overwhelming workloads, high expectations, and stress on their mental well-being and that of their colleagues. The adverse affects of overwork and stress are supported by research (Ray et al., 2017; Mawardi, 2022). Unfair treatment and instances of perceived betrayal were also prevalent, contributing to a sense of dissatisfaction and further disillusionment. Instances which create such intensive feelings can be categorised as breaches to the existing psychological contract (Rousseau, 1989). Additionally, participants highlighted issues related to inadequate compensation that fell below market rates, the denial of raises, and a perceived misalignment between expectations and compensation, which further intensified their negative perceptions of their work environment, which can also lead to breaches in said contract (Rousseau, 1989). Poor management practices, characterised by a lack of responsibility and decision-making that placed undue stress on employees, were also identified as significant contributors to the negative work environment which are supposed by research (Ray et al., 2017).

The final aversion dimension of negative incidents encompasses 2nd order themes that capture specific negative experiences faced by young professionals in their workplaces. These include mistreatment, the departure of talented individuals, and disliked changes. Participants shared accounts of mistreatment and incidents that they personally experienced, which were perceived as acts of betrayal and had a profound impact on their decision to leave the employment relationship. As mentioned previously, acts of betrayal are breaches to the psychological contract between employee and employer and lead to profound negative implications for the employment relationship (Rousseau, 1989). The departure of close colleagues, even if voluntary, was viewed as significant, as it inevitably led to changes in the working environment and potentially affected the overall dynamics and culture. Furthermore, when departures were enforced by the company, such as through layoffs, it not only disrupted the trust in the company and its management but also heightened concerns about the stability and security of their own positions. The occurrence of such events is supposed by research as causing damage to the

relationship between employer and employee and causing lasting negative influence on how the employee engages with employment in the future (Eilam-Shamir & Yaakobi, 2014).

5.1.3 Neutral dimensions

The study conducted also identified a neutral dimension within the conceptual framework, namely the assessment and tolerance of risk. This dimension supports the premise that neither desire nor aversion dimensions alone are sufficient to form the basis of a decision regarding work arrangement changes. Rather, it comprises supporting elements that facilitate and enable individuals to make informed choices regarding their work arrangements.

The assessment and tolerance of risk dimension encompasses 2nd order themes such as support networks, employment as a safety-net, temporary compromise, and lifestyle adjustments. Support networks play a role in providing young professionals with the necessary encouragement, advice, and assistance during their decision-making process. These networks may consist of family, friends, or professional connections who provide emotional support and guidance throughout the transition to new work arrangements. Also included in support networks are systemic systems of support such as the social systems of unemployment benefits and support in the case of emergencies overseas. The need for support, especially in decision making, is supported by research into human needs (Doyal & Gough, 1984). Additionally, the perception of employment as a safety-net acts as a buffer, providing individuals with a sense of security and a fallback option in case their new work arrangements do not meet their expectations or encounter unforeseen challenges.

Temporary compromise represents a strategic approach employed by young professionals when transitioning to non-standard work arrangements. It involves acknowledging and accepting temporary trade-offs or adjustments in various aspects of their lives, such as financial stability, career progression, or social status, with the understanding that these compromises may yield long-term benefits or personal fulfilment. Lifestyle adjustments encompass changes in daily routines, work-life balance, or personal priorities that accompany shifts in work arrangements. Young professionals recognise the need to adapt their lifestyles to accommodate the unique demands and opportunities presented by non-standard work arrangements. Willingness my younger generations to prioritise passion and fulfilment over financial benefits

and traditional job security is supposed by research (Twenge et al., 2010). If the change in work arrangement is deemed to be meaningful, or allow for greater meaningfulness in an individual's life, studies identified by Martela et al. (2021) have shown that people are willing to accept a less financially beneficial arrangement (Achor et al., 2018; Hu & Hirsh, 2017).

By incorporating the assessment and tolerance of risk dimension as a neutral element within the conceptual framework, the study acknowledges the multifaceted nature of the decision-making process regarding work arrangement changes. The presence of supporting factors within this dimension complements the desires and aversions expressed in the desire and aversion dimensions, allowing young professionals to weigh the potential benefits, challenges, and risks associated with their chosen work arrangements. Understanding the role of assessment and tolerance of risk provides a comprehensive perspective on the factors that influence young professionals' decisions and informs the development of strategies and interventions to support their transitions and enhance their overall work experiences.

5.2 Practical implications

This research aims to bring to light the elements which influence young professionals to commit significant changes to their work arrangements. The loss of capable and highly-educated professionals from the job market could be reduced through increasing desirable elements and decreasing negative elements (as outlined in the presented conceptual framework) within traditional employment arrangements and by leaning how to engage with the newest generation on the factors which they value most. By gaining a comprehensive understanding of the factors that lead young professionals on traditional career paths to transition from standard employment to non-standard work arrangements, businesses who are looking to prevent loss of talent to non-standard work arrangements can objectively assess their work culture, benefits, and processes against the conceptual framework presented in this thesis. This understanding enables them to identify potential areas of improvement that can help retain employees, meet their desires, and prevent dissatisfaction resulting from negative elements. Moreover, the findings derived from the investigation of the second research question offer significant implications for companies seeking to develop effective strategies to attract talented individuals back into standard employment following their departure. Understanding the circumstances under which young professionals are likely to consider returning to traditional

work arrangements can inform employers in devising targeted approaches to entice these individuals back into their workforce.

The findings from this research hold significant value for employers seeking to enhance employee retention and satisfaction, especially amongst younger generational cohorts. Although the focus of this study revolves around individuals who have left standard employment for non-standard work arrangements, it can be postulated that the same elements influencing the decision to leave would also have negative effects on employees who do not desire a change in their work arrangements. It is inherent in human nature to seek positive elements, as highlighted in the research results, such as flexibility and fulfilling work, while actively avoiding negative elements, such as excessive workloads, feelings of unfairness, and unfavourable changes in job scope.

All employers can utilise the insights gained from this research to identify and address potential sources of dissatisfaction within their organisations. By creating a work environment that aligns with the desires expressed by young professionals in this study, employers can enhance employee engagement, productivity, and overall job satisfaction. For instance, providing flexible work options, implementing fair compensation and benefits structures, and involving employees in decision-making processes can contribute to a more supportive and fulfilling work culture. Furthermore, understanding the aversion dimensions identified in the research, such as employment pessimism, negative work environment, and negative incidents, can help employers proactively mitigate these factors and create a positive and empowering work environment.

5.3 Limitations

There are limitations in this research. As the studied phenomenon is currently underway, the existing published research is naturally limited and such the theoretical background can be challenging to establish. Another important consideration to address is the inherent subjectivity of the respondents in qualitative research. It is important to acknowledge that the author's own experiences and personal interest in the topic served as motivations for conducting this study. However, every effort was made to maintain objectivity throughout the research process. As the topic of how individual's value their work and made decisions is subjective and broad, all aspects of job satisfaction and decision making could not be covered in this research.

5.4 Recommendations for future research

As this research focused entirely on the individuals who had made changes to their work arrangements, further research could be conducted on the impact the studied phenomenon has from an organisational perspective. A longitudinal study could also be conducted to track the career trajectories and work arrangement choices of young professionals over an extended period. This could provide valuable insights into the long-term effects and outcomes of non-standard work arrangements, as well as more definitive data about the factors that contribute to the decision to return to standard work arrangements. Additional research could also be done to compare the experiences and motivations of young professionals across different genders, industries, sectors, or geographical regions. This could shed light on the impact of contextual factors and industry-specific dynamics on work arrangement decisions, as well as the likelihood of returning to standard work arrangements.

By pursuing research in these areas, a more comprehensive understanding of the factors influencing work arrangement decisions and the circumstances that lead young professionals to return to standard work arrangements can be achieved. This knowledge can inform both individuals and organisations in making informed decisions regarding work practices and contribute to the development of supportive policies and practices in the evolving world of work.

Conclusions

This study aims to contribute to the existing body of knowledge by providing insights into modern decision-making processes regarding work arrangements and the factors that contribute to a fulfilling career in the context of contemporary work environments. By investigating the dimensions that are most prevalent when young professionals opt for non-standard work arrangements, this research hopes to add to understanding about the multifaceted nature of career choices in the modern era. The identification of desire, aversion, and neutral dimensions underscores the complex interplay of factors that drive individuals to seek alternative work arrangements.

As we ponder the phenomenon under study and its already apparent impact, it is important to acknowledge that its future trajectory is subject to various external factors and evolving dynamics. The ever-changing landscape of political, economic, and technological landscapes holds the potential to exert significant influence on our perceptions of value and the role of work in our lives and society. Political landscapes, for instance, shape the policies, regulations, and societal priorities that can have far-reaching implications for the nature and organisation of work. Shifts in political ideologies, government interventions, or global events can alter the economic landscape and create new opportunities or challenges for both individuals and businesses. Additionally, socio-political movements and public discourses on topics like work-life balance, income inequality, and social justice can reshape societal expectations and aspirations regarding work arrangements.

Furthermore, economic factors such as inflation can directly impact the value and reward systems associated with work. Fluctuations in prices and living costs can influence individuals' financial stability, job security, and overall perceptions of the adequacy of their compensation. Economic transformations and disruptions driven by technological advancements, such as artificial intelligence (AI), automation, and further digitisation, also have the potential to reshape industries and job markets, creating new possibilities and necessitating adaptation from both employees and employers. It is important to recognize that these emerging influences, alongside existing societal trends and individual preferences, will shape the future understanding and perception of work.

The study recognizes that many of the needs and motivations examined in this thesis are inherent to human nature and transcend age or personal experiences. However, the specific experiences of younger generations at the onset of their careers, particularly the transformative impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, have undoubtedly influenced their perceptions and expectations as employees. The researcher emphasises that the purpose of this thesis is not to cast judgment or assign blame, but rather to foster mutual understanding and bridge the gap between individuals and businesses. As the landscape of work continues to evolve, it is crucial to acknowledge the rights of new generations to reshape traditions and norms to align with their unique needs. As we anticipate the next generations of workers, their values, aspirations, and expectations may undergo further evolution in response to these transformative forces. Consequently, ongoing research and ongoing dialogue between stakeholders will be essential in comprehending and adapting to the changing dynamics of work in a complex and interconnected world.

Through empathy, effective communication, and a spirit of cooperation, it is possible to cultivate an environment that meets the fundamental needs of all individuals participating in the workforce. By utilising the findings of this study as a foundation for meaningful dialogue, stakeholders can work together towards creating inclusive and fulfilling work arrangements for the benefit all those who participate in the labour market, be it traditionally or not.

Appendices

APPENDIX 1: Pre-Defined Semi-Structured Interview Guide

Demographic information

1. Tell me about yourself (Age, Nationality).
2. Where do you currently reside?
3. How would you describe your education?
4. How would you describe your current employment/work arrangement?
5. How would you describe your work arrangement history?

Mindset towards work

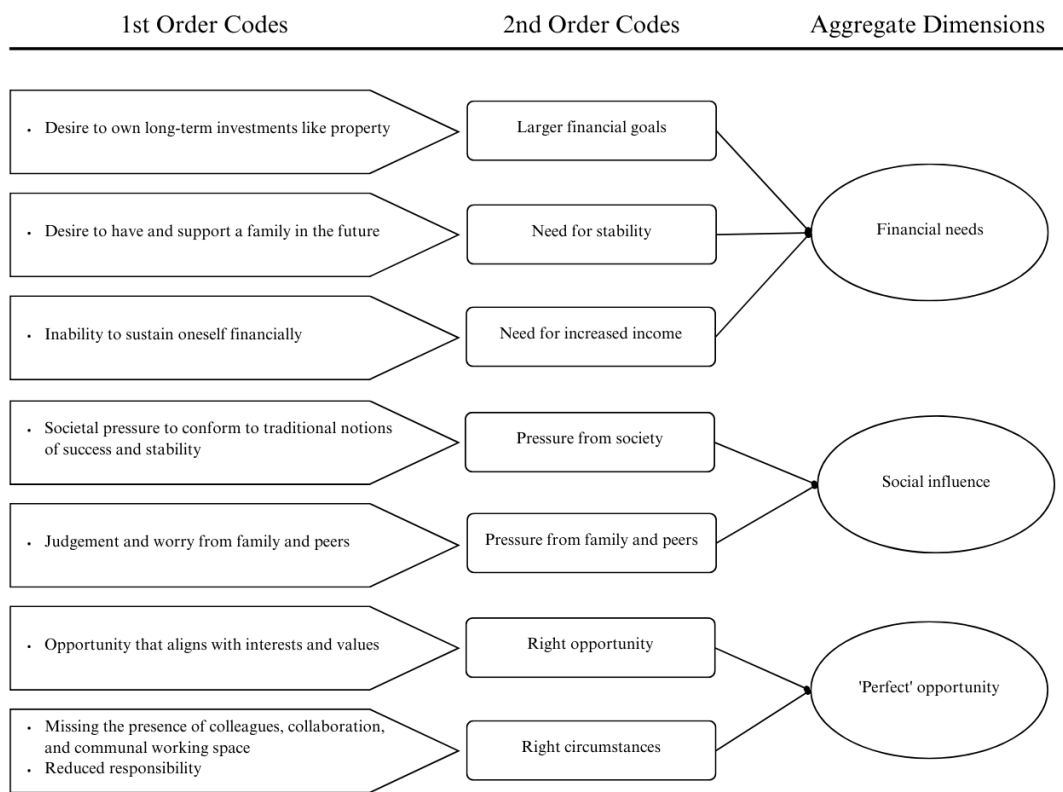
6. Under what circumstances did you end your previous employment?
7. How did you come to the decision to change your work arrangement?
8. How did you end up in your current work arrangement?
9. How do you feel about your current work arrangement?
10. How supported did you feel in making your decision?
11. How would you describe the positive elements of your current situation?
12. Are there any negative elements?
10. How supported did you feel in making your decision?
13. How has your life changed as a result of your change in work arrangement?
14. How do you your work arrangement changing or not changing in the future?

APPENDIX 2: Data-Aggregation Structure

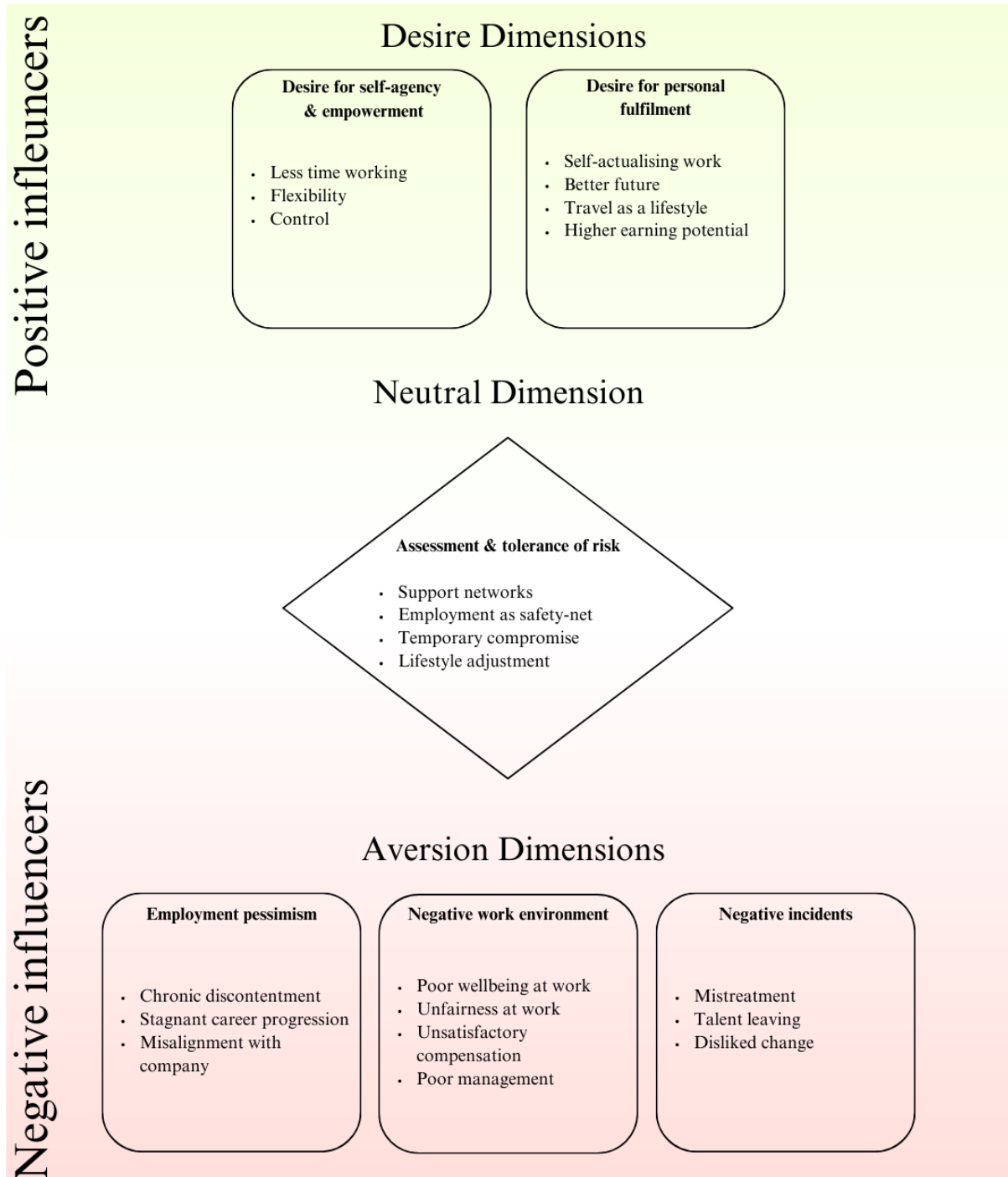
Data-Aggregation Structure for Factors which influence why young professionals make changes to their work arrangements



Data-Aggregation Structure for factors which influence young professionals to return to standard work arrangements



APPENDIX 3: Conceptual framework for understanding research results



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