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Outplacement

Experiences of repacking the special competence for re-employment

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Abstract

The aim of the study was to generate understanding of a successful outplacement process and define the essential elements and the role of an outplacement trainer in the process. Additionally, the study aimed to examine how the process had affected the participants' career identity.

The methods used for the implementation of the research were qualitative. The study was an inductive case study that used Henry Tajfel's Social Identity Theory for the theoretical approach. The social identity theory studies group membership. The data was collected with four thematic interviews that were based on unstructured and open-ended questions. The interviewees were people who have the best knowledge of an outplacement process: an Outplacement trainer, a headhunter working in a company that offers outplacement services and two participants in an outplacement process.

The results of the study suggest that a successful outplacement process includes, first of all, an enjoyable and challenging new job that corresponds with the values of the partici-pant. The outplacement trainer has a role as a trusted coach who leads the participant steadily through the process without feeling of hurry, respecting the individual needs. The trainer helps the participant to define the gained competence in a form that is easy to "productize" for future job interviews. Depending on the outcome of the outplacement, professional identity may be strengthened, remain the same or weaken after the process.

Conclusions: Characteristics that help the outplacement process are career resilience, openness and commitment, sincerity and positive curiosity. Outplacement does not always lead to direct re-employment, in which case the participant is quite alone after the pro-cess, which may cause weakening of the career identity.

Keywords/tags (subjects) Outplacement, Social Identity Theory, Career identity, Career Management

Miscellaneous

Contents

Figures

Tables

1   Introduction

During the recent years, many organizations have been offering outplacement ser-
vices to their employees that are being made redundant. The purpose is to help and
support them in the search of re-employment and creation of a possibly new career.
It is important that outplacement service providers support each individual on the
basis of their individual development needs, listen to their expectations and hopes
and provide them with the needed characteristics for their future careers.

This research is about career management and high-skilled specialists' experiences of
outplacement. The objective of the research was to increase understanding of out-
placement based on the experiences of high-skilled specialists and to determine
what a successful outplacement process includes.

In this research the term 'trainer' was used for referring to a person offering per-
sonal training to a participant in an outplacement process. This was because the
term 'trainer' is the most neutral of the alternatives. Nevertheless, the prior litera-
ture about the topic and the interviewees also used terms 'counsellor' and 'coach'
depending on the outplacement company that they had been working with. This ex-
plains why all three of these terms appear in the study.

1.1   Working life in change

This research was motivated by the social significance of the topic. The fact is that
the working life of today does no longer automatically offer life-long careers for high-
skilled, well-educated people as it did in the past. At the moment, the number of
highly educated, unemployed people is high in Finland, and it is estimated that the
number will continue to grow even longer than what the first estimations have sug-
gested. According to Statistics Finland's Labour Force Survey, in January 2016 the
number of the unemployed was 245,000 (men 135,000 and women 110,000) as one
year earlier the figure was 14,000 lower. The unemployment rate[1] had risen up to 9.3

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[1] The employment rate is the proportion of the employed among persons aged 15-64

percent from the 8.8 in January 2015. Considering the numbers, there was also a difference by gender, as unemployment seemed to hit women more often than men. Within a year, there were 4,000 fewer men and 10,000 fewer women employed. The unemployment rate in January 2016 was 9.3 per cent, which was 0.5 percentage points higher than one year earlier. The unemployment rate of men was 10.0 per cent and of women 8.5 per cent. The trend of the unemployment rate was 9.4 per cent. (Statistics Finland 2016.)

Characteristic to the Finnish unemployment is the high rate of youth employment. In January 2016, the number of young people (aged 15 to 24) was 640,000. Of this number, 57,000 were unemployed. The unemployment rate[2] for young people was 21.1 per cent, which was 1.1 percentage points higher than the year earlier. Among the population in the same age group, the share of unemployed young people was 9.0 per cent. (Statistics Finland 2016.)

Additionally, the high rate of inactive population in Finland is challenging. The inactive population consisted of 1,481,000 persons in January 2016, which was 9,000 more than the year before. Of the inactive population, 177,000 persons were in disguised unemployment[3] , which was 32,000 more than in the same period of 2015. (Statistics Finland 2016.) Lately, also academic unemployment has been rising in Finland. Table 1 below shows the high rise in the numbers of the unemployed highly educated people in Finland within a year between January 2015 and January 2016.

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[2] The unemployment rate is the proportion of the unemployed among the labour force

[3] Disguised unemployment refers to persons outside the labour force who would like to have gainful work and would be available for work within a fortnight, but who have not looked for work in the past four weeks. The reasons for disguised unemployment are giving up searching for a job or other reasons, such as studies, caring for children or health reasons. (Statistics Finland)

Table 1. Unemployed in Finland 2015 and 2016 (Akava 2016.)

Education	1/2015	1/2016	Change in quantity	Change %
Comprehensive level	89221	87030	-2191	-2,5
Secondary level	152700	162177	9477	6,2
Lowest level tertiary education	22667	23211	544	2,4
Lower university level	25349	27370	2021	8,0
Higher university level	19945	21287	1342	6,7
Researcher education	1547	1711	164	10,6
Highly educated total	46841	50368	3527	7,5
TOTAL	**324934**	**336922**	**11988**	**3,7**

However, there is an interesting feature in the actual situation. Several organizations are laying off people at the same time when they are searching for talents in order to fill other new positions. Education and constant personnel development are essential in today's working life, but the need for renewing skills and talents is especially highlighted in specialist work as technology is developing constantly and in fast cycles. Business environments change, some branches or even industries die out and some new ones are born. Financial issues may also force some organizations to cut down their expenses by downsizing the staff of experienced, high-skilled people with special competences. Similarly, when the environment changes due to many different reasons in society or within an organization, the demand for certain competences is in change. There are many competences and plenty of expertise that have been rejected lately by the organizations as the times change. These specialists might have a risk of not being reemployed in a new job corresponding to their competence. Therefore, their expertise must be repackaged in a new format with some new ingredients in order for them to manage in the employment market. They need training and support in order to find suitable re-employment. By offering alternatives and managing talent and careers effectively, organizations may ensure better circumstances for growth. This also helps in keeping the employees engaged and productive. By outplacement, companies may take care of their social responsibility in case of downsizing.

HR issues are fascinating as the changing individual needs and the ability to perform become involved in the changes in the organizational and social environment. Nowadays, as the environment changes constantly, also the knowledge level demands upgrading and constant follow-up in the organizations. It seems as if people would need "personal trainers" in working life just as they have in sports in their spare time. The human resources management in some organizations may even work like this as companies are constantly searching for growth and improving their competitiveness. However, the fact is that eventually, each individual is personally responsible for his or her career development and training needs. The working conditions become more and more challenging as people should be both productive and innovative and develop their knowledge at the same time as they stress for keeping themselves employed.

Constant learning is essential for growth and creating competence from both the individuals' and the organizations' points of view. Without education and training in the work, people easily stop to see other choices and ways of perceiving the world. Development without further training and updating knowledge is not as creative and sustainable as it could be. Education and training are important tools for an organization to improve the working climate, achievements and competitive advantage. From the point of view of an employee, education and training may improve the quality of work increase the career ambitions and engagement to the organization. Well-managed and competent personnel is an asset of a competitive organization supporting the whole nation. However, nowadays it seems that in the search for profit many companies easily lay off a big part of their resources. By outplacement the laid off employees would not be totally abandoned, and the company could consider its social responsibility.

1.2   Research Questions

This study aimed to increase understanding of a successful outplacement process. Practically, the empirical part of the research studied the opinions and experiences of high-skilled specialists on different branches. The aim was to collect data from

people with experience in outplacement. In other words, the preferred interviewees were participants in an outplacement process, recruiters and outplacement trainers. The key concepts for the study were Outplacement, Talent Management, Career Management and Career Identity.

The research questions were constructed by observing working life. Prior studies on theories about identity and research results around the topics Outplacement, Career Management and Talent Management created a theoretical background for the research. The research aimed to create complementary understanding of outplacement by examining the topic by using the following three research questions:

1. Which elements construct a successful outplacement process?
2. What kind of role does the trainer play in the outplacement process?
3. How has an outplacement process affected an individual's career identity?

The research questions were answered by using a qualitative empirical case study with personal thematic interviews.

1.3   Structure of the thesis

Chapter 2 leads the reader deeper into the world of Talent Management and Career Management. The central concepts are presented and the outplacement process defined. The literature review of the study consists of the relevant literature and recent articles on Talent Management, Career Management and Outplacement. The purpose was to deepen the knowledge basis and the mind-set for the empirical study. The methodology of the research is presented in Chapter 3. Chapter 4 presents the results of the research and the Discussion is conducted in Chapter 5.

2   Outplacement and identity

2.1   Identity

Identity is an entity that is affected by both the influence of structure, discourses and personal agency and construction. According to Jenkins (2014, 6-7), identity is a human capacity that is rooted in language. It is about knowing who we are, who others are, them knowing who we are, us knowing who they think we are etc. It is a classification or a mapping of the human world and our places in the whole. Individuals are members of different collectives. It is a process about defining who is who and what is what.

Identity is not about *having* something or not, it is something that someone *does*. This contains a classification and an evaluation that are organised hierarchically, both in a social and interactive way. Individuals A and B may be different from each other, both still being members of the meta-category C. Similarly, a person may be identified as a C in one context but as an A in another. Since identification is affected by relationships between individuals or groups, there are hierarchies or scales of preference, ambivalence, hostility, competition, partnership and co-operation that define the hierarchy in the process. There may appear conflicts between the hierarchies of collective identification and the hierarchies of individual identification. This means that the following sentence can make sense: I hate all As: you are an A: but you are my friend. This proves that people do not have a clear picture of the relation between emotions and identity.

As a conclusion, Jenkins states that categorical priorities are unlikely to guide the classification sufficiently on their own. Therefore, the ability to categorize others in a delicate and fine-grained way is a necessity that we need every day. Additionally, when identity does appear to have an emotional matter it is capable of influencing actions. Identification has to be *made* to matter. Hence, as identification may be re-

lated to motivation and behaviour, the connection between them is not straightforward, and it cannot, therefore, be predicted. This suggests that it is essential to take the other factors into account. (Jenkins 2014, 5-6.)

Alvesson (2010) has outlined and identified seven images of self-identity that can be derived from the work on identity in the literature: self-doubters, strugglers, surfers, storytellers, strategists, stencils and soldiers. They have been distinguished in a fluid way along two dimensions. The first dimension distinguishes images that dominate in the construction of an individual identity. They are those of the strategists, storytellers and strugglers. Images where a "force" imputes or imposes an identity that a person partly or totally has to accept are related to self-doubters, surfers, soldiers and stencils. The second dimension distinguishes images that depend on the degree to which an identity is coherent, robust and has a direction. These images belong to the strategists, storytellers, soldiers and stencils. Those images that emphasize an insecure, ambiguous and fluid identity are related to surfers, self-doubters and strugglers. The self-doubter identity highlights insecurity and anxiety. This may show in the manner in which a person doubts his or her worth and efficacy through the experiences in life. In the same way a professional might doubt his or her worth to an organization. Alvesson (2010) distinguishes a key question or issue for the self-doubter: "Can I find who it is I am"? The struggler's image implies more agency than that of the self-doubter where the identity constructor is facing more active effort in order to fight through the jungle of contradictions and messiness in the pursuit of a sense of self, whereas the struggler confronts the question of "Who am I?" with the answer, "I will struggle to find out." (Alvesson 2010, 193 - 217.)

The third image, the surfer, emphasizes the serial construction of the discourses, structures and messiness of a person, which has an impact the person's life and identity. A person becomes who he or she needs to be at any given time; there is no central core in their self-identity and neither it is integrated nor particularly coherent. The question they might have are not so much of type "Who am I?" but more like "Who or What do I need to be at this given moment?" (Ibid 193 - 217.)

The fourth image is the storyteller who constructs life narratives in order to build a robust and coherent identity. They seek to create a sense of direction by answering the question, "Who am I?" and answering with an attempt at a firm narrative stating "This is who I am" derived from "how I view my past, experience my present and how I see the future". (Ibid 193 - 217.)

In the construction of the identities, the surfer tends to go with the discursive flow, whereas the strategist is fully in control of the identity he or she wishes to exude. Alvesson (2010) states that a strategist tries to craft a sense of self that is then be mobilized for the accomplishment of a personal or collective objective. The question of "Who am I?" is then replaced by "This is who I want to be." Professionals or managers operating as strategists would try to construct a suitable identity to achieve the specific goals and objectives they have in mind. (Ibid 193 - 217.)

The stencil identity is created by forces external to the individual. The stencil identity is not about choosing to adjust to what is required. Instead, it is simply produced by stating "This is what I have to be." The soldier image emphasizes compliance somewhat similarly. However, the loyal soldier or the professionally committed enthusiast surrenders a sense of self-identity to the harmony of the unit or the profession. (Ibid 193 - 217.)

2.2   Social identity theory

In the search for an appropriate theoretical approach to outplacement the social identity theory has been chosen to be the most suitable for this research as the social identity describes social behaviour and group membership. In outplacement process the participant needs to leave the previous position and working group, heading towards the unknown with the existing professional identity. The social identity theory supports the thought of an individual being dependent on the group he or she belongs to. Alternatively, the mind-set theory, that strives to understand the effects of the beliefs individuals have for the nature of intelligence, affecting learning and

education, could have been possible to use for the theoretical approach of this research. Since this research studies also the opinions of outplacement trainers and head-hunters of the topic, the social identity theory was preferred over the mind-set theory.

Social identity theory has been invented by social psychologists Henri Tajfel and John C. Turner in the 1970's. The social identity is based on group membership. The self-caterigorization begins by categorizing the social world. The starting point for the theory was a thought that a society is divided in social categories that have different dimensional strengths and statuses that are competing with each other. These ingoups and outgroups will be distinguished from each other, and a social identity that is based on group membership, gets created. According to social identity theory an individual's perception of himself is a kind of continuum where personal identity is at the one end and the social identity at the other end. The personal identity consists of all the characters that separate the individual from the others. Above all, it is based on individual's perceptions about himself based on longitudinal personal relationships. Personal identity becomes significant especially in mutual or small group meetings while social identity, meaning the characteristics that combine the individual with the others in the same group, is emphasized in a special way in actual group situations. Then the personal identity retreats on the background. In extreme situations the social identity may be emphasized in a group situation in a way that the personal identity disappears totally and the individual becomes interchangeable with the other people in the group. Social identity theory suggests that ingroup identification activates discrimination in favour of the ingoup. The greater the advantage compared to the advantage of other categories, the more the individual's social identity will get. Social identity theory suggests that when the social identity is significant, the individual identifies with the ingoup and tries to regenerate the distance between the ingroup and outgroup. (Capozza & Brown 2000, 15-18.)

As social identity theory describes group membership and behavior, according to Korte (2007) the meaning is to get understanding on how individuals make sense of

themselves and other people in the social environment. The identity of the individuals consists of portions of their identities from their memberships and interactions in groups. Social cognition consists of two components; the elements of cognition (for instance causal attributions, schemas, and self-identities) and the processes of cognition (attention, memory, and inference). There are two theories explaining social identity, social identity theory and self-categorization, what it is (the elements) and how it develops (the processes). Individuals develop a social identity (the element) through a process of self-categorization. Social identity is a concept including enduring (core) and (peripheral) components that are evolved in a reciprocating process between the individual and the group. Social identity is a constant, interactive process between the individual and the focal group (ingroup), and between the individual and other groups (ougroups). In social interaction, identity appears as a complex and dynamic feature that is dependent on the situation. The internal and the external categorizations vary constantly. The processual nature of social identity is emphasized. According to self-categorization people have different opportunities to join a group as a function of their readiness and fit. Also the group's accessibility varies. It is evident that individuals cannot join just any group, as groups are open to some and closed to others. The categorization process includes a phase when individuals evaluate the accessibility of a group for them and are likewise assessed by the group for readiness and fit. The history, personality, status, and opportunity of an individual constrain the choice of groups available. By going through the process of self-categorization, the individual adopts the meaning of this social identity, the norms (appropriate behavior) that guides performance in this particular group. Through self-categorization and group membership, individuals construct a social identity, which creates a social-cognitive schema (norms, values, and beliefs) for their group-related behavior. As the identity of the group is adopted by the individual's personal identity goes to the background whereas the identity as a member of the group comes to the foreground. The change to a group-based identity causes a change in motives, expectations, affective connotations, background knowledge, beliefs, norms, and values. The social identity may cause behavior that conflicts with the personal identity of the

individual. Additionally, as group members, individuals may have more extreme positions than they might personally have. The social identity theory allows us to enrich the understanding of major influences that the training professionals use in order to affect learning in organizations. When directing the interventions at the organizational or individual levels, without paying attention to the group level at which individuals engage with the organization, the training interventions may be in risk to a failure. The strength of social identity theory as a concept derives from its deep meaning to individuals living and working in groups within organizations. (Korte 2007, 168 - 177.)

2.3   Career identity

Career is

An occupation undertaken for a significant period of a person's life and with opportunities for progress,

The time spent by a person in a career, and

Working permanently in or committed to a particular profession.
(Oxford Online Dictionary 2015.)

In this research, **Career identity** refers to the combination of the personal competences, values, interests and skills, working history and development hopes for the future.

La Pointe (2010, 15) refers to Arthur, et al. (1989) by seeing the concept of a career with a broader sense as "the evolving sequence of a person's work experiences over time". This perception is applicable in a wider sense as it is not restricted to paid employment or institutional careers, neither is it assigned any prior assumptions about its normative development. Identity work consists for instance of gender, profession, career, family, organization, special interests, and so on. The positions of these factors vary in time across past, present, and future and construct our identity. Identity work in a job transition consists of experimenting and forming new identity positions or revising or strengthening the old. (La pointe 2010, 83-84.)

Gowan (2012) has studied psychological well-being and job satisfaction six years after a job loss. She defines career identity as being the first dimension of employability. It is connected to the career experiences people have and works as a motivator when making career decisions for the future. Individual's personal values and interests are reflected in career identity and are opposed to being attached to a particular job or company. Career identity is one among many other role identities an individual can possess. Gowan refers to Hogg and Terry (2000) and Turner (1987) who have studied social identity theory that describes how individuals organize their role identities in a hierarchy. The identity that lays at the top is most likely invoked and acts as the most salient, or strongest, influencer on the individual's behavior.

The salience of the career identity is an important determinant for many individuals. It determines the well-being and future job satisfaction in relation to a job loss. Often individuals with a stronger family identity are opposed to individuals with stronger career identity. Gowan (2012, 783) states that actually the family-centered people may be more likely to have higher life satisfaction and self esteem and lower stress level after a job loss due to having other things besides the career as essential parts in the life.

As the second dimension of employability personal adaptability is described with attributes such as optimism, propensity to learn, openness, internal locus of control, and generalized self-efficacy. By these characteristics individuals tend to be proactive and willing to change according to the needs. Personal adaptability in the experience of a job loss can be measured with career resilience and by appraising the experience optimistically. According to Gowan Wolf et al. (1995) career resilience can be defined as having the ability to adapt according to the changes in the career circumstances. Gowan refers to Waterman et al. (1994) by stating that career resilient individuals are "ready to reinvent themselves in order to keep pace with change" and they have the ability to respond to adversity. Career resilient individuals are more likely to resist career disruption and are more effective in coping with a negative work situation. Gowan supports the findings of Fleig-Palmer et al. (2009) who stated that openness to engage in new learning experiences through training and adopting

new work roles indicate adaptability. Additionally, optimistic individuals already embrace a change in their careers while those who see the change in a more negative way tend to have less positive feelings, mental well-being or job satisfaction when reemployed. (Gowan 2012, 783.)

The findings of Leana and Feldman (1990) suggested that attachment to the previous job acted as a strong predictor of negative reactions to job loss. The third dimension of employability comprehends both social and human capital. Wolff and Moser, (2009) have stated that social capital relates to the constellation of relationships and creation of a network. Also networking is related to career success and career satisfaction (Wolff and Moser, 2009). The outcomes of re-employment can be seen in different forms but they need to be examined in terms of the quality of the re-employment. It is not just the acquisition of a new job that counts. The quality of re-employment can be characterized by a new employment that at least equals to the job that was lost, in relation to the pay and the individual satisfaction. (Ibid, 783-785.)

The results of Gowan's research support previous studies that have found that the mental health impairment resulting from job loss is limited and that mental health improves after re-employment. Stress levels of the respondents were lower than immediately following the job loss. Also the self-esteem was higher. The results showed that older individuals and females were more satisfied with their new jobs overall. It is worth noting that these demographic groups may have lower expectations about their opportunities and they are therefor more likely to be satisfied with their outcomes. Moreover, older workers were less likely to report high levels of stress six years after the company closed. (Ibid, 790.)

Gowan states that from an individual perspective, the findings of the research suggest that by developing a proactive, positive approach to managing a job loss will help maintain psychological well-being of individuals. By being more resilient and finding a balance between work and family life, being more optimistic, and by completing a college degree better psychological well-being and enhance job outcomes may be achieved. (Ibid, 793.)

2.4   Individual differences, unique needs

In order to succeed in the outplacement process it is important to observe the individual needs, hopes and experiences of the participant and to tailor the service accordingly. According to the results of a study by Martin and Lekan (2008) about executives' individual differences in outplacement success, it can be stated that outplacement service providers should assess individual differences as an essential part of career transition counseling. Martin and Lekan emphasize that recent trends should be questioned towards making outplacement a commodity service. The results show that diagnostic and counseling skills of a trained professional help in securing a successful outplacement experience. To be efficient and productive, the process should support the unique needs and personality of the clients. (Martin and Lekan 2008, 425.)

According to Martin and Lekan a successful outplacement transition is subject to the willingness of the participant to listen to and cooperate with his or her trainer. In the beginning, the trainer tries to help the participant to cope with the shock and trauma of job loss and career change. This often demands work in order to maintain the participant's feelings of self-esteem, self-worth, and career and social status. It is also important to enhance the participant's own perceived control over the re-employment process and build confidence and expectations for success in the future. At the same time, the counselor assesses the traits of the participant, the preferences and characteristics, helps the clients to discover their capabilities and strengths, identifies weaknesses and areas for improvement, and encourages the client to understand and identify new job and career opportunities. This requires time, energy, and attention from the participant in order to be able to develop and execute a re-employment plan. The participants will benefit more if they are open to change and new experiences. That is why personal growth and development are essential procedures in outplacement success. (Ibid, 427.)

The results of the study of Martin and Lekan (2008, 434) point out the amount of in-

formation that is available to the outplacement professional through personality assessment. Additionally, the results suggest that outplacement counselors should tailor counseling to meet individual needs. Also Gowan and Nassar-McMillan (2001) found out that the providers of outplacement services need to refine and develop their programs in order to ensure the resources in the best possible way in helping individuals for re-employment. The primary managerial implication of this study was that the personality of the participant has a significant impact on outplacement outcomes. This was not only during the transition but also after re-employment. As a conclusion, the counselors should understand and be willing to accommodate these individual characteristics. Gowan and Nassar-McMillan emphasize that outplacement counselors should conduct assessments to help participants to understand their traits, preferences, and characteristics and modify the job search process according these differences. Counselors should be able to adapt their coaching and other assistance according to individual client needs and also be willing to develop strategies in accordance with job loss that reflect the executive's unique circumstances. The author of this thesis agrees with this finding and aims to find out if the current research will produce similar outcome. However, this theory does not fully explain how the individuals with less positive traits, limited social skills or completely different personalities might get a functional and trustworthy relationship with the counselor or trainer. If the chemistry between the parts does not work, it cannot be forced and this will affect the outcome.

2.5   Managing talent and careers

Talent Management and Career Management are concepts that may not be referred directly in the organizations. They may be more familiar with the sub-concepts of Talent Management that is when many organizations might already have a resourcing strategy and they may sustain attraction and retention policies and programmes. Also role development may be in use in order to grow new experts for the future needs.

Carole Tansley (2011) concludes that the term *talent* does not have any single or universal contemporary definition in any language. The term tends to be organizational and highly influenced by the work in question. Different skills can be valued in many ways depending to the branch and the position and the individual connotations. It is possible that the insights vary between the individual or organizational perceptions of the term talent. Since the aim of this thesis is to study specialist work only the talent may refer to the same perceptions. Although, it is worth remembering that everybody has talent, only the utility and respects of it in different environments varies.

According to Michael Armstrong (2006, 389-407), talent management is a wide range of activities. Armstrong divides talent management in elements as resourcing strategy, attraction and retention policies and programmes, talent audit, role development, talent relationship management, performance management, total reward, learning and development and career management. In a nutshell it is about attracting, retaining, motivating, engaging and succession planning the workforce. The concept of talent management has been associated also with the term "best place to work". Often people have assumed that the term talent management refers only to the key persons in an organization. However, talent management should not be processed only to the top performers, because everyone has talent in an organization. Talent management aims to develop and maintain a talent pool that consists of skilled, committed and engagement workforce. The basis for the human resource planning is provided by the business plan. It is about identifying human capital requirements that leads to attraction and retention policies for internal resourcing. The meaning is to identify the talents in the organization, develop them and promote them in favour of the company. Armstrong divides talent management in talent audit, role development, talent relationship management, performance management, total reward, learning and development and career management.

Anupam (2012, 20-28) concluded in his study that in most of the companies he studied the talent is identified by competencies and the HR professional view to increase career growth opportunity. As findings of the research Anupam states that more than 60% of the respondents view organizational culture as a main driving force for

the new talent and for the existing talent. Talent management is also about motivating the employees and Anupam's findings support this by stating that the factors in retaining talent in the future will be best done by rewarding (48%), offering Base pay (57%) and assuring Job security (52%). Additionally, Anupam states that training plays an important role in motivating the employee. I support this thought and will concentrate more on the training and educational offering in the organizations in the research. These studies will be useful in relation to my stated aims of the research and will give important basis for the collection of data.

Sarmad et al. (2011, 3609-3618) conducted a study with conclusions referring that the essential factors in talent management is more about the mindset rather than technology or practice. Sarmad et al. state that the organizations where top management considers talent seriously will perform better on all aspects of talent management. In order to succeed in talent management it is only needed to ensure the successful execution of talent management process and only a little additional investment of time is required. I support this because when the organization has taken the first actual measures in order to collect the existing and needed skills in a talent pool, the refining, utilising and developing of these talents will be quite easy to handle. I will consider talent management from the same aspect in the research. At the end it is only about caring about the organization, its employees and combining them firmly with the visions of the future needs.

According to the results talent-winning companies performed better than their competitors due to the following HRM practices: Continuous recruitment, developed skills in specifying the type of people and qualities needed for their own business, talented people are put in challenging jobs before they are actually ready for them, mentoring and coaching are used as essential tools in offering effective training and career development, poor performers are not allowed to stay in position for years. Companies should hold their line managers accountable for attracting, developing and keeping talent as they do for example in the USA, the criteria for promotion is the ability to recruit talented new people in the organization. (Hiltrop 1999, 424.)

Career management is about providing opportunities for people to progress and develop their careers and ensuring that the organization has the flow of talent it needs. Career management refers to the opportunities available to the people in an organization in order to progress and develop their career and know-how. The aim is to have flow of talent the organization needs. By career management the organization should offer learning and development opportunities, career planning and management succession planning. (Armstrong 2006, 399.)

In their article Martín et al. (2001, 149-150) state that the traditional way to explore career management in organizations is to look it from two perspectives at the same time: from the individual and the organizational perspective. The individual perspective sees the career in the control and within the responsibility of the individual himself whereas the organizational perspective sees the career development as organizational responsibility. Additionally, there are two more levels of perspectives that have been adopted, global and senior management perspective. The global perspective is broad and organizational and the senior management perspective more practical and looks closer at the justification for the career changes. Martín et al. also refer to Wils et al. (1993) who have defined career in three factors: impersonal, organizational and individual career. In the context of the actual working life, the career management and career success appear to be more on the responsibility of the individual himself (Quigley and Tymon 2005).

The study of Power (2010, 681) has explored the understanding of career management tactics and their relation to success in interorganizational transitions. She uses the concept of interorganizational transition instead of outplacement. Her study has identified innovations in career management tactics by concentrating in learning about one's work in multiple employers rather than focusing only on one's current employer. The study showed the individuals to be more autonomous in their career development decisions as they were based on larger work environment. These two innovations are also showed in two major revisions of more traditional career management tactics: networking and learning. The Figure 1 below shows the variables that affect the experience of success after a job loss or interorganizational transition

or outplacement: Individual variables such as work competencies, personal charac-teristics, use of career management tactics and personal criteria for transition suc-cess and Structural variables such as availability of jobs, involuntary nature of transi-tion and discrimination in the hiring process. These lead to organizational experience and that in turn leads to experience of success or lack of it.

Individual variables
- Work competencies
- Personal Characteristics
- Use of new career management tactics
- Personal criteria for transition success

Structural variables
- Availability of jobs
- Involuntary nature of transition
- Discrimination in the hiring process

Organizatorial experience

Experience of success or lack of it
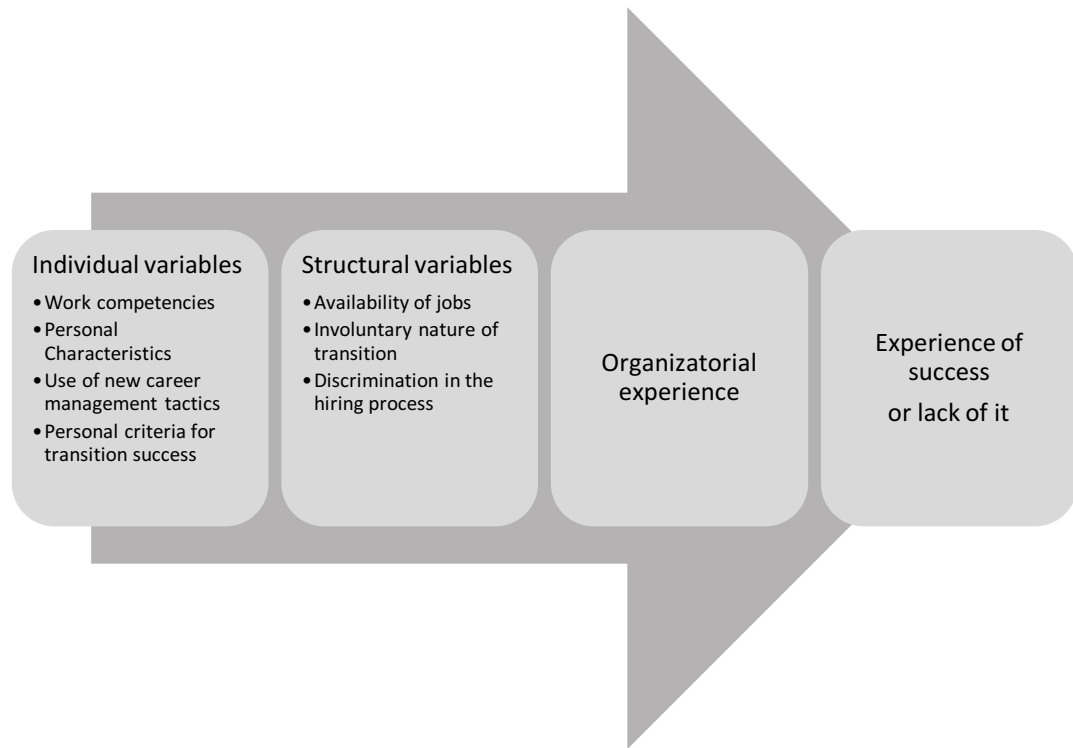
Figure 1. Model of the major variables affecting the experience of success after interorganizational transition (Modified from Power 2010, 680).

Additionally, the study pointed out three additional dimensions of career success that can affect success in transition. First, the opportunity for continuous learning (i.e. without being related to specific career goals) was considered as a very im-portant element. Secondly, the opportunity to be creative proved to be significant, and thirdly, the possibility to gain more independence. (Power 2010, 668.) These di-mensions of career success are presented in Table 2 below together with the suc-cessful and the unsuccessful types of criteria.

Table 2. Components of objective and subjective perceptions of inter-organizational transition success (Power 2010, 668).

Type of success criteria	Successful	Unsuccessful
Objective	Higher hierarchical level of new job	Lower hierarchical level of new job
	Higher compensation for new job	Lower compensation for new job
	Full use of skills and knowledge	Less use of skills and knowledge
	No or short period of unemployment before new job	Long period of unemployment between jobs
Subjective	Personally meaningful work	Work not personally meaningful
	Personally interesting work	Work not personally interesting
	Useful networking possibilities	Networking possibilities not good
	Less stress	More stress
	Better work-life balance	Less work-life balance
	More personal security	Less personal security
	Opportunities to add important skills and knowledge	Limited opportunities to add important skills and knowledge
	Opportunities for continuous learning	Limited or no opportunities for learning
	Opportunities to be creative	Limited or no creative opportunities
	Opportunities for increased independence	Limited or no opportunities for increased independence

Moreover, Power's research highlights two traditional tactics, which could be utilized in a new way in order to better manage contemporary careers that most likely will include a lot of inter-organizational mobility: focus and refocus on issues that consider the individual skills, autonomy, networking and learning.

A new focus on

1. building work-related **skills**, knowledge, and experience.

These elements should be seen especially with a view towards the environment. What is happening in multiple possible employers rather than just concentrating on an individual's current employer.

2. **autonomy** in decisions concerning developing work related skills and knowledge.

A refocus

3.of **networking** towards building work-related relationships.

This should be done not only inside but also outside the individual's current employer, and

4. and refining of the individual's **career-related learning**. (Power 2010, 672.)

Orpen (1994) uses the term **organizational career management** by stating that it is usually used to refer to various policies and practices of organizations in order to improve the career effectiveness of their employees. At this point many other researches have referred to the process by the term talent management (Armstrong 2006). These policies can contain various elements depending on what employees want from their careers, providing appropriate career opportunities for employees, identifying which employees deserve these opportunities and then providing them and evaluating the outcomes of career management programmes. The counterpart to organizational career management is **individual career management** meaning the personal efforts made by individuals to advance their own career goals. These goals may or may not coincide with those their organizations have for them. The idea of joint responsibility assumes that individual efforts of this kind are needed for career effectiveness, as well as an appropriate career management programme on the part of the employer. This statement can be supported since without the personal will and engagement of the employee himself or herself the career management procedure will not be fructuous. Orpen states that according to the psychological success model, employees are active, striving agents who utilize career management programmes to satisfy their personal career goals. According to Orpen it is the task of employers to ensure that this process helps the organization achieve its goals. The

main weakness with this theory is that the working life of today considers the individuals in a different way. In fact, for today's organizations people are seen as resources and resourcing does not value much the individual career goals if they are not in line with the organizational purposes or the superiors' opinions. However, with the reference to the outplacement this theory works well.

Orpen divides the two primary aspects of individual career management to **individual career planning** and **individual career tactics**. Individual career planning refers to the process of identification of individual's hopes from the career, assessing the individual strengths and weaknesses in relation to these goals, and deciding what steps need to be taken in order to realize these goals in in relation to the strengths and weaknesses of the individual. The process includes a series of individual decisions that ought to be made as rationally and systematically as possible if planning is to contribute to career success. However, career planning needs to be supported by appropriate tactics for implementation, in relation to the changing circumstances that often occur unexpectedly. Therefore, in order to succeed individual needs to create developing and executing strategies for carrying out the career plans. (Orpen 1994)

2.6   Outplacement process

Outplacement is a procedure of re-education and training that is being used in cases of unexpected unemployment. The meaning is to facilitate the re-employment and get new skills and develop the existing ones. Outplacement can be seen from two perspectives, the employer's and the employee's perspective. During the last decade the use of outplacement services or outplacement counselling has increased. This has often related to corporate downsizing and restructuring, resulting in layoffs of people. Outplacement counselling is a special form of career counselling that is offered to terminated employees.

Outplacement counselling services (OPC) are designed to facilitate a smooth transition process, reducing lawsuits and grievances, increasing the morale of remaining employees, and maintaining both productivity and the organization's public image.

Outplacement counselling is also intended to help the redundant worker in rebuilding a sense of self-worth, re-establishing a relevant career path, and securing meaningful employment. The offered services vary a lot but typically they include career planning, resume writing, interview training, assessment, identification of transferable skills, values exploration, marketing training, networking, and image development. There is some knowledge of the extent to which OPC programs meet the needs of their individual clients. Clients have been interviewed on which OPC services they found helpful, which services were not helpful, and whether there were services they could not use even if they would have been helpful. Individuals use the OPC services at a time of high vulnerability and emotional shock due to the unexpected job loss so it is important to know whether the services are helpful for the new career planning or not. (Butterfield and Borgen 2005, 306 -307.)

OPC activities and actions that were assessed with a positive outcome were the sense of someone taking care of clients' interests, doing all that is possible to help them find new employment, and equipping them with a sense of confidence and direction. Regarding the job skills training there was positive impacts on participants' sense of gaining control and confidence when they started to get the clue of the skills on current competitive job market. The negative outcomes contained a sense of feeling unimportant or not heard and of feeling frustrated, controlled, intimidated, and pressured to find a new job. Job skills training had negative experiences in a sense of frustration at the superficial way of covering the topics. Superficial handling left them without the required skill level and they were not able to use the training effectively. Also OPC program elements caused both positive and negative experiences. Positive elements and design provided a sense of inclusion, structure, peer support and control. Negative elements and design caused the participants feelings of not being treated as individuals with specific needs. Participants found many of the program elements to be rigid and intrusive, which led to anger, frustration, and a decision to opt out of some elements. The results of the study suggest that many individual recipients of OPC services received structured, task-focused programs that did not meet their emotional and transition needs. (ibid, 310-314.)

Johansson (2011) has studied voluntary outplacement processes. Almost all of the participants in the study had considered to quit their job before they received the offer of outplacement services from the company. Many of the interviewees base their voluntariness to the fact they did not experience enough development in the company and saw only a little chance to find a new position within the company in the future. Generally, the interviewees in this study were quite satisfied with the outplacement services provided. This might be due to the lack of previous experience of outplacement programs to compare with. Because of the voluntary nature of job transition they had perhaps affected their needs not to have counseling and emotional support as many of the participants in the study by Butterfield and Borgen (2005) did. Feelings of distress probably get higher for a person who gets unexpected termination. Most of the interviewees in this study considered their employability good after participating the program.

De Witte et al. (2005, 162) have studied the re-employment and outplacement in Belgium on worker level. There are various results emphasizing the need to develop a well elaborated training policy. This training policy covers all levels and all partners involved in the process. First of all, there is a clear need to offer different forms of training to workers who have been confronted with organizational restructuring. It is important to offer application training, as well as additional training, when qualifications and employability are low. The acquisition of new skills and knowledge is especially important in order to improve the employability when one has to find a job in a different sector than the one he or she has been working in until then. Additionally, besides the workers involved, there is also a need to offer training to the others partners concerned. It is important to highlight the role of communication during a downsizing or organizational restructuring process. The qualitative interviewees have underlines the need to train managers in this important task. Also the outplacement consultants themselves need training on communication. They have rather diverse amount of tasks and expectations to fill and as mastering all these tasks seems rather ambitious and challenging without training.

Westaby (2004, 25) has studied the impact of outplacement programs and their effectiveness on re-employment. He found out that high-level outplacement support facilitate the re-employment outcomes of managers and executives. He states that also the previous researches have showed that the psychological assistance has a positive effect on re-employment. The high-level support allowed the participants to use the outplacement assistance for unlimited times. The main criteria of the study were the employment status at the conclusion of outplacement assistance, the speed of re-employment and the new salary. In a shorter Outplacement program of three months the results showed greater motivation of the participants. The results revealed also that the outplacement programs with higher level of support were associated with outcomes of re-employment with higher quality.

Westaby states that there is dramatic variation between the types of outplacement assistance that displaced employees receive. For example, some outplacement programs with less comprehensive contents may have only a 1-day group workshop for the displaced employees. The outplacement programs with more comprehensive programs may provide individualized counselling and support to the displaced employees, offering career assessments and specialized resources. Table 3 below shows the effectiveness of unlimited outplacement program services compared to the the shorted 3- and 6-monts outplacement services. (ibid, 20)

Table 3. Components of outplacment program (Westaby 2004, 20).

Components of outplacement Programs						
Distinguishing Features						
Outplacement Program	Counselling Time	Psychological Assessment	Private Office	Mailing Resources	Staff involvement	Program Length
Higher level support, Executive	Very high	Very high	Yes	Very high	Very high	Unlimited
Higher level support, Management	High	Very high	Yes	High	High	Unlimited
6-month limited	Medium	Medium	No	Medium	High	6 months
3-moth limited	Medium	Medium	No	Medium	High	3 months

It is essential that the outplacement programs adopt the psycho-social aspect of employability and design programs that helps individuals in becoming both more career resilient and optimistic at the same time as they are developing traditional human capital skills. These programs can also help employees maintain their focus on areas outside their work life, re-estimating the importance of career in order to improve well-being. This approach to outplacement has the potential to position the participant to have a better work/life balance when reemployed. Moreover, participants focusing on areas outside their work life may have increased opportunity for networking that also can open new doors in the search of employment opportunities. With the public policy point of view, requiring government sponsored outplacement programs utilizing psycho-social aspects in the coaching and skills training and job

search training may lead to positive outcome. By focusing on development of a pro-active approach to career management, the participants will be able to more effectively manage the job transitions that are an inevitable part of employment of today. (Gowan 2012, 793.)

Alewell and Hauff (2011) have studied the motives of the organizations for using the outplacement services. There was a relatively low importance for "compensation for past performance" and a relatively high importance for the next group of motives concerning survivors. This proved that the direct impact of outplacement activities on redundant employees may not be the most important consideration as the organizations view on social responsibility. However, social responsibility could also be understood in terms of measures taken to prevent the unemployment. Nevertheless, as the authors also state I would highlight that the social responsibility is a factor that is mainly considered in the bigger organizations that mind their public image. Additionally, regarding the relationship between employers' motives and the use of specific outplacement activities the results of Alewell and Hauff showed that there were different motives connected to the use or non-use of specific activities. (Alewell et al. 2011, 483-484.)

Alewell and Hauff (2011) classify outplacement activities in two groups:

1. **Outplacement services in the narrow meaning of the word**
They are professionally designed services to help redundant employees find a new job and a new employer. This group includes instruments such as training for writing applications and self-presentation in recruiting processes for redundant employees, psychological counseling to cope with the conflict associated with the redundancy and regulate emotions accompanying the layoff and direct placement and help with job search services; and

2. Legal counseling with regard to labor law, social insurance law, or other complex issues related to changing employers.

Activities that also belong in this group, aim directly at employees becoming redundant, and provide resources to them such as redundancy payments and the offer of the employer to redundant employees to use firm resources to find a new job, for example paid working time or bureau assistance with application processes or other administrative or financial resources. (Alewell and Hauff 2011, 468.)

2.7 Summary: Outplacement leading to re-employment

The previous chapters have presented the results of the prior research on outplacement, combined with knowledge on Talent Management and Career Management. The thesis started with the career identity, specified the uniqueness of the needs of each individual in outplacement process, got deeper in the concepts of Talent Management, Career Management and finally in outplacement as a procedure. The search for an appropriate theoretical approach to outplacement the social identity theory proved suit best the purposes of this study. According to social identity theory the identity that lays at the top is most likely invoked and acts as the most salient, or strongest, influencer on the individual's behavior (Korte 2007).

Employability is connected to personal adaptability. It is described with attributes such as optimism, propensity to learn, openness, internal locus of control, and generalized self-efficacy. Career resilient individuals are "ready to reinvent themselves in order to keep pace with change" and they have a good ability to respond to adversity (Gowan 2012.) A successful outplacement transition depends on the willingness of the participant to listen to and cooperate with the outplacement trainer. Through the personality assessment process there is a very large amount of information available to the outplacement professional. Therefore, the outplacement trainers should and could tailor counseling to meet individual needs (Martin and Lekan, 2008). The providers of outplacement services need to refine and develop their programs in order to ensure the resources in the best possible way in assisting individuals to regain employment. The personality of the client has a significant impact on outplacement

outcomes, not only during the transition but also after re-employment. It is important that the counselors understand and are willing to accommodate these individual characteristics (Gowan and Nassar-McMillan, 2001).

There are three dimensions of career success that can affect transition success:

1. The opportunity for continuous learning (i.e. without being related to specific career goals)
2. The opportunity to be creative
3. The possibility to gain more independence. (Power 2010)

This research aims to reflect the individual experiences and outcomes of the outplacement process. The social identity theory and psycho-social aspects in the outplacement process referred in the review of literature provide a ground for the theoretical framework the frames to the empirical part of the study.

The figure 2 below describes the theoretical framework of this study and how the research questions aim to be answered.
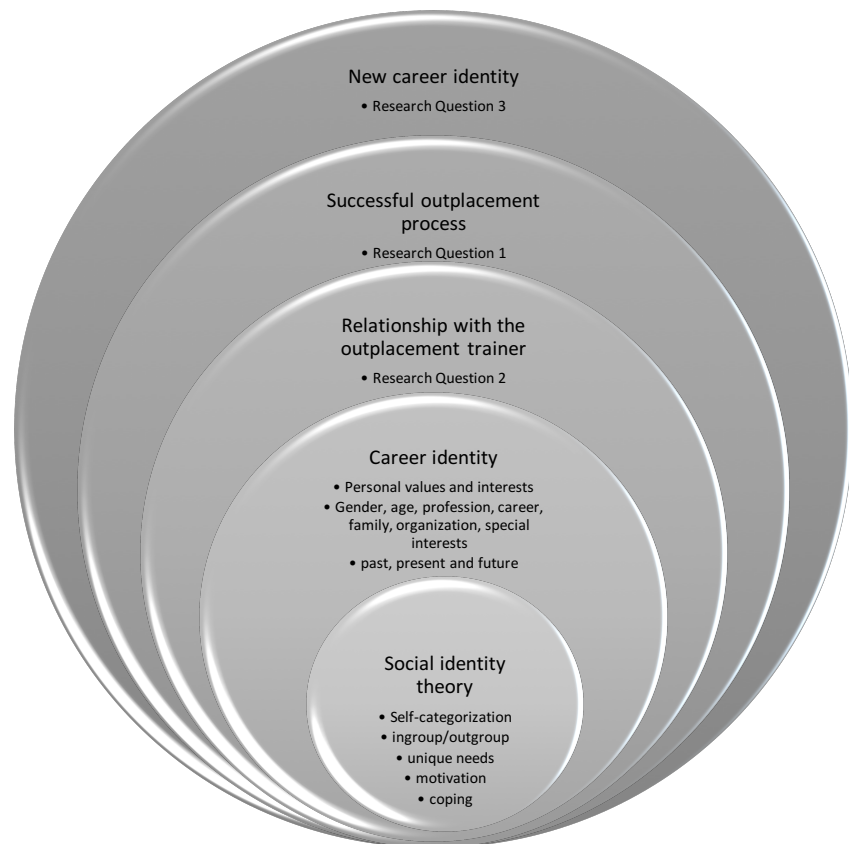

Figure 2. Theoretical framework of the research

The empirical study will be conducted on the basis of the theoretical framework in the following manner: the social identity theory and career identity form the core for the research. Career identity is the individual element made of personal experiences and characters affecting his or her career perception. A successful outplacement process is the positive change affecting the individual's career identity. This forms the first Research Question by examining what elements are essential for a successful experience. When participating an outplacement process the individual has a close relationship with the trainer. This relationship will be studied as Research Question 2. It describes how the interaction between the two parties affects the motivation, coping and the results of the outplacement process. Finally, the third Research Question studies the nature of the individuals' new or enforced career identity after outplacement process. This last element acts like an outcome of the whole outplacement process. According to Gowan (2012) career resilience helps forming new identity positions. Similarly, new career identity whether revises or strengthens the old career identity (La Pointe, 2010).

In this research, the experiences of outplacement process are examined in the field of business in Finland. The key concepts Outplacement, Talent Management and Career Management have been defined in section 1.2. Due to the qualitative nature of the empirical study, any hypothesizes have not been presented for the research. Instead, the social identity theory and career identity have been adapted as a ground for creating understanding of development of a new career identity that results from an outplacement process. The elements that are being examined in the empirical study have been defined based on the social identity theory and the concept of social identity. The chapter 3 presents the chosen methodology and the results chapter 4 reveals the results of the empirical study. The conclusions drawn on the basis of the empirical study are presented in Discussions chapter 5.

3   Methodology

According to Eriksson and Kovalainen (2008, 4-5), one of the major interests of qualitative research is to understand the socially constructed reality. Therefore, many of

the qualitative research approaches strive for interpretation and understanding. The collection of data and the analysis reflect the context that aims to create a holistic understanding of the studied issue. Silverman (2010) defines content analysis as a study that includes establishing categories and counting the number of instances where these categories appear. In qualitative research content analysis is a method used for textual investigation. The researcher establishes a set of categories and counts the appearance of elements in each category. It is essential that the categories are defined precisely in order to ascertain that different coders may receive the same results with the same material. This is what reliability measures in a content analysis, whereas validity measures counts of word use. Content analysis examines instances in the data. The instances will then be systematically identified across the data set by a coding system. Open-ended questions are used in qualitative research due to their ability to create holistic understanding of perspectives.

This study was an instrumental case study that aimed to understand the phenomenon called outplacement. The purpose was to describe a successful outplacement process by employing the perspective of outplacement participants and trainers in the creation of a new career goal for a high-skilled specialist. The qualitative approach was appropriate for this study due to the will to create a holistic understanding of the topic. The purpose was to determine what elements a successful outplacement procedure includes and to map out the changes in the career identity during the process.

The research process included familiarisation with several articles and studies on the topics Outplacement, Talent Management and Career Management. Outplacement as a research topic is of some current interest, and there is very little Finnish research on it yet. The research questions were formulated on basis of prior literature, prior studies and their results. The research methods were chosen in order to support the purposes and goals of the research. As the purpose was to produce a holistic understanding, qualitative methods and an instrumental case study proved to be appropriate for collecting the data. The data was collected by using thematic interviews in order to have findings that would describe the experiences in an outplacement

process. The questions in the interviews were open-ended and mostly unstructured in order to gain good and valid data for a qualitative study. The same questions were not repeated one after another in order to obtain valid results. Therefore, the questions were changed after the first interview and analysis.

The social identity theory describes group membership and behaviour. The purpose is to form an understanding of how individuals make sense of themselves and other people in the social environment. According to the social identity theory, the identity that lays at the top is most likely invoked and acts as the most salient, or strongest, influencer on the individual's behavior. There are two theories explaining social identity, what it is (the elements) and how it develops (the processes). They are the social identity theory and self-categorization. . Individuals develop a social identity (the element) through a process of self-categorization. (Korte 2007, 168-170.) This study was based on the social identity theory. The empirical part of the research focused on combining the social identity theory with the outplacement process.

The findings of the study were hoped to give important information on how outplacement services could lead people to re-employment and new careers. The study aimed to define some of the essential elements of a successful outplacement process and describe how the individual needs are confronted in real life. It was also considered important to determine what kinds of difficulties the process may contain on the way to re-employment and a possible new career identity.

3.1   Research approach

The overall approach of this research was a qualitative case study. It was a series of thematic interviews conducted by using inductive methods. The chosen approach was appropriate for the study because the aim was to create understanding of how the social identity theory would support the thoughts and experiences of individuals who have gone through an outplacement process as participants or trainers and how the creation of a new career identity has succeeded. The relationship between out-

placement and career identity is interesting and complex as the purpose of a successful outplacement process is to find re-employment and produce new high-skilled specialists while the possibly new identity takes time to become reinforced. The complete change of a career identity takes plenty of time, demands effort and engagement and a great deal of individual guidance.

According to Eriksson et al. (2008, 10-13), all research methods are closely connected to the research philosophy and to the ways it is possible to gain new knowledge through research. They suggest that having some knowledge of the basic philosophical concepts and ideas for research is helpful in order to design a decent study that produces the information that it promises. Therefore, the statements that constitute the phenomena in a certain study have implications for the ways in which it is possible to gain knowledge of it.

The theoretical approach to outplacement and career management presented in the previous chapters guided the formation of the research questions of this study. The literature and prior studies presented in Chapter 2 revealed that the unique needs of people in an outplacement process have to be faced individually in order to reach the best possible outcome. A successful outplacement transition depends on the willingness of the participant to listen to and cooperate with his or her counselor. The amount of information that is available to the outplacement professional through personality assessment is substantial. Therefore, outplacement counselors should and could tailor counseling to meet individual needs (Martin & Lekan, 2008).

According to Gowan and Nassar-McMillan (2001), the providers of outplacement services need to refine and develop their programs in order to ensure that the resources are allocated in the best possible way in assisting individuals to regain employment. Personality has a significant impact on outplacement outcomes, not only during the transition but also after re-employment. The counselors should understand and be willing to accommodate these individual characteristics. The social identity may cause behavior that conflicts with the personal identity of the individual. Additionally, as group members, individuals may have more extreme positions than they might personally have.

3.2   The Research context

This research was not appointed to any specific industry but handled business branch from the viewpoint of the Human Resources Management (HRM). The research explored the outplacement in the context of highly educated and experienced specialists and their outplacement trainers in different branches. The research was conducted in Finland and it was assigned by JAMK centre for competitiveness.

The research was conducted by using inductive methods. The guideline utilized in the research was based on the statement of Eriksson et al. (2008, 22-23) who see the inductive research process developing with the empirical materials as a starting point, not from the theoretical proportions. Then the relation between theory and empirical research comes out by following the logic of proceeding from empirical research to theoretical results. In this research there were conducted four interviews with unstructured and open-ended questions. The participants for this study were chosen in order to have the best information providers of the topic: interviewees had participated outplacement process as a participant or as a trainer or a followed the process as a head-hunter. All the four interviewees were highly educated and experienced. It proved to be very difficult to get interviews from the outplacement process participants whereas the trainers were quite eager to share their views. Apparently, this is due the fact that being laid off still is an issue that people do not want to share their thoughts about. It is possible that outplacement is not very usual yet here in Finland.

Four interviews were conducted for this research. The interviewees were an outplacement trainer (T), a head-hunter (H) from a company offering also outplacement services, participants to an outplacement process (P1) and (P2). The codes in parenthesis describe the interviewees in the results chapter.

3.3   Data collection and analysis

The data of the research was collected by four thematic personal interviews. The interviewees were found and contacted directly, via outplacement service providers,

announcements in the social media and using professional acquaintances of the researcher herself and the supervisor of this research. The interviews were held personally by the researcher herself in order to remain the understanding and the content on the same level. The approach was about being directly in touch with the respondents in order to observe and analyse the whole interview situation, including nonverbal elements, pauses and hesitations in the answers. Due to the challenging schedules of the interviewees, two of the interviews were held on phone and two interviews were held in live sessions. All the four interviews were recorded with Audio Recorder and littered for content analysis.

The interviews were conducted in Finnish as it was the mother tongue both of the interviewees and the researcher. The length of the interviews in this research varied between a half an hour and one hour and a half depending on the interviewees' readiness and eagerness to answer the questions. The questions for the interviews were presented in an interviewer-administered questionnaire and the interviewees did not have possibility to see the questions in advance. The questions were formulated so that the key concepts became evident for the interviewees before answering. There were fifteen beforehand formulated questions to each interviewee, and depending on the handled issue and the interviewees responses to them, the total amount of questions during each interview varied between fifteen and thirty.

The advantage of this kind of unstructured interview is the highly individualized, contextualized and relevant nature both to the participant and the researcher. This type of interview demands good interpersonal skills and willingness to listen. It produces often insights and opinions that the researcher did not anticipate to find out. An unstructured interview is not systematic nor comprehensive. All the interviews are unique which often leads to a time-demanding detailed analysis in order to cover all the specific details of each interview. Additionally, this kind of an interview gives a good ground for generating new research questions and demands therefore some extra time and several analyses. Open-ended questions encourage the interviewee to produce more speech. Furthermore, the interviewee gets more control over what is being talked about. They also give more detailed answers due to the open-ended

questions. (Eriksson et al. 2008, 82-84)

The questions were changed after the first interview and analysis in order to guarantee valid results. The questions varied also between the interviews but each interview included the same construction in the topics that were handled. These topics were constructed in order to answer the research questions that handled following topics:

1. The elements in the outplacement process

2. The role of the outplacement trainer

3. Career identity change in the process

The analysis often starts with within-case analysis that is the analysis of each interviewed individual case separately. In multiple-case studies, this phase is usually followed by comparison of the cases in order to find similarities and differences between the cases and in contrast to the theory. This is called cross-case analysis. In addition to coding, the individual case analysis often contains drafting a general description of the case in chronological order or in thematic order. The chronological order emphases events, actors and processes while thematic order emphasises themes, issues, problems and conceptual categories. This description aims to construct meanings by linking empirical patterns (themes, events, processes) to each other in order to form a holistic configuration of the case. (Eriksson et al. 2008, 130.)

The unit of analysis of this case study were individuals that have gone through an outplacement process in a way or another. The collection of the right data to address the research questions was ensured by formulating the questions for the interviews accordingly. Each interview was transcribed and analysed individually before the next interview was held. This was done in order to ensure repetition of questions that would produce redundant or already achieved information. The collection of new interviews was stopped after they did no longer produce further new insights for the research. The used data analysis technique in this research was coding for content analysis. The software used for analysing the data were Microsoft Word and Excel

that were used for categorizing the answers according to the information they re-vealed.

The data of the research was analysed according to the attributes affecting self-cate-gorization in the social identity theory and the concept of career identity. The stud-ied attributes of the research were gender, age, program length, individual charac-teristics, attitude, motivation, career identity change and the expressions that were used for describing the relation with the outplacement trainer, the quantity and the sort of the faced problems and the relation with the past, present and future career.

The transcription of the interviews resulted in 22 pages of data. The data was then reduced according to the attributes for self-categorization of social identity theory. This meant that only the data was reduced and coded for analysis. The responses and the original citations in the interviews were changed to plain statements in order to find the core idea and make the final reasoning. The final reasoning was eventu-ally the data that was used for the analysis. This data was coded in Excel sheets ac-cording to the three research questions.

Eventually each studied reasoning from the interviews were cross-analysed with each other in order to gain understanding and create conclusions. The thematic or-der was applied in order to be able to create holistic empirical patterns of the stud-ied topic. The data collection techniques were applied properly. By comparing and finding out similarities and differences in the responses, the analysis finally resulted in understanding.

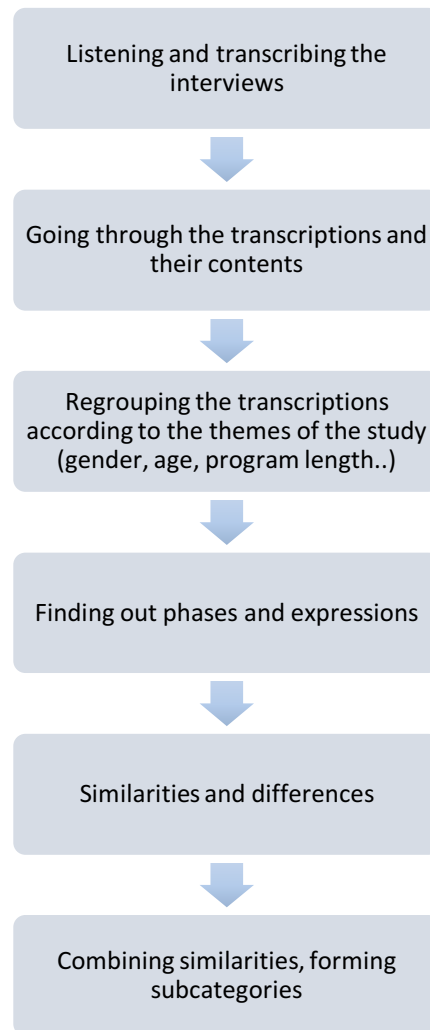The Figure 3 below describes the content analysis procedure.

Figure 3. Content analysis procedure (revision of Tuomi and Sarajärvi 2009,109.)

Table 4 below describes how the original citations were changed to plain statements and final reasoning. The reasoning formed the data that was used for analysis.

Table 4. The procedure from original citation to plain statement and final reasoning

Original citation	Plain statement	Reasoning
No testing. We have different kinds of training for personal characteristics. Our mind-set is to train people by thinking. The trainee may ask feedback for instance from the ex-colleagues. More in the way like training, not learning. We use tests very seldom. We have some of the in storage but we do not use them systematically. (Translated)	No systematic testing, but exercises for finding out the personal characteristics. Training at the same time. Getting feedback from ex-colleagues.	Strengthen the positive characteristics with exercises.
"Ei testejä. Käytetään henkilökohtaisia ominaisuuksia varten erilaisia harjoituksia, mietitään enemmän valmentaen, palautetta haetaan esim. entisiltä työkavereilta. Enemmänkin niin kuin valmentaen. Testejä tehdään harvoin, ei systemaattisiesti käytössä meidän prosessissa. Meillä on tietyt testit joita voidaan käyttää, mut ei systemaattisesti käytetä niitä."	Ei testejä systemaattisesti vaan harjoituksia henkilökohtaisia ominaisuuksia varten, valmentaen samalla. Hankitaan palautetta esim. entisiltä työkavereilta.	Harjoitusten kautta vahvistetaan positiivisia ominaisuuksia.

The original citations and plain statements were processed in Finnish as the interviewees were conducted in Finnish that is the mother tongue both of the researcher and the interviewees. The reasoning was translated in English for coding and analysis. After the process the questions were translated in English for the appendix (Appendix 1 and 2). The following Table 5. shows how the data was coded in Excel for analysis.

Table 5. Coding the data in Excel

Code 1-10	Plain reasoning	Interview number	Cell
1	F	P1	O9
2	+40	P1	O10
3	4 months	P1	O11

The studied attributes of the research were numbered in tables for analysis of each interview. There was gender (1), age (2), program length (3), individual characteristics (4), attitude (5), motivation (6), career identity change (7) and the expressions that were used for describing the relation with the outplacement trainer (8), the quantity and the sort of the faced problems (9) and the relation with the past, present and future career (10). In the Table 5 above the codes 1 – 3 represent gender, age and program length. The interview number tells in which of the four Excel sheets the code can be found. Document number describes the interview number and the cell tells the location in Excel.

3.4   Verification of the results

This research is aimed to be relevant to business branch and especially professionals on the field of management and Human Relations (HR). The trustworthiness of this research may be evaluated by credibility, transferability, dependability and conformability. With credibility is ensured the fact that any other researcher may gain the same results of the collected data. Transferability measures the ability to connect the gathered research material with the results from the prior research. This will be shown in chapter 5.2 where the findings are compared with the prior results. Dependability means the ability to create logical, traceable and well-documented research whereas conformability describes the ability to connect the research results with the interpretations in an easily understandable way. (Eriksson et al. 2008, 294.)

In this research, dependability shows in some extent in the results that will be presented in chapter 4.

The used sources of this research were reliable due to their academic nature. The referred literature consisted of articles based on doctoral dissertations and other academic studies and publications. The sources were various and data collection techniques were used in a correct way. The objectivity of the findings has been guaranteed by interpreting the results carefully and reasoned objectively. Other researchers have the ability to achieve the same findings to the degree when the interpretation of the findings starts. The generalisations and conclusions have been interpreted subjectively but based on the findings of the research.

The validity and reliability of the data was ensured by changing the questions after each interview. The findings of the research can be produced by another researcher, because the responses in the interviews did not leave any obscure elements for interpretation. The used sources were reliable and various. The theoretic framework consisted of academic literature and studies. The internal validity was guaranteed by preserving the link between the research questions, theoretical framework, methodology and results in accordance with each other. The external validity was ensured by comparing the achieved results to the prior studies.

It is possible to make generalizations based on the research when a finding in one setting can be applied more generally (Silverman 2010, 378). The findings of this research can be generalized to other context to extent when the interviewees have share same opinion on the handled issue.

4   Results

This chapter presents the results of the empirical part of this research. Four interviews were conducted with professionals in order to produce findings for the case study. Put together and analysed, they gave understanding about outplacement. The results of this study are important to people working in HR, personnel management

and outplacement. The research proved that the personal experiences in the outplacement process and talent management varied greatly depending on the expectations and openness for change, career resilience and readiness to face adversity, and possibility to change according to the environment. The ten codes that were used in the data analysis were individual characteristics, attitude, motivation, career identity change, expressions describing the trainer, the quantity and nature of the problems faced, relation to the past, present and future career. The common view based on these attributes and the results of the study are presented in the following.

Two of the interviewees were women and two men. Gender did not play a significant role in the findings. Both of the female interviewees had positive experiences of the outplacement process, whereas one of the interviewed men had negative experiences based on the outcome of the process, while the other male had a very positive view to outplacement. All the four interviewees were at +40 years of age and highly educated professionals. They were all experienced in working life. Most of the interviewees felt that the optimal length for an outplacement process was more than four months, but the outplacement trainer (T) was the only one to think the longer the better. Only one of the interviewees said aloud that outplacement was good only as business, the other three had a very positive viewpoint towards outplacement and its outcomes. All of the interviewees felt that interpersonal chemistry and especially communication with the trainer were important in the outplacement process. Only a few of the interviewees had experienced or heard of personal conflicts between trainer and participant. Three of the interviewees were motivated by outplacement, while the fourth person felt that the gained motivation disappeared after the process when it did not lead to re-employment. Three of the interviewees felt that their career identity changed or strengthened along the outplacement process. One of the interviewees felt that after the process, the career identity was strong but that with unemployment it suffered a setback.

The interviewees listed some expressions describing an outplacement trainer. They emphasized communication, listening, complete trust, sincerity and honesty, individ-

ual encounters, experience of the aimed level of the participant. One of the interviewees thought that some people would need a strict trainer in order to gain a positive outcome from the process. The interviewees were asked to list some problems they had faced in the outplacement process. Three of the interviewees thought that the problems usually had a nature that was easy to discuss thoroughly. One of them felt that the main problem with the experienced outplacement process was the lack of a new job and the lack of new contacts for re-employment. One of the interviewees mentioned that only the abuse of alcohol or other intoxicants, mental illness or lack of motivation would be an issue too big to handle in an outplacement process. The relation between the past, present and future career had been ascending for three of the interviewees. The fourth had also experienced a long ascending career, until the unemployment. Since that the person had felt that the career identity had weakened.

4.1   The nature of a successful outplacement process

According to the research data, a successful outplacement process consists of training with experienced and well-educated professionals who have been working in HR and in many different branches.

> (T) *"…we have certain requirements for the coaches, the person must have experience, for instance, from recruitment, or working as a foreman or in HR. And we educate all of our people, we have a certified education system…We are very strict about that the values of the coaches match with our company values. The values are genuinely inside of all of our concepts. It is a mind-set where we work…"*
>
> (H) *"…Outplacement is about finding the characteristics in yourself that you may bring to job interviews…When they see that you are sincere and that you have already thought through what you have to offer, and if they have need or use for it, the discussion goes on. Otherwise no."*

The interviewees were asked to describe a successful outplacement process. Interviewee T thought that the participant should have a clear way to look at herself or himself and the gained competences. Interviewee T also thought that with the aid of

a successful outplacement process the participant would be able to create new networks and contacts. T compared the outplacement process to the saying "fork in the road", meaning that in outplacement a person stands in a big crossroads, searching for direction. Instead of suddenly choosing a new direction, each bigger and smaller road is carefully examined with the help of the outplacement coach. Interviewee T stated that their outplacement was based on a daily agenda for the participant, working in a business atmosphere even if the participant was unemployed. Keeping up the rhythm in life is important, but it is essential in a change.

Interviewee T emphasized that in outplacement a close relationship between the participant and the coach is an essential element for a successful outcome. The process is about questioning and listening, being curious about the participant's personality, competences and hopes in a positive way. Interviewee T highlighted that in order to succeed, the process contained well trained, experienced and carefully chosen coaches in their company. They do not match only the company values but there is also a match between the outplacement coach and the participant in order to guarantee the best possible outcome. Interviewee T stated that it was essential that individual characteristics were taken into consideration in the outplacement process.

Interviewee T emphasized the importance of respecting the individual many times during the interview. According to interviewee T, a successful outplacement process would be characterised by a participant having no bad feelings at all towards the ex-company after being discharged. The feeling should be that of being able to go back since they had treated the person so well by offering outplacement as support for gaining re-employment.

Interviewee T stated that offering Outplacement to the employees was a matter characterizing the management culture. It was about how a specific company handles HR issues. Outplacement is used where social responsibility is respected.

According to interviewee T, it is essential in outplacement to construct the future of the individual. It is not about finding employment as soon as possible, but about

knowing what the person would like to do for the next 20 years. The contents of the procedure go, therefore, very deep into the mind of the individual.

Interviewee T emphasized that resilience and readiness to change were characteristic that would help the individual in an outplacement process. An outplacement process includes deep questions, and the procedure is about reflecting. It is not a tube with an entrance and exit where to put the dismissed people.

Interviewee H emphasized the significance of sincerity in an outplacement process several times. In the process, it is essential to find the best expertise in the person. This expertise may then be presented to companies who buy it if they have use for the offered talent. Interviewee H stated that a job interview is a wrong place to start underestimating oneself and one's competences. It is important to bring up the best in the person, and the interviewing company decides if they find the competence useful for them. Preparing for the interviews is one of the main issues in an outplacement process.

Interviewee H characterized outplacement as a process where the participants learn to repack and present their individual expertise. According to interviewee H, the essential issue that can be learned in outplacement for the future job interviews is to adopt the following mind-set: *"What I have to offer instead of what I could get from you"*.

> (H) *"… it is self-reflection, what I am, what I can, what things affect my behaviour, concrete examples"*

> (H) *"…what you can do for your salary, nobody can do it for you, you need to find it in yourself"*

> (H) *"The same basic things matter at all levels. Attitude! Often there are basic things to reach in order to gain the salary. The clients pay the salary and you need to bring value to the company that hires you"*

Interviewee H emphasized that presenting the skills in the job interview is the issue that decides the recruitment, not personality. Therefore, the outplacement participants are taught to give all their best but without acting or trying to pretend. Honesty and sincerity were characteristics that were emphasized several times by interviewee H. Additionally, interviewee H stated that an outplacement participant should

be curious in order to succeed in the outplacement process. Along the way of the process, the thinking will change and the person learns to repack the skills and competence into a solid package that is easy to sell in the job market. The outplacement participant learns to market and sell the gained competence. The interviewee H emphasized the meaning of receptiveness and motivation for the best possible outcome. The outplacement participant has to be motivated for a change and ready to participate the process with the whole personality. Considering different age groups, the interviewee H stated that outplacement does not recognise any ageism: the essential is to have enough power to proceed with the process and will to the needed skills. Essential is to sell something the recruiter wants to buy, the employment comes beside. Skills and competence will always be highly valuated. Interviewee H emphasized the importance of keeping up the personal value on the market.

> (H) *"… the recruiter looks at a person thinking if he or she is vigorous and equipped with a competence that is needed. And if the person is eager to work…I have seen many people in their fifties who clearly have the engine running. They have high competence and they have been outplaced in a brilliant way! It is the attitude, it surely shows."*

Outplacement demands absolute trust in both ways. The elements that would cause absolute "no go" to an outplacement process according to the interviewee H are mental problems, alcoholism or lack of interest. The outplacement process does not contain any psychological training but peer support is very strong. According to the interviewee H a successful outplacement process lays on trustworthiness and it can be read from the basic things. Only if they are right, there can be success. Additionally, values are an important issue. For the best possible outcome, the personal values need to match with the values of the organization.

The interviewee H stated that usually the outplacement processes have been successful as people like to be helped. Outplacement and life per se is learning all the time. Learning from the past, from the present moment, making plans for the future and learning from adversity. According to the interviewee H an outplacement process is making a plan and sticking to it. The outplacement participant needs to learn *an elevator speech* of 10-15 seconds to tell what he or she has to offer. This will be

reached by discussions with the trainer and peer participants, by tests, by listening and solving different issues, by writing a diary and by learning from oneself.

The interviewee P1 has got a better position by outplacement. The actual job includes more various tasks than the previous one, and the person had also became a superior. Nowadays the work of P1 is quite similar to the earlier work, but the environment is more interesting, challenging and motivating. The interviewee P1 emphasized the importance of fitting the personal values together with the job. The person's values match better with the actual work and company culture.

> (P1) *"The outplacement process in itself did not have any demands. I only needed to participate. The process was well organized and very well arranged. I could participate whatever I liked and what ever I felt important to me. I could say that what was essential for me, was organizing and updating the CV. It was long time since I had been unemployed. It helped me so much! And then I could ask anything that came up in my mind via them. I could ask directly. I had one personal trainer and several courses that I could take whenever I wanted to and if I wanted to."*

The interviewee P1 felt that the outplacement process offered support, both mental and practical advices. The person felt that the self and the knowledge got updated. The process offered a possibility to go through the personal history, knowledge and know-how and helped expressing and documenting it. Motivation was important and helped knowing the "real me". Defining the competences and having discussions with trainers and peer group was rewarding.

According to interviewee P1, updating the CV took a lot of time but it was the most important task to do. The process included thinking, taking time to consider. One essential thing was to seek only places with interest. The outplacement process was measure-made for the interviewee P1. The person recommended strongly outplacement to others too. The process included possibilities to train with many outplacement trainers with various expertise, advices and contacts.

The interviewee P1 expressed that the outplacement process included a creation of a profile with the help of tests. There was a lot of time to think and get advises. The

importance of the experienced people in helping others in outplacement got empha-sized in the interview of P1. The results of the process were visible; new job that re-sponds the personal values, more pay and inspiring challenges. Although, the inter-viewee P1 thought that also a failure of losing a job needs to be treated somehow, people should not give up. The interviewee P1 told a story about a peer participant that had not gained re-employment after the process, and despite the good new ways to look at the competences – that were learned in the outplacement –, the friend seemed to have gone back to the old habits of seeking a job. The interviewee P1 wondered, if there will be anyone to help the outplacement participants after the process. People might need support also afterwards. As outplacement always is paid by the previous employer, this after-placement-support does not exist. Interviewee P1 had not felt any ageism in the job market.

> (P2) *"…perhaps it could have been better if I would have got more con-tacts, for instance contacts to the companies that take direct applicants or head-hunters… I got some paper with contacts but I would have ex-pected possibilities to discuss or present myself, perhaps it would have helped me."*

The interviewee P2 had worked on director level until the outplacement process. The person described the outplacement as a process that corresponded the description. The participants were getting skills for the search of a new job and above all, updat-ing the CV and LinkedIn -profile was essential. Interviewee P2 felt that some im-portant contacts to were missing from the outplacement process. The person had ex-perienced that the outplacement process was motivating but something was missing. The length of the process was four months, and P2 felt that it was enough but it did not include all the expected elements. The interesting point was that the interviewee P2 did not remember the contents of the outplacement process correctly. Inter-viewee P2 mentioned that the outplacement process did not include any measure-made functions. P2 stated that the director level was not observed well enough in the process. Based on this it may be concluded that the process did not reach the person P2 in the right way. Perhaps the trainer was unexperienced, perhaps there were conflicts or a bad climate for cooperation, or perhaps the person was not equipped with the right attitude, not motivated or got frustrated during the process

of due to the unemployment. As the meaning of outplacement is to go deep in the person's competences and hopes, values and expectations, it could be expected that the process would bring in mind some details also a few years later. Preferably the outplacement process offers experiences as the basic thought is to work from the individual hopes and needs.

The interviewee P2 felt strongly that ageism causes unemployment. The person emphasized that the most important thing to participate an outplacement process is to receive a job. Meeting other people in the same situation helped a lot the outplacement participants. Interviewee P2 got good help for updating the CV and LinkedIn profile and gained other practicalities but however, it was not enough. Nevertheless, interviewee P2 still is hopeful to regain employment. In the beginning, P2 was not eager to become an entrepreneur but perhaps it is the only way for to get employment. The interviewee P2 admitted the disappointment, but stated that the outplacement trainers did their best to help. Unemployment was an unpleasant surprise.

> (P2) *"The re-employment does dot need to happen immediately, but in general it is essential. The most important thing to participate the outplacement process is to gain re-employment. They offer good tools for it and help creating the CV and LinkedIn profile. I got good help with them, practical help with essential things at that phase. But for me that was not enough. I am still unemployed."*

> (P2) *"Outplacement is good as a business, and of course it is a way to calm down the person that has been laid off... It would be interesting to see their statistics: how often the outplacement process has lead to re-employment and especially with the older participants. But in general, it is good that these companies exist and I'm sure they do their best."*

4.2   The role of the trainer in the outplacement process

The interviewees were asked to define the role of the outplacement trainer in the process. One of the interviewees emphasized characteristics as positive curiosity and

individual touch, personal history, HR and recruitment experience, education, matching values with the outplacement company.

The interviewee T also stated that it is essential to the trainer to find out what motivates the participant, whether it is more towards a new or the old professional identity that the participant is willing to head for. For the interviewee T it is important not to make sudden solution but create real benefits in the long run for the individual participating in the process. Offering networking and cooperation were important elements but also arranging regular meetings, possibility to train with different coaches was mentioned. According to the interviewee T the trainer needs to be committed sincerely in the company and the business in order to support the participant. The interviewee stressed the importance of the development of the trainers own competence. There should be done careful work on the background and the trainer needs to have a clear plan for the individual process without the trainee's knowledge. The participant should not feel any hurry in the process, but at the same the trainer has to be able to manage the process according to the individual. The interviewee T stated that the participant has a possibility to change the trainer but this option very seldom gets used. According to the interviewee the main task of the trainer is to find out the deepest will of the participant concerning the future work. Optimal program length according to the interviewee T is 6-8 months when the participant gains the most.

> (T) *"… we do not use psychological tests. We do different kinds of practises in order to define the personal characteristics. We think more in coaching way. We seek for feedback for instance from earlier colleagues. We test people very seldom, they are not systematically in use in our process."*

> (T) *"It is like standing in a fork of the road, and each way will be carefully examined" "Everything is done with regarding the individual"*

> (T) *"The coach has to be in a positive way curious about the participant's situation"*

> (T) *"The coach has to help the participant to clear out the situation and the interests"*

> (T) *"Depending on the individual, we go through the practises the participant has done between the meetings… for instance we work on the*

CV or work on the key competences or just discuss about the hopes about becoming an artists or starting studying something new…the coaching sessions vary a lot depending on the participants personality and hopes"

The interviewed head-hunter emphasized the genuinity and the meaning of being honest.

(H) *"…we do not believe on sucking up or on pretending in our processes. You can see immediately if a person is sincere or not, if he or she tries to get the job by pretending. It does not go that way. At the end it's the same if you sell the company products or your own competence. Practically it does not have any significance."*

(H) *"…interested in different things, studied them a bit and developed as a person in a right way…"*

(H) *"Outplacement and head-hunting support each other very well, so if the trainer has experience from both outplacement and head-hunting, he or she has a lot to offer"*

The interviewee H's own career has been successful but surprising, filled with contacts with various people. The interviewee stated to feel doing meaningful work when people feel receiving things. The interviewee sells headhunting services, offering extra brain and deeper thinking. This means checking the skills and knowledge of the participant when eventually the re-employments is secondary product from the process. The interviewee H emphasized the meaning of the outplacement trainer's experience and faced adversity that brings visions and credibility, trustworthiness and success in life itself. Good discussion skills are essential and in order to observe well as an outplacement trainer, he or she should be experienced in a large scale.

The interviewee H stated that outplacement and headhunting support each other. The outplacement trainer needs to be helpful, considerate and good with people. It is important not to pretend. There should not be any flattering. Instead, being sincere is essential because people can see the difference. The interviewee H emphasized that at the end there is no difference whether a person sells the company products or his or her own competence and expertise.

The interviewee P1 considered that some people may need stricter trainer than others, stating that perhaps the trainer should be chosen by matching the personalities

with the participant. During the process the relationship with the trainer is very close. The interviewee P1 emphasized the trust and honesty as essential qualities of the outplacement trainer.

> (P1) *"Actually I became very close with my trainer, in a matter in fact I had a few close trainers…the people working there were very easy to work and discuss with…It was very easy for me to talk to my responsible trainer… I was extremely honest to myself…"*

Also interviewee P2 emphasized the importance of the good chemistry between the outplacement trainer and the participant, not to mention good communication skills. Interviewee P2 considered that the choice of the trainer may affect the results of the process. However, interviewee P2 considered that the age or sex of the outplacement trainer does not have impact on the results, nevertheless, it would be good the trainer to have experience especially if the outplacement participant has experience from the executive level. Interviewee P2 states that at the end, outplacement is a business and helping people survive from the shock of unemployment is the outplacement trainer's job.

> (P2) *"Age of the trainer does not have any effect on the results. But of course, if the outplacement participant seeks for a higher position as a director or manager, it would be good the trainer to have experience from these kind of positions and trainees. Otherwise young trainers can surely be experienced. I'm sure the age and sex affect the outcome."*

4.3   The creation of new career identity

The interviewees were asked whether the outplacement process affects the participants' career identity. Interviewee T considered that as the work life of today has faced dramatic changes and the employment relationships no longer last as long as in the history, individuals might have a portfolio of professional identities in the future. This means that the individuals may be equipped with several identities along their careers since the the changes of today are fast and sudden.

> (T) *"The speed is so high that everything will change during a generation. Possibly we will have several career identities during our working life. We can have many identities. That would mean that in the future we will have a portfolio of different identities."*

(H) *"Actually I think that a person has to be curious to enter this kind of a process. Nobody can form another person without the person's own influence on the process. When a person individually participates in the work in order to make a change, when somebody brings elements with interest and evolves the thinking…learning is to think in a different way than before"*

(H) *"During an outplacement process the individual kind of makes a crusade in the personal professional competence. Afterwards, the person is able to make visible the professional competence and skills. In a way, the person is able to pack the competence in a concrete way. The outcome of the process is like this phone: after outplacement the person may hold and look at this phone from different angles and study how it works, and easily give a description of it. After outplacement the person may easily show what he or she has to offer, do you have need for this competence?"*

Interviewee H stated that people look at the qualities of the others through their own personality. According to H an outplacement participant should be curious in order to succeed in the Outplacement process. As with other education, outplacement aims to change the thinking. The person learns to repack the skills, competences and knowledge into a solid package that is easy to sell for employer in a recruitment process. Then, when selling the competence the recruiter "buys the product" if it is something the company is in need of, and if not, there will be other companies for the candidate to sell the repacked competence. The point of interviewee H was that it is not a duty for the companies to employ people, in fact the employment is a side product of the company's invention to sell something so valuable that the clients are ready to pay for it. Finally, the clients pay the salary. What is essential is to sell something the customer wants to buy, the employment comes beside. According to the interviewee H, the outplacement participant should be receptive and motivated for a change, ready to throw in the whole personality.

Interviewee P1 had got better position with the help of the outplacement process. The actual work includes more various and challenging tasks and becoming a superior was a totally new experience. Interviewee P1 emphasized the meaning of motivation in outplacement process. Knowing the real innermost and being able to define the competences has deepened the career identity. The discussions with the peer group, outplacement trainers and the previous colleagues have affected the career

identity in a positive way. With the help of the offered options and motivation the interviewee P1 has got very high professional identity. The actual work offers total meaningfulness and valuableness, that has not been able to be reached in the previous position.

> (P1)*"Pratically it was about finding out what I have done in my life earlier. I did not have it figured out really before. When going through the competences I realized, Oh my god, I have done this and that, this is evident and this belongs here… The process was something I had not realized at all earlier. Others do not know anything about my competences if I cannot bring it out and show it."*

Interviewee P2 considered that due to the unemployment the outplacement process went wrong. However, the hope to have a job in the future remains, although the career identity has got weaker as the professional level has suffered. The interviewee P2 has been forced to apply jobs that do not correspond the previous professional level as director. The prolonged unemployment has entailed frustration and lack of self-confidence that has affected the career identity negatively. The interviewee P2 has been searching similar kinds of jobs as the earlier position but also jobs with lower position than the earlier. The interviewee P2 had lost hope for re-employment and thought possibly becoming an entrepreneur in the future. In conclusion interviewee P2 stated that outplacement calms down in the beginning but wondered how many people eventually get re-employment by outplacement eventually. In this case the main reason for the prolonged unemployment was ageism according to the interviewee P2. It seemed that the interviewee P2 felt a loss of the professional value.

> (P2) *"My career identity has changed after the unemployment and the outplacement process. I do not believe any more that I could find work in the director level anymore. So actually only jobs in the lower level may be open for me in the future."*

> (P2) *I have been searching for work from the same level (director), and also from a bit lower level too. I have also applied jobs that do not exactly match with my earlier competences. A little this and that."*

> (P2) *"We also discussed the possibilities of becoming an entrepreneur and I got good tips for it. The issue is still a little open, but now it seems that perhaps entrepreneurship is the only way for me for re-employment."*

4.4   The overall picture of the results

The figure 4 below describes the results of the research by an overall picture.

A successful outplacement process

Prolonged unemployment may affect career identity negatively

Satisfying employment, matching values, defining the competences

Individual guidance, honesty, steering the proces smoothly but without hurry, sincerity, communication, positive curiousity

Figure 4. Overall picture of the results

Most of all a successful outplacement process includes a satisfying new job that matches the personal values. The outplacement process helps the participant to define the core competences and productize them. The role of the outplacement trainer is to offer personal guidance by sincerity and honesty, steer the process smoothly but without any feeling of hurry. The meaning of communication is essential so the trainer needs to have good social skills. Positive curiosity of the participant's situation is a characteristic that helps the trainer to reach the right level for the support. Outplacement may affect the participant's career identity in a negative way if the re-employment is not reached in a reasonable time after the outplacement process. Additionally, a successful outplacement process seemed to affect the

career identity in positive way. The professional identity with both in-group and out-group seemed stronger after re-employment.

4.5 The limitations of the results

The results are based on qualitative case study only. Therefore, there would be a need for quantitative studies or a bigger sample on other branches in order to be able to evaluate and generalize the results in practise. However, as Silverman (2010) suggests, qualitative researches tend to regard a relatively small number of cases in order to create understanding. In this research, studying the unremarkable, the routine and the ordinary about outplacement was examined from four viewpoints.

The empirical part of the research faced unexpected challenges as it proved to be extremely difficult to find interviewees for the research, especially participants to an outplacement process. This fact may have affected the results also as the individuals that agreed for the interview also might have more positive view on the issue. The outplacement service providers do not reveal their customers' names, so contacting the participants had to be done with other means and acquaintances. Luckily one interviewee led to another. Additionally, as the fact is that outplacement is always paid by the company laying off, perhaps it is not as used in Finland as it could be. It seems that the trend is more like the companies would prefer to save in all possible costs. Outplacement is a choice of responsible companies. It is worth hoping that the companies offer more support for the laid off in the future and talk more openly about the issue. It is also possible that outplacement is not yet very commonly used here in Finland.

The chosen approach, using social identity theory as a background and collecting the data from the field of business and HR for a case study, offered a large and multilateral view to the studied topic. Perceiving outplacement from different angles – participants, recruiters and outplacement trainers offered a possibility to create understanding from different perspectives. Yet, the research and the results would possibly have got more comprehensive if there was a possibility to examine the viewpoint

of a person buying outplacement services, in other words a company representantive laying off people. That could have imported the research a continuum describing the aspects from the whole outplacement process from the beginning until the end.

5   Discussion

The social identity theory studies group membership and behaviour. The analysis of the interviews of this research showed one central point that was repeated. The first thing in an outplacement process is to encourage the participant and reload the self-confidence. This is followed by regaining the trust on the possessed expertise. Being laid off is always a shock as the individual loses a part of the group membership. The influences on the behaviour appears in many ways. It takes time to reconstruct the "new me" and resilience is a quality that helps in the process. With the aid and support of a competent professional outplacement trainer this process may become more comfortable to tolerate. The process may even become an enjoyable way to examine the alternative career paths that have earlier lied in dreams only. During the outplacement process the competence of the participant will be carefully examined and repacked in a compact form that is easy to present in future job interviews.

In this research the theoretical framework was based on the social identity theory that points out following actions:

- Self-categorization
- ingroup/outgroup

  Social identity can be seen as an ongoing process of interaction between the individual and the focal group (ingroup), and also between the individual and other groups (outgroups) (Korte 2007, 168-170).

- unique needs
- motivation
- coping

The same elements appeared in the questions of the interviews and mainly also in the responses of the interviewees.

The potential contribution of this research to knowledge is inform the employees and the organizations about outplacement, strategic personnel management and talent management. The findings of this research may be used in favour of the HR professionals, recruiters and laid off employees participating an outplacement process. This research creates understanding about outplacement in practise and gives insights for support whenever there is a need to lay off people in a correct and productive way. Outplacement is a topic that is socially significant, but quite little studied in Finland. As the working life is in a change in our society outplacement will most likely get more usual in future.

5.1   Answering the Research Questions

This research aimed to create understanding on a successful outplacement process. The research questions were

1.   Which elements construct a successful outplacement process?
2.   What kind of role does the trainer play in the outplacement process?
3.   How has an outplacement process affected an individual's career identity?

The following chapters reveal how the aim was reached and what kind of shortcomings the research included.

5.2   Comparing the results with prior literature

One of the interviewees (P1) that had participated in an outplacement process had received a job that suits the personal values better than the original job where the participant was laid off from. Both the interviewed outplacement trainer (T) and the Head-hunter (H) thought that one of the qualities of a successful outplacement process is sincerity to oneself and the personal values. In conclusion it can be stated that the outplacement process should support the individual characters. The study of Martin and Lekan (2008) ended up with the same conclusion by stating that tailoring according to unique needs and personality is essential in outplacement.

Additionally, Gowan and Nassar-McMillan (2001) concluded that the counselors should understand and be willing to accommodate the individual characteristics. The primary managerial implication of their study was that the personality of the participant has a significant impact on outplacement outcomes. This actual study reached the same result as the interviewee P2 felt that the process did not support enough the managerial characteristics for the future job and, as the person remained unemployed one year after the outplacement process, at the end outplacement had been more like a good business. There should therefore be some continuity after the outplacement process. There is an interesting similarity with the study of Gowan (2012) that concluded that optimistic individuals already embrace a change in their careers, whereas those who see the change in a more negative way tend to have less positive feelings, mental well-being or job satisfaction when re-employed. This issue would offer an interesting topic for further studies.

Also the study of Power (2010, 668) pointed out same kind of results. Power distinguished three dimensions of career success that can affect transition success. These dimensions were the opportunity for continuous learning (without being related to specific career goals), the opportunity to be creative and the possibility to gain more independence.

After being laid off an individual has a possibility to reflect the gained experience with the personal values and the future hopes. This process may be difficult without help from outside and outplacement trainer can then be a true help. In this research the interviewee P1 had gone through the process like that. The new job after the outplacement process matched the individual values better than the earlier position. Therefore, it is possible that if an individual is ready for a professional change and if the expectations from the future job are similar to the recent job, the outplacement process may not bring as much personal memorable experiences. This supports the findings of study of Power (2010,668) that concluded that the success of transition may be measured with subjective criteria such as opportunity for continuous learning (i.e. without being related to specific career goals), the opportunity to be creative and the possibility to gain more independence. It is possible that personal values as

subjective criteria become evident only after a longer experience or a career. At that point money no longer is the common and only way to measure personal success in the work. However, the new generation is more conscious of elements such as values and social responsibility, creativeness and independence in work as the earlier generations. The work life in future may be facing a bigger change when the teenagers of today enter the labour market.

According to the respondents a successful outplacement process includes first of all an enjoyable and challenging new job. One of the interviewed outplacement participants was still unemployed one year after the outplacement process. The same person felt that the lack of the new job is the main reason for feeling defeat after the outplacement process. Additionally, the person felt strongly that the unemployment was due to ageism. Other interviewees did not consider age as a challenge for re-employment.

Other elements affecting the successfulness of outplacement process are the possibility to carefully update the CV, getting new contacts and creating networks, getting peer support with the help of group discussions and personal discussions. Above all, complete trust and honesty are key elements in a successful outplacement process. The participant needs to be honest and sincere as to himself, as well as to the trainer. The process has to be built on trustworthiness in order to create positive results.

The interviewee H1 distinguished three qualities for excluding an outplacement process: alcoholism, mental problems and lack of interest. In comparison with the prior results, this supports the earlier studies that emphasize openness and commitment but also career resilience. Gowan (2012) concluded that employability is connected to personal adaptability and described it with attributes such as optimism, propensity to learn, openness, internal locus of control, and generalized self-efficacy. Career resilient individuals have a good ability to respond adversity. According to Martin and Lekan (2008) a successful outplacement transition depends on the willingness of the participant to listen to and cooperate with his or her counselor.

Additionally, one of the interviewees (T) thought that a successfulness of an out-placement process may be measured by the feelings of the outplacement participant towards the previous company. This kind of interpretation means that a person that eventually thinks that the experienced change has brought some positive elements in life and career is grateful for having new possibilities and without being laid off this may not have happened at all. Similarly, an individual that would feel resentful towards the previous employer might feel even worse even if the outplacement process would have brought some hope in the change. In conclusion, as Gowan (2012) also concluded, it can be stated that with the help of resilience it is easier for an individual to form new identity positions. In the study Gowan stated that it is essential that the outplacement programs adopt the psycho-social aspect of employability and design programs that help individuals in becoming both more career resilient and optimistic at the same time as they are developing traditional human capital skills.

The main **weakness** with this theory is that it suggests that all the individuals would not learn resilience by time and according to faced adversity. In a way a successful outplacement process learns this important quality to the participants. On the other hand, this means as that after the process the individuals' self-confidence would have been improved and based on sincere facts, their resilience also would have developed and they would be able to sell their skills and competences to the companies. In a way a successful outplacement process creates optimism and positive attitude that are based on improved, honest and realistic self-esteem and ability to re-pack the essential competence in a compact set for the job market. This implicates the results of La Pointe (2010) that concluded that new career identity whether revises or strengthens the old career identity.

One major drawback of this approach is that it suggests that individuals would not be as much affected by the other elements in life, the changing surroundings and the adversity in relationships, family life, health, economy and so on. As the interviewee H stated, eventually the essential is to have the ability to present the personal competence in a way that the recruiter recognises needs for them in the organization.

5.3   Improvements to the Research and Shortcomings

The research could have been processed more smoothly if the interviewees would have been easier to find. It would have been best to interview all the interviewees in the same way, personally and in a live situation. However, the reality was that the distance and differing schedules challenged the research process to the extent that two of the interviews needed to be done in phone.

Additionally, the delay between the first and the fourth interview was more than five months. The delay was caused by the challenging task to find the interviewees. Hence, it also helped the researcher to analyse the results from the earlier interviews in depth before proceeding to the next one.

In order to strengthen the validity and reliability of the data there could have been employed the triangulation techniques like analytics and quantitative techniques. However, in this qualitative case study this did not seem to be essential. The comparison to the results of prior studies indicated that the results support each other.

The aim of this research was to answer the pre-determined research questions and map out how the outplacement services have met the expectations and needs of outplacement participants. At this point it may be stated that the aim was well achieved. The research produced understanding about outplacement from different angles as the information providers were very familiar with the topic.

5.4   Recommendations from the Research

On the basis of the results of this research there are some suggestions for different groups. These groups are companies and their HR departments, employees, laid off people, outplacement trainers and outplacement participants.

The companies and their HR departments could offer more support for the employees even before laying off employees. The HR specialists in the companies could start to encourage the employees to keep the CV updated constantly. This would help also

the companies when reorganizing the tasks as the knowledge and competence of the employees already has been scanned.

To the employees, the research suggests that finding the personal competence and strengths may be helped by examining the past and present competence by breaking each little task in pieces. In the world of today, the companies and organizations make sudden and often unpredictable decisions affecting the employees' work in a way that searching for another job may become preferable. Creating an effective CV is not that easy. However, it is important to keep the CV constantly up-to-date as the environment changes rapidly. When a person with a long career suddenly finds himself in a situation without work and pay, and if there has gone a long period since the last recruitments, completing the CV and recognizing all the competences and skills may be very difficult without professional help, yet impossible. By making a good CV, the individual makes also a trip exploring the personal work history in detail. Then the self-esteem may be strengthened as the individual remarks the amount of the gained competence and diversity of the skills lying beneath as it has not been reported and written out earlier. On the basis of the research it can be stated that the outplacement process supports the self-esteem and personal image of the individual's competence, skills and hopes for the work in the future. Selling this package is not simple without a careful analysis and a vigorous sales pitch. Despite a descriptive CV, outplacement process provides the participants also with a good set of knowledge concerning contemporary job searching skills and useful contacts. A big part of the jobs of today are not officially announced. They are hidden in the organizations waiting for the right person to appear.

On the basis of the research the outplacement trainers can be suggested to keep in touch with the participants also after the process. The research revealed that often the participants themselves are in contact with their trainers every now and then. As the process is absolutely confidential, it also brings the outplacement trainer and the participant quite close each other. Some may even make friends. Although, there are cases where the outplacement process does not result in a new job. It is also possible that due to the environmental changes the unemployment may be faced again. If the

outplacement process does not help the laid off individual to get re-employment, the process should be re-started from the beginning. Often this is not possible. Somehow, the right mind-set from the outplacement process should be kept on the achieved, positive level. This is because instead of keeping up the recently learned skills people tend to go back on their earlier, more familiar behaviour. This may be avoided by organizing outplacement processes that last long enough. Hence, that is something the laying off companies should offer. Additionally, there could be available after-process-support for people who need to freshen up the learned skills and keep up the right state of mind. Perhaps some groups of "outplacement alumni" already exist. The peer help is a strong and effective way of getting contacts and discussing the actual situation. The outplacement providers might use the time after the process in favour of their business.

The research suggests that Outplacement participants should start the outplacement process by opening up their mind for new ideas and start looking at themselves with acceptance. This may be difficult at first as the self-esteem often is deeply hurt when a person is laid off. A fact that is characteristic for us Finns, starting underestimate ourselves and our competences is too easy. The research revealed that this comes up also in recruitment processes where people often start to list things they cannot do instead of bringing up the best of themselves. Applying to a job starts with a healthy self-esteem. Finding a suitable job will be easier when the individual enters the job interview with a natural state, with strong mind and beliefs on the actual competences instead of performing something imaginary. If the competences meet the company's needs, there might be a position in the company eventually. It cannot be denied that also the values both of the company and the individual need to match in order to reach the best possible results. If a person in a recruitment process acts naturally and proves to be sincere and skilled, there will be a position eventually. There will always be work for competent and honest people. Finally, outplacement is only about knowing oneself, defining the competences and selling them in an effective way.

5.5   Suggestions for Future Research

In future, it would be interesting to read how outplacement has helped people in matching their personal values and expectations with their careers after unemployment.

Furthermore, a study comparing outplacement participants' experiences from different age groups or different branches would be interesting to read. Processes may be filled with different contents, depending on the achieved competences and the environment where people come from and where they're heading in the future.

The outplacement companies do not offer data of their succession in the processes. However, a comparative national research about their way of processing, or even a quantitative study of their success in helping people to get re-employment would support the whole branch.

5.6   Closing

Working with this research has offered interesting challenges, some new contacts and a lot of possibilities to learn about HR, outplacement and career identity. As the researcher herself has been at the same time in a process of career change, the research has been helpful in developing the right mind-set and repacking the competences for the future career. To employees that may be facing unemployment, this research offers important information for creating the belief for re-employment and and some tools for selling the competence. The participants of outplacement process may find this research useful by comparing their own process with these results and by enforcing their own mind-set. Additionally, HR-professionals and outplacement trainers may find this research useful in knowing what kind of experiences outplacement has produced.

The personnel can be considered as the most important asset of an organization creating competitive advantage. Each individual has talent that can be used in favour of the organization. With the help of effective talent management, the organizations can ensure that there will always be the right person in the right job. By developing

the skills and competences of the employees the managements of the organizations may foresee that there should always be available the right person for each specific task. Nowadays, managing careers seems to be the employee's responsibility. Due to organizational changes like financial problems, changes in the market areas, strategies etc., there may come time when the employer no longer needs the special skills and competence of a specialized employee or even a bigger group of them. At that point the organizations tend to lay off people that have created their career based on the needs of the organization. The employees see the situation often as a threat and being laid off may become one of the biggest adversity in their lives. Responsible organizations take care of their employees, even when their competence is no longer needed. When laying off and thinking a little longer in the process, responsible organizations utilize outplacement services in order to help the laid off employees to update their CV's and repack their competences for re-employment. With outplacement, the organizations, that employ a big amount of people with special skills and go through unexpected big organizational changes, may take care of their social responsibility. Creating revenue by laying off people is not a sustainable choice. A change and its outcome has to be considered as a whole.

This research has proved that despite confidence and an enjoyable new job, a successful outplacement process often brings other positive effects in the participants' lives, due to the positive way the individuals look at themselves and their competences. Wellbeing comes often from inside. When an individual has a good self-esteem and has recognized the achieved competences, he or she brings welfare also around. Being sure of oneself is positive but it should be based on sincerity, not on false beliefs. The true confidence shows in the job interviews and gets the recruiters interested in the person's competences, and the possibilities the recruitment might bring along. This research showed that the outplacement trainers are career resilient, they're curious and they have a positive attitude towards change. It is a message that we should remember. A change is always a chance towards the better.

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Appendices

Appendix 1. Questions for the interviews to the outplacement participants (translated from Finnish)

1. What was your earlier occupation and what kind of tasks and competences did it include?
2. What do you do nowadays?
3. What kind of change and education the outplacement process included?
4. What kind of new skills and competences were the most essential in the process?
5. Describe how the outplacement process affected your motivation.
6. How many personal meetings did the outplacement process include? How long did the process take?
7. Were there enough meetings and with right contents? What contents did the meetings have? Did the outplacement process include a psychological assessment?
8. Life-long learning, continuous learning, are they important? Possibility to be creative? Possibility to gain more independence?
9. Describe the relationship with the outplacement trainer.
10. Were you confronted as an individual? Was the outplacement process tailored according to your personal needs?
11. Did you hope for more guidance for some special field and was it arranged?
12. Were there any important fields that were not observed in the process?
13. Describe your professional identity and career identity before and after the outplacement process.
14. Was the length of the outplacement process enough in order to rebuilt the identity for a new career?
15. Describe your career identity when you are in a group with colleagues and when you are alone.
16. How does your earlier career identity appear in your actual work? Describe the conflicts that there may have been between them.

Appendix 2. Questions for the interviews to the outplacement service providers (translated from Finnish)

1. Describe the services your company offers.
2. Have you specialized for some branch?
3. What are the lengths of the offered outplacement processes? Which of them is the most useful and why?
4. Describe a successful outplacement process. Both from the company's and the participant's viewpoint
5. Does the participant have only one or several trainers?
6. What is the role of the trainer in an outplacement process?
7. How the trainers are matched with the participants?
8. Describe the cooperation between the trainer and the participant.
9. Describe how you map the personal characteristics of the participants and how they are developed.
10. How the personal chemistry is being observed?
11. Has there been any trainer changes, for instance because of bad chemistry between people?
12. How the trainers develop their competences?
13. Are the participants analysed before and after the outplacement process?
14. How you measure the success of the process?
15. Does the outplacement process aim for change of the professional identity? Justify the answer