



# Fostering talent experience through staffing

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The work expectations of today's employees are demanding, and the competition for acquiring talent is high. The recent COVID-19 pandemic has had a major impact on the work life and has caused employees to reorganize their priorities. Further, a vast wave of resignations has occurred throughout the globe, a phenomenon called the Great Resignation. This phenomenon has arisen also in the case company of this thesis. It has become increasingly difficult to retain the current talent in the company, and to respond to the growing employee expectations. The issue can be tackled from several perspectives, but this thesis aims to specifically investigate the challenge from the perspective of staffing function and to discover how staffing can improve the employee experience. The goal was to find concrete development actions for the company that could further foster the talent experience.

The key concepts of this thesis are staffing, employee experience, employee motivation and purpose of work. Literature of these central concepts was reviewed to discover the areas where staffing can influence the talent experience. Furthermore, secondary research was conducted by reviewing the results from the previous company surveys, where staffing and talent experience had been evaluated. This background work formed the basis for the planning of the primary research, conducted as a questionnaire.

The survey provided insight to the researcher and for the case company, and the results supported the hypothesis the researcher and the company had. The research indicates that the employees do not want to be considered as "resources", but as employees actively in charge of their career development. They want to share the same values as their employer. They value autonomy, purpose, constant learning, and open communication. The main stakeholder for the career development of the employees, is the coach. Thus, the coaches and the staffing team need to have a close relationship to effectively communicate the skills and needs of the employees. Furthermore, the tools and communication of staffing are on a proficient level, but there are possibilities to further utilize them more effectively.

Keywords: staffing, talent experience, employee motivation, employee engagement, purpose of work

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## 1 Introduction

“The long-sought “secret sauce” of rising profits, stellar customer satisfaction, and sustainable growth has one key ingredient: an outstanding EX (employee experience).”

(Maylett, Tracy, and Matthew Wride, 2017.)

The job market is currently heated, and people are leaving their work for more meaningful or otherwise better work experience. Yes, not just work, but *work experience*. For talent of today it is no longer enough to get decent pay from the job well done, but the work must give more: provide social relationships, opportunities for learning, challenge minds and bring meaning to life. After all, we are spending most of our regular days at work, and we want that time be well spent.

This thesis is about fostering the talent experience. Moreover, this thesis focuses on how one business function - staffing - can help with that aim. Employee experience is an area which is explored in many researches and investigated by many researchers. However, the staffing perspective is not very common in this past research.

### 1.1 Case Organization

The study will be carried out for a case company. The case company is confidential information and will remain anonymous in this thesis. The company has already over 150 years long history and is a global leader in a service industry. 80% of Fortune 500 companies are clients for the case company. In Finland, the company employs 750 people and operates in 6 business units, serving multiple industries (Company information, May 2022). The research will be carried in two business units of the company, which are operating in management consulting business.

In the case company, staffing function is a relatively new business function. Project team resourcing has been centralized to staffing team around 3 years ago, and it has been gradually developed since. The project staffing was previously done in project teams or with help of the assistants, but in 2019 the company decided to start a new function for that work. The staffing team is still called a start up in the firm, although the team has grown from one staffing specialist to current 5 + team lead.

Since the company offers HR consulting among its services, it is evident that the company needs to live what it teaches. Talent experience is constantly under radar at the company, and current human resource (HR) trends are monitored within the company and for

customers. The company culture is to continuously monitor own performance and processes, do changes in agile way and learn and grow as a company and as people. Furthermore, the staffing team works under HR and talent team, thus considering the talent experience in the daily operations from that perspective as well.

## 1.2 Research objectives

The objective of the study is to find out how staffing can help to improve the talent experience in a management consulting company. In the case company, consultants leaving the company have graded staffing function with somewhat low grades in offboarding surveys (Offboarding survey FY19-21). Thus, the talent experience needs to be improved, and some ideas have already been identified as ways to tackle the issue.

This thesis aims to identify the challenges the current employees face and find ways how staffing function could improve the talent experience. The work is important, as the job market has been intensified lately and recruiting of new talents is getting increasingly difficult. And of course, the firm desires to keep the talent it has already invested in, in the company. The consulting business in general has rather big people turnover. In this specific case company, the people turnover has increased during the last year.

However, the rise in people turnover is not very exceptional, as the year 2021 has been a year of “great resignation”, i.e., a global phenomenon of people changing jobs. In 2020, the first year of COVID-19, the job market stalled in great extent, as people were hesitant to seek for new opportunities when the future was unclear for us all. According to YLE uutiset in November 2021, over 20 million employees in USA had resigned from their work during April 2021 to November 2021. In July 2021 as many as 4,9 million had left their jobs, resulting to almost 3% of the entire workforce of USA. (YLE uutiset, 2021; McKinsey, 2021.)

One big reason for the Great resignation has been the ability to do remote work. In many company people are leaving their jobs in case the employer demands a return to the workplace. (YLE uutiset, 2021.) In the case company the work continues in hybrid mode, so there is no strong urge for return to the office. However, remote work can be also one reason to the resignation growth. Employees have lack of belonging, as they work alone at home, and do not have the social aspect of workplace so strong in their everyday lives.

Other reason for the resignations during 2021 has been identified to be the fact that people want more purpose and meaning to their work (McKinsey, 2021). We will take a closer look at the subject in the chapter 2.3. Also, instead of getting a better salary or pay is no longer the most important factor, but rather a better balance between work and personal life. (McKinsey, 2021.) We will discuss more in a chapter 2.1 how staffing affects the work balance.

### 1.3 Research problem

Objective of this thesis is to explore how staffing can help in the case company to improve talent experience and keep the current talent in the company. To find out how, we need to understand what the factors behind the talent experience are, i.e., employee experience. Research question for the study is:

- How can staffing function help to improve employee experience?

The following chapters introduce the theoretical framework and central concepts related to this Master's thesis (chapter 2) and the methodology by which the research was carried out (3). Thereafter the findings are presented in chapter 4. The chapter 5 concludes the process and summarizes answers to the research questions. The final chapter 6 discusses the recommendations and possible future development suggestions.

## 2 Theoretical framework

The key concepts of this thesis are staffing, talent experience, employee motivation and purposeful work. These key concepts are introduced in more detail in the following sub-chapters. Figure 1 illustrates the key concepts of this thesis.



Figure 1: Central concepts and information basis

### 2.1 Staffing

In this thesis one of the central concepts is staffing. Staffing is one of the key business processes in the case company. Other terms for the same are resourcing, resource

management, or workforce planning. Also depending on the industry, it may mean many things for the organization. In management consulting company, like the case company, it refers to project resourcing: connecting open roles with matching professionals. According to Gully and Jean (2012, 1), acquiring, developing, and retaining the right talent helps to create the organizational capability and intellectual capital that drives business strategy execution.

Organization's talent philosophy and strategy determines how the company sees their employees. In some companies the employees are seen more as partners and key stakeholders, whereas in other companies they can be perceived as workforce - more expendable and easily replaceable. (Gully & Jean, 2012, 19.) In the case company employees are the company's biggest asset; something to look after and hold on to.

Jim Stedt defines in his book *Talent Balancing: Staffing Your Company for Long-Term Success* (2005, 1) staffing as talent balancing - the ability to balance the workload with the appropriate and competent staff. According to Stedt, the objective of the talent balancing is to be able to produce goods or services to meet corporate needs with a minimum number of employees working at the highest level of productivity. Furthermore, employees need to experience they are challenged, comfortable with their responsibilities, and capable of meeting their goals. Thus, they need to be motivated. Staffing is a dynamic process – it always involves a specialized methodology in recruiting staff with an objective to balancing current and future capacity and goals. It also aims to build teams that are engaged and continue to be very efficient and productive. Finally, talent balancing includes an effective management technique to keep the staff challenged and fulfilled. (Stedt, 2005, 1.)

#### 2.1.1 Measuring the success of staffing

Staffing has a profound impact on the profitability of the business and on the talent experience. Therefore, it is crucial that staffing is working as well as possible. The metrics around staffing are:

- Utilization of employees
- Project profitability
- Customer satisfaction
- Employee satisfaction

**The Utilization rate** is the rate at which we utilize the total available time of the resources, i.e., employees. It measures the productivity levels of the employees and is used in doing capacity planning and forecasting resource demand. In the case company, the utilization rate is calculated as follows:

*billable hours / standard working hours = utilization %*



Billable hours are based on the work that is carried out for a client in a project, the work that is billed from a client.

Utilization rate is monitored for forecasting of the profitability, the need for recruitments and to see if sales activities need to be focused on some specific area.

**Project profitability** is another success factor and a good metrics for successful staffing. Of course, staffing is not always fully responsible of the project profitability, but staffing can make an impact when we consider the project cost and what resources we can use to meet the profitability targets. Usually, an effective project team can achieve profitable project results. However, in the case company, meeting project profitability targets is mostly on the hands of the project manager (engagement manager), and staffing has little direct impact on that.

**Customer satisfaction** can be also considered as a staffing metrics. When the right talent has been matched with the right projects, it is more likely the customer is also satisfied.

**Employee satisfaction** is also a metric, where staffing is one component that has an impact. However, employee satisfaction derives from many components, not only from staffing. In next paragraph we are discussing on how staffing can make an impact on employee satisfaction and talent experience.

### 2.1.2 Staffing as a tool for better talent experience

In this thesis, we are concentrating on how staffing can help in improving talent experience in the case company. What are the ingredients that staffing can have an impact to?

First, staffing helps to **balance the workload of employees**. Staffing specialist monitors the utilization of the teams and employees and ensures there is no overburden or under-burden for a long period at least. The workload should be somewhat stable throughout the months. However, in a management consulting business, the work is never solid “nine to five” type of work, but the workload differs throughout the time based on the project load. Typically, there might be more work in the beginning and end of the project. If the project is carried in sprints in agile way, the workload follows the sprint schedule. Thus, in the case company one of the staffing principles are that the workload can be 120% of the worktime (i.e., 20% over the standard working hours) for a limited time, e.g., for 1-2 months in a row, and then on low season the utilization rate can be much less. The utilization target for consultants settles around in 70% within one fiscal year.

We know that the management consulting business is typically not very easily forecasted industry, and thus the workload also depends on the projects at hand. For a young professional that type of unpredictable workload might be suitable, but for an employee with

a family it may be more difficult. Staffing aims to make the work schedules more stable and predictive with better forecasts. Also, the aim is to balance the workloads between teams and team members so, that everyone has enough work but not too much to carry.

Another key element is to help employees in their career. **Suitable work offers growth opportunities for employees**; it challenges but is not overwhelming. One of the key elements of the case company is to offer learning opportunities for their employees through work: projects where they constantly learn new things either from the business or from their superiors.

Overall, matching the right talent with right projects is the key for successful staffing. This means the staffing specialist needs to consider the availability, and the capabilities and skills of the professional, but also the personal goals and needs of the talent.

## 2.2 Talent experience

What is actually talent experience? Shortly, talent experience is a synonym for employee experience. Using the word “talent” instead of “employee”, often refers more to white collar work instead of blue-collar work. A professional knowledge worker wants to be perceived as a capable talent that has one’s professionalism to offer for the employer, rather than just a generic employee. Phrase “talent” originates from the headhunting and recruitment world, where one’s capabilities create a unique talent to be sought for. In this thesis, the author uses both phrases - talent experience and employee experience - generally meaning the same thing.

As Maylett and Wride state in the beginning of this thesis, the secret ingredient of profitable business, great customer satisfaction and sustainable growth is the employee experience. According to Maylett and Wride, every important business outcome lies downstream from the experience and engagement of the people who make the organization grow. That is the reason, why talent experience is important for the organizations and for this thesis. Employee experience is about creating and operating environment that makes employees to flourish and succeed. They define the employee experience as follows:

*“The Employee Experience is the sum of perceptions employees have about their interactions with the organization in which they work. “(Maylett and Wride, 2017, 12-13.)*

Employee experience hasn’t always been in the core of businesses and on the minds of business leaders. Some decades ago, the relationship between employers and employees was much more straightforward. The dominant approaches to HRM have largely focused on performance instead of employee well-being. (Guest, 2017, 10.) The work wasn’t meant to be nice and rewarding, it was about getting the bills paid and keeping the share owners happy.

Employee was a component and had basic utilities to do the work. After the utility-era came the productivity-era. Business leaders were trying to think how to get the most out of the employee, not thinking much on how the employee would want to stay in the company. Since the employees were not robots, it came apparent, that something more was needed. Several studies found out that engaged employees are more productive, stay at the company longer, and are generally healthier and happier. It was radically new concept of focusing on employee engagement, rather than concentrating only on productivity. Employee engagement-era was already rather close to current employee experience-era, and they have a lot in common. In fact, employee experience doesn't replace employee engagement, but they collaborate. According to Jacob Morgan, employee experience is something that creates engaged employees but focuses on the cultural, technological, and physical design of the organization to do that (Figure 2). (Morgan, 2017, 4.)

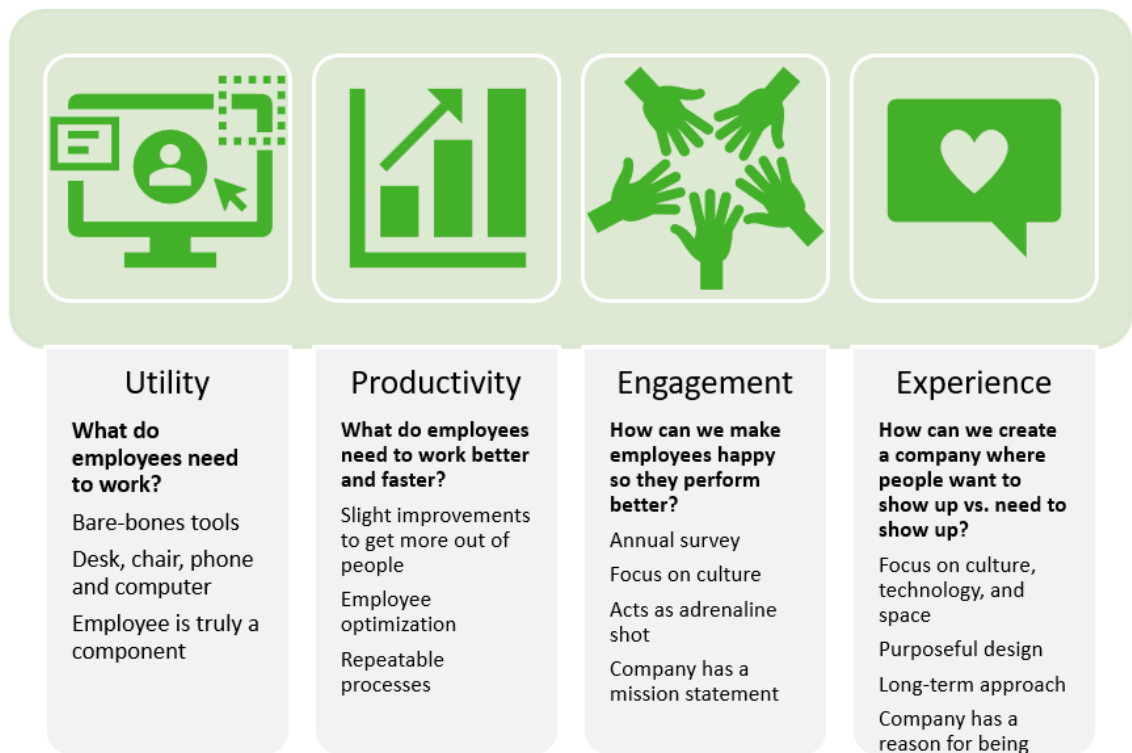


Figure 2: Evolution of employee experience (Morgan, 2017)

Also, according to a blog by US talent recruitment company Hoops HR, companies have generally placed employee engagement to the focus in a means to improve talent acquisition and retention. However, employee engagement in the end is the effect, not the cause. Talent experience is the cause that needs to be fixed right in order to improve the employee engagement. (Hoops HR Blog, 24.2.2018.)

Similarly, Morgan states that many organizations use employee engagement and employee experience interchangeably without any notable difference, which is incorrect. Employee engagement initiatives have been for example, office redesigns, culture programs, and well-being strategies. These of course make the organization look better but may have a little impact on how the organization functions. Moreover, employee engagement can be viewed rather as a short-term booster, whereas employee experience is the long-term redesign of the organization. (Morgan, 2017, 6.) According to Josh Plaskoff (2017), “we must recast our human resources processes to understand these experiences from, and create them for, multiple generational lenses”. Employees need to be perceived as purposeful, learning and experiencing people. (Plaskoff, 2017, 141.)

Talent experience starts already from the application process, pre-start communication and onboarding. During the employment journey, it will be affected for example by the leadership, training, performance reviews, promotions, work environment, company culture and colleagues. At the end of the employment, the quality of offboarding is the key, and even after the employment the alumni gatherings or company communication to outside, continue to affect the talent experience. Thus, it is far more than just a job description or paycheck; it derives from the entire employee journey. The employee journey has many milestones and interactions, and the quality of employee experiences has a direct influence on employee satisfaction, engagement, commitment, and performance (Plaskoff, 2017, 138).

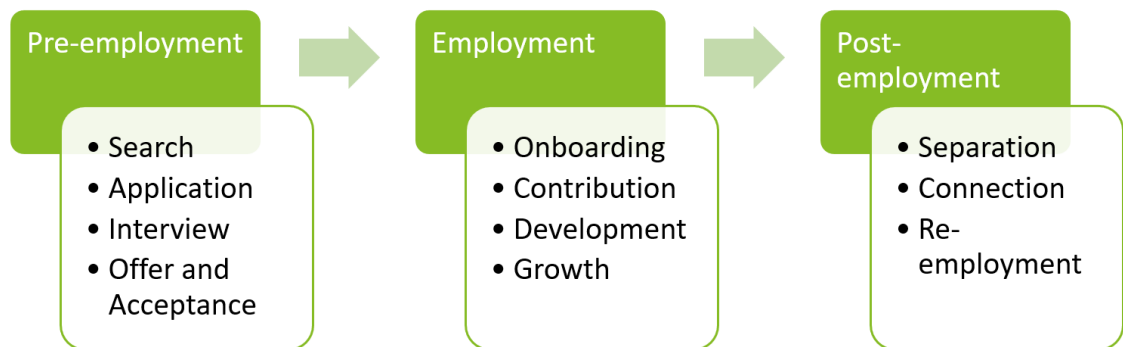


Figure 3: The employee journey (Plaskoff, 2017, 138)

However, employee experience is not the same as employee journey, or employee life cycle. What really matters for the employee experience, are the expectations and perceptions of the employee. Two employees with identical employee life cycle can have very different employee experiences. It really comes down on what are the expectations of the employee and how he/she perceives the employee experience. However, employee experience isn't only about employees' feelings either; the purpose is not to make all the employees happy, as being happy does not automatically mean they are performing well at high level. The job of a

leader is to design, build, and maintain the right employee experience so that the sum of the employees' perceptions encourages and produces the very best in people. (Maylett and Wride, 2017, 27.)



Figure 4: Expectation - Reaction triangle (Maylett and Wride, 2017)

In the expectation-reaction triangle in Figure 4 it is laid down how expectations and reactions correlate to each other. When employee's expectations are violated, the reaction is anger and mistrust. When employee's expectations are met, it creates satisfaction at employee, and if the expectations are exceeded, the reaction is happiness and loyalty to the employer. If the expectations are not met, there's usually an expectation gap. A gap between what an employee has been promised, and what she/he **thinks** have been promised. The main reason for the gap is usually a bad communication. (Maylett and Wride, 2017, 36-39.)

This is also highlighted by Laiho, Saru and Seeck in their article *"It's the work climate that keeps me here": the interplay between the HRM process and emergent factors in the construction of employee experiences*. A strong HRM system sends unambiguous messages to employees and can then create employees' shared perception of the HRM. Shared perception is defined as employees having a similar view on what type of performance is expected of them and rewarded. It can be concluded that the shared perception is the outcome of how employees experience the organization's practices and processes. (Laiho et al, 2021.)

The reason why talent experience is in the core of this thesis, is because great talent experience creates employee engagement. And of course, if the talent has been successfully recruited in the company, it should be a top priority to retain the talent in house and

satisfied. Like already discussed in the introduction of the thesis, the job market is aggressive, and it is the employees that are having the power now, not employers.

In the case company, talent experience has been brought to the center of focus, and it has been defined as having unlimited opportunities to do meaningful work and to grow, learn, and lead at every point in the career. People of the organization have the flexibility to create the career and life experience they want and they have the power of being part of a global network of talented people. (Case company website, 2022.)

Retaining the top talent is not the only reason for working on better talent experience. There are more reasons to put the employee experience in the focus. We've got familiar with the phrase "customer comes first". But what is behind the great customer experience, CX? More and more companies are noticing it is the employees that serve the customer, who are the most important part of the customer experience. Thus, while concentrating in to improving the employee experience, we are actually also getting better customer experience. (Maylett and Wride, 2017, 24.) Likewise, as customer experience and customers' expectations evolve all the time, also employee experience is a continuously evolving concept. The expectations that talent had a year ago may be completely different on what they expect today. (Hoops HR Blog, 24.2.2018.) Especially during these big social changes, we are currently living in 2022, COVID-19 pandemic and the Ukrainian war.

According to a research by MIT Center for Information Systems in 2017, companies with great employee experience clearly outperform competitors on innovation, customer satisfaction, and profitability. The research was conducted globally for 281 senior executives. This research resulted in an observation that employee experience is formed by work complexity, collaboration, creativity and empowerment. Companies that succeed in these, get advantage to their competitors. In this research, employee experience is distinct from the employee wellbeing, including the benefits and beliefs that make employees feel good about belonging to an organization. In this research the employee experience was only defined through the employee's experience of doing work. In Figure 5, the results show the differences between the business performance of companies that ranked in the top and bottom quartiles on employee experience. (MIT Cisir research briefing, 2017.)

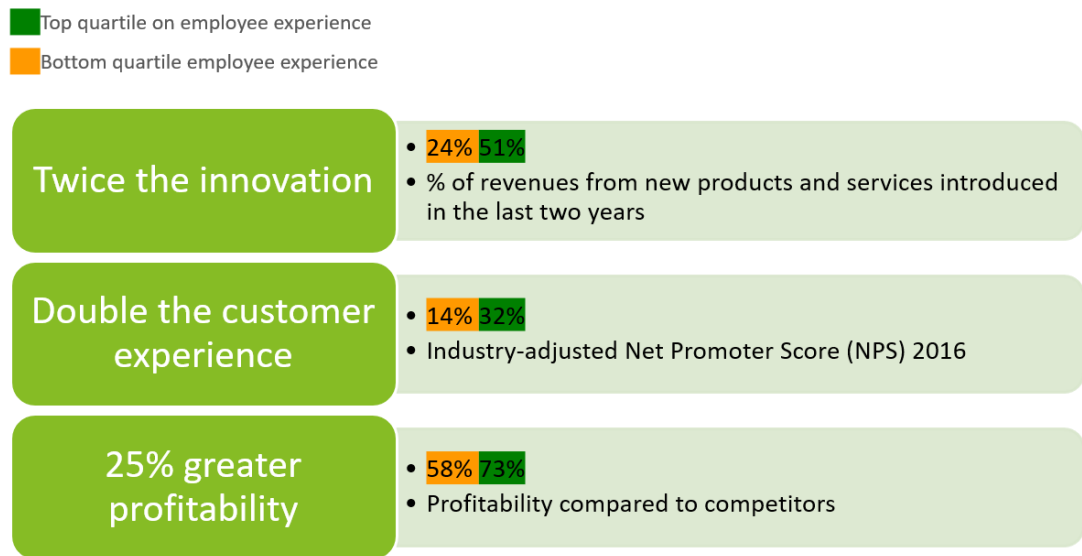


Figure 5: Employee experience predicts business performance (MIT Cisir research briefing, 2017)

It is visible, that companies with good employee experience were twice as innovative than the peers in the bottom quartile. This result is based on the percentage of revenue from new products/services in the past two years. The better performing companies enabled their employees to work together more effectively. It was also seen from the Net Promoter Scores of these companies, that the better performing companies' ability to develop new solutions and better customer experience paid off. Finally, the research indicated that those companies scoring high in employee experience, saw a 25 percent increase in the industry-related profitability. That shows that those companies were lowering costs and/or increasing revenue to shift their performance relative to competitors. (MIT Cisir research briefing, 2017.)

Similarly, Guest concludes in his study about HRM and employee well-being, that organizations are likely to benefit from a focus on well-being in terms of both enhanced performance and reduced costs (Guest, 2016, 26).

Furthermore, great talent experience helps in brand building. In fact, it does not only help in brand building, but employees *make the brand*. They are the faces customer sees, thus directly affecting the customer experience. And they are the colleagues for new employees, thus attracting new talent for the company. Great talent experience attracts the right people to the company, and in the suitable environment they are motivated and want to give their 100% in work. (Maylett and Wride, 2017, 25, 27.)

### 2.3 Employee motivation

What is motivation then? For sure it is one of the most researched areas within Human Resources. It can be defined as a driver, that makes an employee to achieve one's goal. According to Tuukka Kostamo, motivation is an important resource at work, and it can be separated to intrinsic and extrinsic motivation. Although extrinsic motivational factors are built into our work life as rewards, bonuses or promotions, it is not recommended to base our doing only on those, as it is not sustainable. To keep the employee enthusiastic about one's work, the working needs to base to intrinsic motivational factors, which make us enjoy working. An employee who has intrinsic motivation, can enjoy the workflow and does not necessarily need so much extrinsic rewards. (Kostamo, 2017, 37-38.)

Likewise, Frank Martela says in his book *Valonööri* (Martela, 2015, 75), that lightneer (valonööri) is a person, who lives his/her life guided by the intrinsic motivation, instead of just following the expected path defined by others. Also Conrad, Gosh and Isaacson argue in their research (2015) that the most important, although the most difficult, task for a leader is to inspire employees. It is difficult because the motivational factor can change over time. When the standard of living for the employee rises, the paycheck might be less relevant. Thus, it is important that the work itself is motivating.

Tuukka Kostamos' publication, *Ihan intona [Very excited]*, is about research project called *Leading Passion, How to create a culture of engagement*. The research investigates especially young professionals, Generation Y, also called Millennials. Millennials are born 1981-96, so they are 26-41 years old during the year 2022. This age group is widely represented in the case company of this thesis, so the research project is relevant and applies to the case company (case company average age in January 2022: 35 years old). According to the research, passion for work creates constant learning and growing, and vice versa the constant learning creates passion for work. In fact, the constant learning and passion for work are in central role in the future of work. When an employee is enthusiastic about work, he/she usually is also very committed to the work, and those kinds of employees are crucial for the organization, as they are more innovative and productive than employees who think they are "just working here". (Kostamo, 2017, 136.)

We are far from the industrialized era which defined the labor and work decades ago. Today's millennials and the next generation, i.e., Generation Z, are expecting more from work and want to define their roles themselves instead of work defining the worker. The discussion around future of work thus needs to focus more on how to reconfigure jobs and not to reimagine or replace them entirely. This is because artificial intelligence, automation and offshoring are streamlining the routine work, and we need to think what is left and how to reorganize that. In the past, employees were divided into standardized jobs, which were



defined by tasks, competencies and skills. An employee was defined by his/her past experience, education and skills. Now many of the tasks can be automated and jobs has to be reconfigured. In the below Figure 6 Cantrell describes how today's work should be reconfigured now, and how it could look like in the future. (Cantrell, 2021.)

There are many ways to organize the work to match the current needs. For example, work and the capacity of employees can be fractionalized into smaller pieces, and then better match the demand and supply. More broadly, work can be organized by extensive commitments, so that workers are given direction on what to achieve, but they can figure out how to solve and navigate to the solution. This gives autonomy to the employee, and thus also increases motivation. (Cantrell, 2021.)

However, in consulting type of work the amount of automation or AI that can be used, is limited. Management consulting is a human centered work, and not only needs logical thinking but ability to reapply. Nevertheless, the work organization similarly needs to be reconfigured for tomorrow's model. Automation in tools is essential, and the roles and career development paths of consultants are changing and becoming more versatile. In the end, that is exactly what the management consulting business aims to: convincing the client that they do not need to have all the needed talent for example for IT strategy change in house, but they can rely on outside help, i.e., the management consulting company.

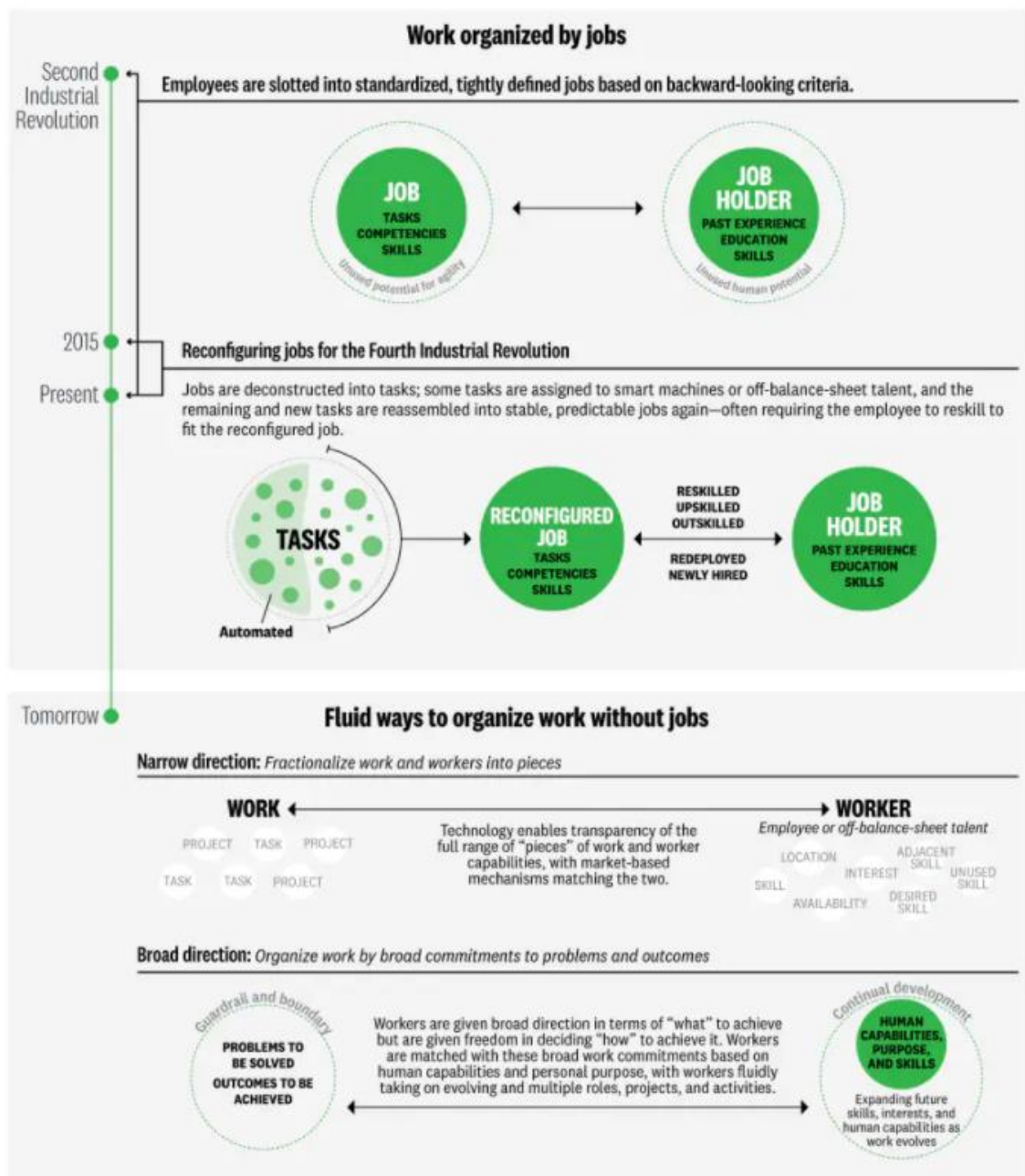


Figure 6: Work beyond jobs (Cantrell, 2021)

The past two years have been exceptional within everyone’s work life, due to COVID-19. In the professional business most people have been working remotely if not all the time, at least most of the time. This change has been rapid and made many of us miss the human aspect in work. The time has been unsecure, even from the safe of the home. All the rapid changes, the isolation and increasing workloads, has made us tired. Many employers are trying to fix the problem by paying bonuses or other financial perks, but that only has made employees think their actual needs are not met. The current motivational factors for many white-collar

employees and professionals are empathy from the leaders, flexibility, connectivity, and sense of unity and purpose in work. (McKinsey, 2021.)

Mirva Puranen, Development Manager of Finnish Unemployment Fund (YTK) writes in her blog (August, 2021) about the same phenomena in Finland. According to Puranen, it is visible also in Finnish employment market that people are seeking jobs that match their values. (Puranen, 2021). Also Taru Tujunen, CEO of communication agency Ellun Kanat, writes in Helsingin Sanomat, that employees are now looking for sustainability, purpose and values in their work. Employees see their work more closely part of their life and not as a separate item, “just work” (Tujunen, T, Helsingin Sanomat, 2021). However, a yearly Talent Shortage Survey carried through by ManpowerGroup in 2021, showed that employees’ and employers’ needs are not always connecting. Survey found out that 80% of employees want better balance in their work life and personal life, and that the flexibility of the remote work mode can be continued. However, 69% of the employers expect that employees are returning fulltime in the office as soon as the restrictions ease. Also, in the survey, almost 70% of the employers tell they have difficulties to find appropriate talent to the jobs they have. (ManpowerGroup, 2021.)

According to Maylett and Wride, the meaning and impact are one of the most important things for good employee engagement. Engaged employees are crucial for the company, as engaged workforce translates to high customer satisfaction scores, high customer loyalty, stronger growth, and higher profits. It also means lower turnover and lower recruitment costs. It can even mean happier employees through less stress at the workplace. (Maylett and Wride, 2017, 28.)

Also, according to researchers Sunyoung Oh and Sang-Choong Roh (2019), previous studies have shown that perceived work meaningfulness shows positive relations with work engagement, job performance, career and organizational commitment, job satisfaction, and mental well-being. Furthermore, evidence provided by meta-analytic review suggests that perceived work meaningfulness is the most important psychological state through which motivational job features can affect work motivation (Humphrey et al., 2007). The research by Oh and Roh (2019) indicates, that the level to which individuals feel a clear and coherent sense of themselves plays an important role in their perception of their work as purposeful and significant. In the next chapter, we will look at more closely to the meaning and impact of work, i.e., the purposeful work.

### 2.3.1 Purposeful work

In the previous Chapter 2.3 we already discussed about employee motivation and what factors have an effect on that. In this chapter we discuss more about how especially purpose in work impacts talent experience. Also, we aim to find out how staffing can create purpose in work.

In his book “Valonöörit” (Lightneers), Frank Martela (2015, 49) introduces 4 psychological basic needs for human. Those are proximity, doing good / charity, being able / own capacity and autonomy. There are of course many other basic needs for humans as well, but these are the ones Martela thinks are essential for a good life. These needs are built through evolution, and “built in” our systems. Martela has created a motivation diamond, which illustrates the basic psychological needs of humans.

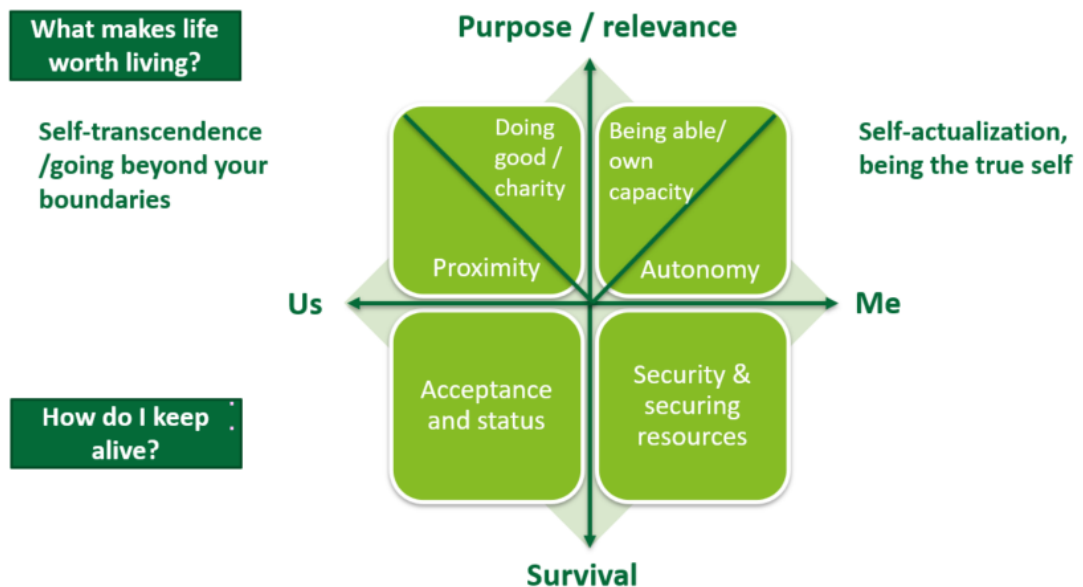


Figure 7: Motivation diamond (Martela, Frank, 2015, 94)

On top of the diamond (Figure 7), are the needs that make one’s life worth living, and in the bottom of the diamond lies the more basic needs. Valuable life, which is supported by humane growth, is born when a person can be his/her true self and can fulfill his/her life goals. Self-actualization is the complete realization of one’s potential, and the full development of one’s abilities and appreciation for life. Being able to do things that make the person happy, and not fulfilling anyone else’s ambitions or needs. Autonomy comes from the fact that the person feels as he/she can decide on what he/she wants to do. Doing is voluntary and self-directed. Doing is not forced from outside, but the will comes from the person inside - he/she feels the doing is relevant. Autonomy is supported by capacity - the person thinks he/she can manage the work he/she needs to do and is able to manage them

with success. Also, the learning experience is a key part of the capacity - the feeling that the capacity is growing. (Martela, 2015, 50-51.)

These basic needs are something that staffing in a consulting company can influence. The autonomy is very important for highly educated professionals, and they would not like to be forced to do projects that they feel are not in connection to their values. Of course, Staffing Specialist cannot influence what is sold to customers and what sort of projects we need to find talents for, but staffing can affect the way we communicate the coming projects. It is important not just to add a pile of tasks to someone's table, but to ask if the employee has the time and interest on the project at hand. Even if we would know the employee does not have a real chance to say no, for example because he/she is out of project work or is the only professional with the needed skills - he/she is still asked and offered the work and can have the feeling of choice. For a feeling of capacity and being able to manage the work, staffing has a profound impact on. Staffing is the key function to find the matching talent and employees that also have time available. Also, it would be important for a Staffing Specialist to know what the learning goals for the employees are, so Staffing Specialist can find matching projects for those career goals as well.

On the other side of the diamond in the upper left corner are things that relate to us - me and other people. Humans are social animals, and the experience of the value of one's life is greatly tied to others. The way others perceive us, and the way others react and relate to us, is an utmost importance to us. Self-transcendence or going beyond one's own boundaries in this concept means how we connect to all each other and how that creates value to our lives. That is divided to two separate psychological basic needs. (Martela, 2015, 52.)

Proximity or feeling of a connection is born when one feels surrounded by people that one cares, and they care him/her. It is a connection to the people around us, and the feeling one has when being seen and heard. We need to be loved, cared and supported. We also want to be good to those people we care. Doing good / charity relates to the feeling that we want to create good around us. We want to feel that we have a positive impact on the people around us, and the world around us. Doing good / charity is a very powerful source of good in our lives. When creating something positive around us, it contributes very effectively to our own wellbeing. (Martela, 2015, 52-53.)

For these psychological needs, Staffing Specialist alone can have little impact on. These, however, are something that company culture and HR can greatly influence on. It is very important in a professional company that the employee can feel safe and cared for, especially during this current COVID-19 pandemic and all the remote work related to that. What Staffing Specialist can do for these attributes, is to be the go-to-person for whatever staffing related needs and issues and offer a helping hand for project managers for any

administrative, schedule or project team issues. Communication is the key; how we communicate to the employees that they can trust Staffing and feel safe voicing their opinions.

If we think about purpose or relevance of work for employees, the needs on the upper side of the diamond are most relevant. The things that make life worth living are also same in work life - things that make work worth doing. Of course, the flip of the coin - or diamond - also matters. Acceptance and status and securing resources are things we value and what many might value very high in work. But like said, those extrinsic motivational factors won't motivate as well as the more intrinsic values, like autonomy and doing good.

Also, Maylet and Wride have introduced in 2014 in their book *MAGIC: Five keys to unlock the power of employee engagement* a five-part approach to creating employee engagement in organizations. Those five keys are Meaning, Autonomy, Growth, Impact and Connection. Those five keys are very close to what Martela has in his diamond under "purpose". Thus, we could think that purpose in work fosters employee engagement and thus improves talent experience. (Maylet and Wride, 2017, 14.)

On these unsecure times we have been living in for few years now, it may not be a surprise that trends in the job markets are changing. A recent study (Academic Work Young Professional Attraction Index 2021) indicates that young professionals no longer seek excitement but want a **steady and safe job**. High growth startups have previously been a disruptor on the talent market, but the startup trend shows signs of waning as young professionals seek towards large corporations and the public sector. This has been noticed also in the case company, which was ranked among the 50 most attractive employers in Finland. (YPAI 2021.)

## 2.4 Conceptual framework

Based on the central concepts and theory introduced earlier, we can draw a conceptual framework to better understand how the literature links into the objective and research questions in this study. The figure 8 illustrates how the main theory of talent experience and the staffing function are linked to each other and form the basis for the research question. In the below figure, Staffing and Talent experience are selected as main concepts, forming their own area. In the area of Staffing, the author has listed 'tools' and 'communication' as the services that are visible to the employee, and what form the basis for the talent experience of staffing. Also, there are other concepts included, those being 'availability of practitioners' and 'utilization & profitability'. These concepts are issues that staffing needs no consider in the everyday work, when matching the right talents into suitable projects. Talent experience

is formed by 'employee motivation' and its sub-concept 'purpose of work', and also the 'own background and expectations' of the employees.



Figure 8: Conceptual framework

The two areas create the employee's perception of staffing, when they collide. Furthermore, these topics are the basis that will give us the response to the research question: how can staffing help to improve the talent experience? Furthermore, in order to evaluate the ways, the staffing can have an impact, we need to understand the tools the staffing team can use to make a change. The change process is continuously ongoing (Figure 9), and the goal is that with these research results, we can form a development plan for the next fiscal year. It is a great asset in the case company, that staffing team is part of HR and Talent team. Managing change always involves people, i.e., human resources. It is essential for HR professionals to know what requires a change (i.e., processes, practices, and policies). In addition to this, it is critical that HR professionals possess a deep and rich understanding of the complexities around why change should occur and how to enact effective and lasting change (Peacock, 2017, 6).



Figure 9: Organizational change management process (ITIL workflow)

The hypothesis is that there is no need for rapid and big changes, but the change will be managed gradually, through effective communication and gentle nudging. The change will be tangential and continues the change management process that already started few years back (Figure 10). Tangential changes usually require the employee to change a process or work habit without altering the mindset. However, these changes are still an important and critical part of the change management in the organization. (Peacock, 2017, 22.)



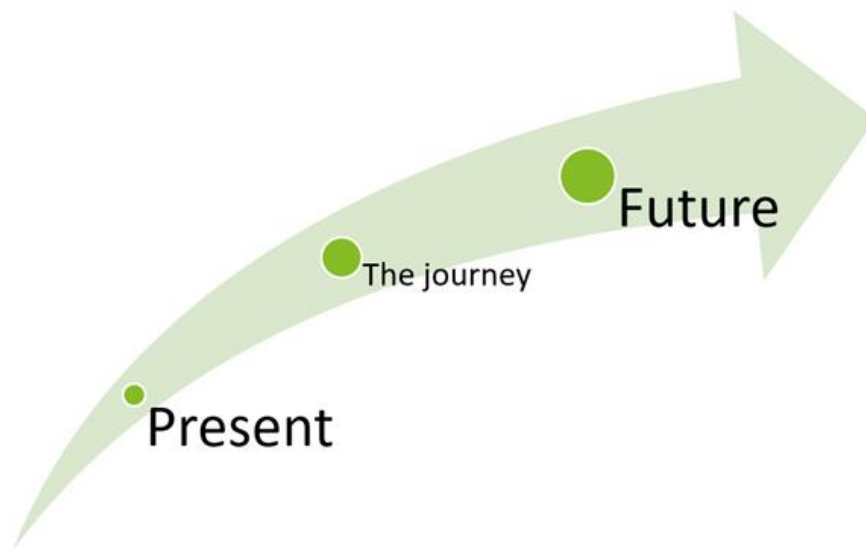


Figure 10: Tangential change (Peacock, 2017)

Nudging is an efficient tool for making subtle changes, and it is a tool that can be used for the changes we wish to make based on this research. Thaler and Sunstein (2008) have introduced the concepts of choice architecture and libertarian paternalism to explain the background of decision making. Choice architecture refers to the way options are presented or displayed to us, and how this can influence our decisions. Libertarian paternalism refers to conscious efforts, by institutions in the private sector and by governments, to steer people's choices in directions that will improve their lives. Even in a professional management consulting company, employees do not always make carefully balanced decisions, but they might be in a hurry and act based on heuristic biases. For example, project managers might neglect their obligation to update project staffing when they are in a hurry, which results to a wrong data in staffing system. That further jeopardizes the ability to make staffing decisions, as the data is incorrect. Moreover, this creates more confusion and creates hurry around the connected stakeholders.

There are multiple types of nudges, that can be applied in a business environment. Staffing team is already applying some simple nudges in their processes. For example, the staffing request template has been made available in the Outlook signatures by default for the employees, so they do not have to search for the template when they are making a staffing request. This nudge is called default nudge, or digital nudging. (Sunstein, 2019, 128.)

Other nudge that can be used to improve the talent experience, is a reminder. The staffing team can use the monthly newsletter for a communication platform for reminding employees

on the roles and responsibilities related to staffing, or for example on how to use tools and where to find them. In addition, social norms nudging can be used in the monthly newsletter. This can be done by promoting the desired actions done by others. Good example is to communicate how many of the employees are checking and confirming their schedules in STAFFIT tool weekly and why is that important for the business and data validity. (Sunstein, 2019, 128.)

Similar approach is a precommitment strategy, by which people commit to a certain course of action. Business Units have certain goals, but often the behavior falls short of those agreed goals. If people pre-commit to engaging in certain action, they are more likely to act in accordance with their goals. Certain processes and policies have been agreed with business units concerning staffing, and once the goals are clear for the stakeholders, it is easier to commit to them and act accordingly. (Sunstein, 2019, 129.)

Also nudging by making things easier and more convenient is an effective tool and especially useful in a professional service company, where professionals are busy, and the work is hectic by nature. By reducing various barriers and by using simple and easy communication, it is easier for employees to maintain and follow staffing principles and processes. (Sunstein, 2019, 128.) In the next chapter we will discuss more about the research methods of the study.

### 3 Conducting the study

#### 3.1 Theory development and methodological choice

Planning the research design is a crucial step in the research design process. A research design is the actual framework of a research that provides specific details regarding the process to be followed in conducting the research (Sreejesh, S., et al., 2013, 16-17). In this thesis the approach to research is inductive reasoning. In inductive reasoning, known premises are used to generate untested conclusions. In this study, data collection is used to explore the known phenomenon and identify themes and patterns related to that (Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill, 2015, 145). The inductive theory development approach of the study enhances the chosen research strategy and topic. Theory development in this thesis starts from observing the central theory concepts, employee experience and employee motivation. Different theoretical models are investigated to provide adequate reasoning for the conclusion.

Research methodology is a way to systematically solve the research problem (Kothari, 2004, 8). The methodological choice of this study is mixed methods research design, which means that quantitative and qualitative means are used for data collection and analysis. In

embedded mixed methods research one methodology supports the other. In this thesis the main data collection method is a questionnaire, which incorporates quantitative and qualitative questions. This is known as a concurrent embedded design. In the questionnaire, the qualitative questions support and bring more value to quantitative questions. Likewise, data from previous offboarding surveys of the case company are being used as background data for the research. (Saunders et al, 2016, 169, 172.)

In the questionnaire the researcher is using evaluative research methods and trying to find answers on how the staffing function in the company is currently performing, and how staffing impacts talent experience. Questions are formulated as evaluative with the use of scales or comparison questions and open questions aim to further discover experiences of employees. Evaluative research is many times used especially for evaluating delivery of a support service or personnel policy. The purpose of the use of evaluative study is to produce a theoretical contribution where emphasis lies on understanding how impactful the staffing function is and why. (Saunders et al, 2016, 176.)

### 3.2 Research strategy

Research strategies for the study are case study, and survey. Case study dives into the research subject in a real-life setting; in this case organization and its specific function. The case company has been selected based on the fact, that the author is working in the case company, and thus the study is relevant to the author. The survey strategy allows the study to use quantitative data, which can be analyzed quantitatively using descriptive and inferential statistics. For a case study and survey, the crucial thing is to identify the boundaries for the study. For this particular case, the study has been limited to two business units of the company, where staffing function is more mature than in other business units. The two units are embedded cases in the study and also represent the sample of the survey. (Saunders et al, 2016, 182-187.)

Both case study and survey strategy take place in a real-life context. In survey strategy, the ability to understand the impact of the context is limited by the number of variables for which data can be collected. Thus, case study strategy aims to fulfill the gaps with other ways of data gathering. (Saunders et al, 2016, 185.) The study will represent cross-sectional research, as the phenomenon of talent experience is studied at a particular time. In the survey, the timeline in focus is the recent year.

The research could be identified also as action research. The purpose of action research is to promote organizational learning to produce practical outcomes through identifying issues, planning action, taking action and evaluating action. Action research is more about research in action, rather than researching action. Action research tries to solve real organization issues, such as in this case company example. However, in action research, participation is a

critical component. In this research, participation of organizational members materializes when they allow their existing work practices to be studied, by replying to the survey. However, this research is not as strongly a two-way process as in general in action research. In action research the collaboration of researcher and organizational members is very tight during the iterative processes that take place in action research. In this thesis such iterative cycles are not in place. (Saunders et al, 2016, 190-191.)

However, it is true that this study aims for the same results as action research: to conclude concrete actions that may result an organizational change. We also hope that when all the members of the two business units can have their say in the survey, they would be more likely to implement the change they have helped to create. (Saunders et al, 2016, 192.)

### 3.3 Validity and reliability

The study uses mixed methods research which increases the validity of the study, as qualitative questions support the quantitative questions. Qualitative questions aim to give more insight on the quantitative questions, by providing a possibility of cross-referencing the findings during the analysis.

There is a risk of research bias due to the author conducting the study at the own organization and asking questions from colleagues about her own work and team performance. However, the possibility of giving feedback anonymously lowers the participants' bias and increases the overall will of giving feedback. Also, the study uses surveys done in the past for historical reference and in those there is lower risk of bias, as the research has been done by a researcher outside the context.

As the study has been conducted as a case study and it can be assumed that the business environment is rather unique, it is not automatically replicable for other organizations. It means that even though the theoretical framework and concepts behind the study are valid and generalizable, the study's findings, which are a combination of the case company's present state analysis and its reflection on the theoretical framework, are only relevant for the case company. The findings may not be even replicable as such for other business units in the same organization, as the other business units are somewhat different in nature.

### 3.4 Data collection

#### 3.4.1 Secondary data

The process of data collection started from exploring the existing literature on the central concepts of the study. The review included books, previous research, articles, and electronic

publications and the purpose was to form a comprehensive picture of the studied topics. This literature review formed the theoretical framework for this research.

In this research, the author uses survey-based secondary data, which is initially collected for other purposes. This sort of use of old data is increasingly common, as such data is easily available and gives access to already known data sets, which may answer, or partially answer the research questions of the current study. Many organizations collect and store a large volume of data to support their day-to-day operations: for example, payroll details, employee surveys and statistics on the demography of employees. This sort of company data is usually only available for the organization producing them, and thus the access may be limited. (Saunders et al, 2016, 316-321.) In this research the author has been able to negotiate access to the data, as the author works in the case company, and the findings of the research will be of benefit for the case company.

Secondary data may include both quantitative and qualitative data, and the data can be raw data, which is not processed at all, or compiled data, which has been processed. In this research the author has used data from a continuous and regular employee survey, for which the data has been compiled through a survey tool to a set of power point slides. Continuous and regular surveys are repeated over time or recurring at regular intervals. Continuous and regular survey data provides a useful resource for which to compare the primary data of the research. (Saunders et al, 2016, 318-321.)

The empirical research of this thesis was conducted by collecting data in two rounds. The first data collection round was conducted as a desk study from secondary sources, by researching the offboarding survey results from the previous years. At the end of each fiscal year, the results of individual offboarding surveys are drawn together and analyzed per year. The offboarding surveys are conducted for each employee who has decided to leave the company and pursue other opportunities outside the company. The sample size was around 400 employees. The survey is part of the exit process and offboarding. It must be noted that the starting point for this survey is different, as the respondents have a reason to leave the company, and their talent experience might not be good in all cases. This must be considered in the analysis of the results, noting that the surveys are not completely comparable.

One quantitative question and four qualitative questions were chosen from the offboarding survey to be analyzed for this study. Other questions in the questionnaire were not related to staffing. An average grade was calculated for the quantitative question, and open feedback was reviewed and grouped by themes.

### 3.4.2 Primary data

The second round of the data collection was conducted by using primary data collection method and forming a questionnaire specifically designed for this study. There are several reasons why questionnaire can be a good choice for this sort of research. According to Kothari (2004, 100-101), survey method is good because:

- it is relatively low cost,
- it is free from the interviewer bias, as respondents can use their own words to describe their opinions,
- respondents can take the survey on their own time, and
- larger samples can be used and thus the results can be made more dependable and reliable.

The questionnaire is one of the most widely used data collection methods within the survey strategy. Since all respondents are asked to respond the same set of questions, it provides an efficient way of collecting responses from a large sample. However, with the selection of questionnaire approach, it needs to be noted that it is very difficult to design the questionnaire so that it will answer to the research question. The design of the questionnaire will affect the response rate and the validity and reliability of the data collected. (Saunders et al, 2016, 439.)

The questionnaire was planned by the author and reviewed and co-created in a cooperation with the staffing team and business unit leaders. For the questionnaire, there were two objectives:

- to gain knowledge on how staffing team / function is performing,
- and to gain knowledge on how staffing can impact on the talent experience.

The first aim was to primarily gain knowledge on the current state of the staffing team and function, and how the employees see the performance and services provided by the staffing function. The second aim was to further explore the overall talent experience, and how staffing can impact on that.

The questionnaire was divided in four sections (see appendix 1):

- Background questions,
- Staffing & talent experience,
- Staffing communications and
- Staffing tools

The company has 6 business units, from which two business units were selected to the respondent group. These two business units have the most mature staffing processes, as the project staffing has been outsourced to a Staffing Specialist earlier than in other business units. In one business unit there is no staffing done at all, as the unit is concentrating on internal business services (HR, finance, marketing, IT, etc.).

Also, the two selected business units are more similar in nature, as they are focused on management consulting, and are performing many joint projects for customers. The survey was sent to everyone in these two business units. In business unit A there are 180 employees, and in business unit B there are 115 employees. Thus, the total sample size of the target group was 295 employees from various career levels. Different career levels have diverse experience on staffing, so the career level was important to take into consideration in the question setting. Moreover, for both business units it was important to analyze the responses of their own employees, thus the business unit was also asked as a background question.

The questionnaire was formed by using quantitative and qualitative questions, such as

- several simple Yes/No questions,
- some evaluative questions, where respondents were asked to rate their opinion on a Likert scale of 1-5,
- and open questions, which provided deeper insight to support the quantitative questions.

### 3.5 Analytical methods

#### 3.5.1 Quantitative data analysis

Quantitative data means numerical data, which in its raw form before any processing, does not provide much insight for a researcher. To be able to explore, present or examine relationships and trends from the data, the researcher needs to use quantitative analysis techniques, such as tables, graphs and statistics. Calculations and chart drawing are undertaken using analysis software, such as Excel spreadsheets or SPSS tool. Similarly, numerous questionnaire tools can calculate and analyze the data automatically. (Saunders et al, 2016, 496-498.)

There are several issues that need to be considered before starting the collection of data. These issues include:

- sample size
- type of data

- data layout and format
- impact of data coding
- process of inputting the data
- need to weight cases
- process of checking the data for errors.

Sample size was already discussed in brief in chapter 3.4, when introducing data collection. In the secondary data the sample was everyone, who had left the company within fiscal years 2019-2021. Overall, nearly 400 employees had left the case company during those years, and all of them were sent the survey questionnaire for the offboarding survey. In the primary data questionnaire, the sample size was 295 respondents. (Saunders et al, 2016, 498.)

Quantitative data can be divided into two groups regarding the type of data: numerical and categorical. Numerical data are those whose values are measured numerically. In contrast, categorical data refers to the data whose values cannot be measured numerically but can be classified into data sets based on certain characteristics or placed in rank order. Numerical data is more precise, as the researcher can position each data value on numerical scale. In the secondary data questionnaire, the type of data used was numerical. In the primary data questionnaire, there were both numerical and categorical data. (Saunders et al, 2016, 499-500.)

The data layout of both surveys is internet questionnaire. An online survey tool named SurveyPal was used to form the surveys. In this type of questionnaire, the respondent marks the answers by himself/herself, which simplifies the work of the research, as the process of inputting the data can be skipped. Also, the modern questionnaire tools are capable to calculate and process the data for a readymade presentation format. However, in these surveys, both in secondary data and primary data, the researcher did not have the access to the tool herself, but she received the raw data in Excel data matrix and simple compilation of results in PowerPoint format. Excel Pivot functionality was used to analyze the results. The researcher used tables and graphs to visualize the data and to analyze the dependencies of the replies. Pie charts and column charts were used for the presentation of demographics, and tables were used for other data. Data was converted into percentages or averages depending on the analyzed question.

### 3.5.2 Qualitative data analysis

The analysis of qualitative data is different from the quantitative data. In qualitative data, meanings are derived from words (spoken or written) or images. It is non-standardized and is usually in large volume and complex in nature. There are multiple ways to interpret the



data, but usually it involves summarizing, coding, grouping, or categorizing the data. In this research, the qualitative data to be analyzed is in written format from the offboarding survey and from the Staffing & Talent experience -survey. (Saunders et al, 2016, 568-569.)

Although this research incorporates an inductive approach to theory development, a deductive approach is used for qualitative data analysis. Deductive approach uses theoretical framework that can be used as initial analytical framework. In order to develop a theoretical or descriptive framework, the researcher has to identify the main variables and themes in the research. In this research the theoretical framework was introduced in chapter 2, including staffing, talent experience, employee motivation and purpose of work. A descriptive framework relies on researcher's prior experience and what is expected to occur. In this case, there was a strong idea on what the data could look like. (Saunders et al, 2016, 569-570.)

Thematic analysis is a generic approach for analyzing qualitative data, and it is the approach the researcher used in this analysis. The purpose of this approach is to identify themes or patterns that occur across the data. Thematic analysis helps the researcher to identify key themes from a data set for further exploration and draw and verify conclusions. Key themes of the data were directed by the questionnaire design in both surveys, i.e., in secondary and primary data collection. In a deductive approach, the examined themes are linked to existing theory. In addition, the research question - how can staffing help to improve talent experience - is well grounded in the analysis, and research objectives were considered when deriving themes from the data. (Saunders et al, 2016, 579.)

The process of thematic analysis starts when the researcher becomes familiar with the data. For the offboarding survey there were 62 PowerPoint slides full of text to be analyzed, and it required a lot of reading and re-reading. In the primary research questionnaire, there were 8 open questions and a lot less pages to be analyzed. The next step in the process is coding of the data. The data of this research was coded using the concepts from the theoretical framework, and also by grouping the data to positive, neutral and negative comments. Since the qualitative analysis uses deductive approach, not all of the data was coded. The coding was done in parallel with the step of searching for themes and recognizing relationships. Afterwards the themes and relationships are refined further to derive a well-grounded analytical framework for the analysis. (Saunders et al, 2016, 579-587.)

## 4 Research findings & analysis

### 4.1 Desk study

As a starting point for this research was the results from the previous studies made in the organization. Organization has not conducted any research earlier especially about staffing,

but staffing has been one question among the Offboarding survey questionnaire, which is conducted every time an employee leaves the company. Each fiscal year the results of these individual Offboarding surveys will be drawn together and analyzed.

In the survey, respondents are asked to grade “staffing / resourcing of work”. The grades staffing has been graded in these surveys have not been very good. On a Likert scale of 1-5, where 1 is tolerable and 5 is excellent, the grade has been in three recent years below 3 (good) at firm level. In the two business units we are looking at in this thesis, the grades have been somewhat better, since in these business units the staffing has been centralized to external Staffing Specialist longer and the staffing process is more mature (Table 1). However, it needs to be pointed out, that these grades do not only point to staffing function and staffing team, as in this survey the term “staffing” can also mean other stakeholders involved in the staffing process, such as the immediate supervisor (coach) and team leaders (engagement managers). (Case company, Offboarding surveys FY19-21.)

Staffing	FY19 avg	FY20 avg	FY21 avg
<b>All company</b>	2,5	2,8	2,8
<b>Business unit A</b>	2,96	2,5	3,18
<b>Business unit B</b>	2,36	3,0	2,9

Table 1: Results of Offboarding surveys FY19-FY21, scale 1-5

The open questions related to staffing in these surveys were the following:

- How have you experienced your workload?
- What do you like the most in the content of your work? What there is to be developed?
- How have you experienced your career development?
- What is your experience on the learning and training opportunities at the organization?

First, it can be seen from the question setting, that the “experience” of the employee is the most relevant: how employees experience their workload, content of work, career development and learning opportunities.

Due to the nature of consulting work, the work is not basic “nine-to-five” work, but the workload may vary a lot during the year. This is usually well known for people recruited for this sort of organization, and a point that should be made clear in the onboarding phase of an employee. However, it might still be surprising for an employee coming for example from a

public sector employer. Generally, employees of the organization feel the workloads in these two business units have been on good level and manageable, but in these offboarding surveys there were also comments about unmanageable workloads: workload being either too high or too low. Too high workload is stressful and can affect the **work-life balance** and well-being of the employee. Also, too low workload was perceived as stressful, since most of the employees in such firm are very career oriented and want to make a good impact and result. Employees also have utilization targets as one business KPI, so too small workload does not help them to reach targets. Also, the volatility and unpredictability of the workload is not optimal for good work-life balance, as it may be difficult to combine demanding projects and life with small children for example. Below are some comments from the respondents about the workload.

Not too heavy workload. However, the division of workload between consultants is not very even.

Partly too high workload. An enormous load of 'invisible' work is included in the workload, which is not seen in staffing report. A very high contribution is expected from Trainee-Consultant career levels, and it may be shocking to some working in their first job.

Sometimes there has been too much work, so it has had an impact on my personal life. But it didn't come as surprise, as I knew it when taking this job.

Workload has been ok, and I have been always able to discuss about that with the supervisor.

Too low workload. (multiple respondents)

Ok workload. (multiple respondents)

Ok workload, but difficult to predict.

Challenging (workload) as expected but gives room also for family and home. Good balance overall.

Changing, as usual in project work.

I think most of the jobs that are at the simultaneously interesting and personal growth contributing will anyway be intense work. The 11 months spent working on 'case company' engagements had been extremely hard working and an almost constantly huge workload. I must say that the flex time system implemented within the Finnish firm has enabled me to get sufficient time off to recover in between the most intense work periods.

In the content of the work the employees appreciated the interesting projects, where one can truly help client to tackle organizational problems. **The purpose of work** was pointed out by many of the respondents, especially work for the public sector, where employees feel they can truly affect the lives of us all. Similarly, many had commented that they appreciated the intelligent and easily approachable co-workers and **leaders, whom they can trust**. However, some thought that they were staffed for projects they did not feel comfortable in, or the work they had to do was too easy or monotonous for any learning to happen. Also, some felt that it was sometimes difficult to know what was expected from them in the projects or to reach a promotion. Below are examples on how respondents commented on what is best and what is worst in the content of their work.

Best is when I have been entrusted with tasks where I have the freedom to demonstrate my abilities, make own decisions and be creative.

Worst is simple tasks where abilities are underestimated, i.e. merely being expected to do as you're told or trivial tasks such as sending calendar invitations, ordering coffee etc.

Best thing about work are the best clients in Finland and the interesting projects.

Best thing has been to do diverse projects and constantly learn new.

Best was the diversity of work, different projects, clients & project teams. I was hoping that my personal wishes about work content would have been considered and listened more.

Sometimes it is difficult to understand what is expected from me at my work.

In the results of multiple offboarding surveys we can draw a conclusion that career development, or lack of it, has been one main reason for many to leave the company. Many of the respondents pinpoint, that they feel they were not promoted as quickly as they desired, or that their career did not develop the way they wanted. The reasons for this have been identified e.g., the projects they were staffed in, where they did not have the **opportunity to grow or show their abilities**. Also, it was said in some comments, that the career development seems slower in this case company than what it seems to be in competitors. However, many also commented otherwise, i.e., they were satisfied with their career development. They felt they were given enough responsibilities and that they were trusted. Likewise, there were many comments that their employment was too short to evaluate the

career development opportunities. Respondents evaluated their career development as follows:

No comments on career development, as I worked in the company for so short time.

The lack of interesting projects have resulted in a situation, where I have not been able to grow and develop the professional I wanted.

I have experienced a lot of development as a professional and also personally, but the career has stalled. Although I have received a lot of responsibility and I have done demanding work, the career development has not been visible.

Excellent; I've had the chance to grow in a multitude of different areas and have always gotten more responsibility as soon as I've been able to take more.

Getting opportunities was a struggle initially, but after that I have been happy with getting more meaningful tasks and engagement opportunities. I am confident that my career development would have been fine going forward.

Most of the respondents value the learning and training opportunities the case company provides. Much of the learning happens in the work, alongside with more senior colleagues and supervisors. Correspondingly, the external training the company provides, has been valued. However, others have commented that there was not enough time to external training, and that one should be quite proactive in searching the training opportunities. One main reason for respondents feeling they did not have enough time for training, was the customer projects, that did not leave time for external training. This is how respondent's commented on the learning opportunities that company offers:

Company has offered good training opportunities and supports in this area.

I feel that the company has supported very much the individuals growth and learning, and I could have wished for better.

Not enough time for learning new things was reserved during the working hours. Learning had to be done in the evening.

Learning along the work projects works usually fine.

Not enough external training.

Good training possibilities especially for junior consultants.

I've been able to finish even 4 certificates, which I'm grateful of.

I wish that trainings would have been more linked to projects as add-ons, instead of random e-learnings with no connection to practical work or engagements that are too difficult and there is no time to complement them with trainings. I have been happy with more general trainings, e.g., consulting bootcamp and BU training day. I have always learned something new and have found them useful in general.

## 4.2 Questionnaire

An electronical Surveypal questionnaire was carried out in the case company for the same two business units of the company, which were analyzed in the desk study. The results were first drawn together with the survey provider's own tools, and then exported into PowerPoint and Excel for closer analysis. In the Excel the researcher used Pivot technique to group the data and analyze findings.

In this section, we view the results of the survey in more detail. The chapter is broken down to sections, representing the corresponding parts in the survey. In the first section of the survey, some background questions were asked, in order to better analyze the results from later parts of the survey.

The second part of the survey is the core of the survey, giving insight on the impact of staffing. The researcher wanted to put this section right to the start of the survey, to ensure that maximum number of responses are received. If the most difficult questions are in the end, the respondent may have questionnaire fatigue at that point, and doesn't have time or energy to reply. The third and fourth part of the survey are about communications and tools of the staffing team / function, and those parts of the survey included easier and quicker questions to reply.

### 4.2.1 Part 1: Demographics

The survey was sent out to 295 employees in these units: 180 employees from business unit A, and 115 from business unit B. The survey was open for 2 weeks in March 2022. Total of 72 responded to the survey, so the response rate was 24% (Figure 9).

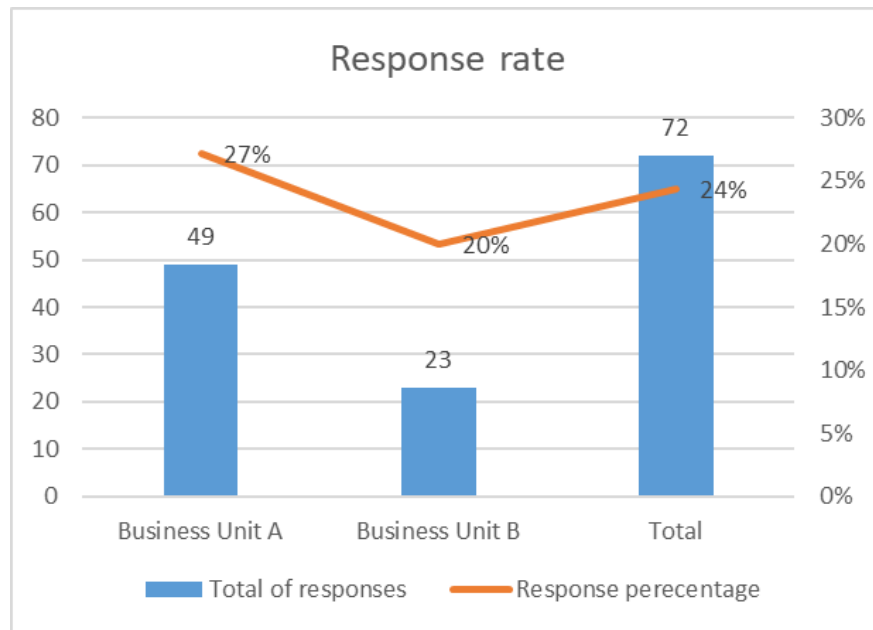


Figure 11: Response rate of the survey Staffing & Talent Experience

From the respondents, 24% were at career level from trainee to consultant, 29% were senior consultants or assistant managers, 37% were managers or senior managers, and 10% were directors or partners (Figure 10). The division of career levels was good for the analysis, as employees above consultants are the ones that have the most exposure for staffing function and staffing team, and the relationship is closer. 76% of the respondents were above consultant level.

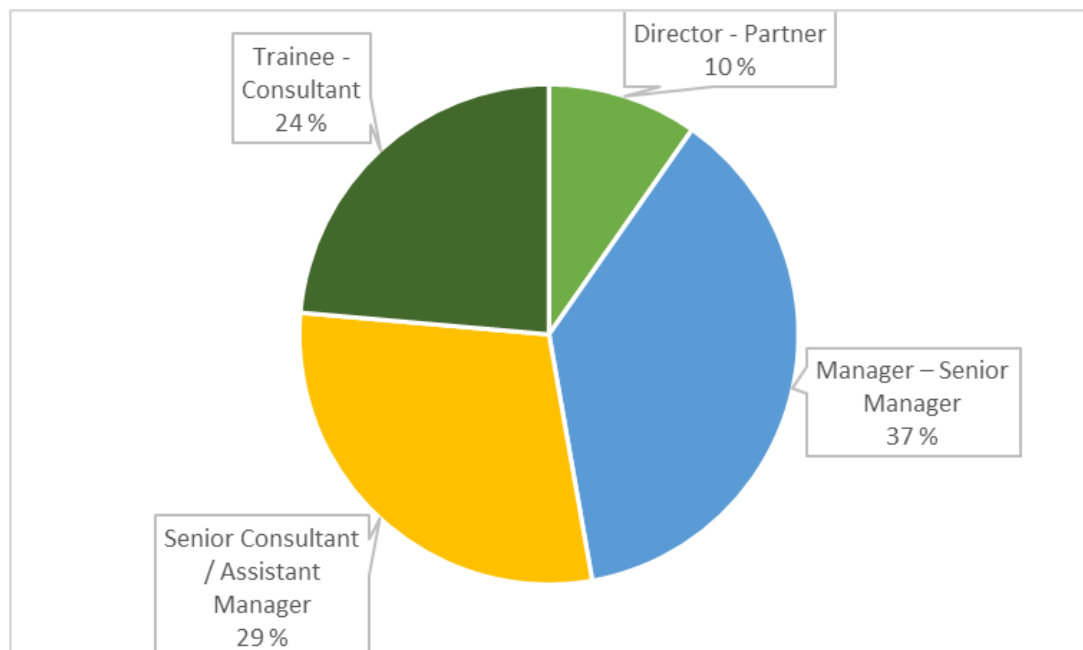


Figure 12: Career levels of respondents

#### 4.2.2 Part 2: Staffing & Talent experience

After the background questions, the second part of the survey concerned the roles and responsibilities related to staffing, the work life balance and the impact of staffing has to the employees. In the results, the percentage score is a percentage of positive ‘Yes’ answers. Based on the results, majority (88%) of the respondents understand the role of staffing function, and 81% of the respondents know their responsibilities regarding staffing at their career level. Less than half (49%) of respondents feel that staffing has had a positive impact on their work-life balance. On a scale from 1 to 5 (1= not impactful, 5= very impactful), the respondents feel staffing is rather neutral, as the average was 3,2. (Table 2)

The percentage of positive responses for the question 3 was a bit of a surprise for the staffing team, as the hypotheses was that most of the respondents would feel that staffing would make a positive impact on their work life balance. However, as seen from the feedback, respondents had a lot of variance from which viewpoint they responded to the question. In addition, as the question was “Has Staffing had a **positive** impact on your work life balance”, the respondents that felt the impact was “neutral”, responded ‘No’. Thus, there should have been a better question setting and a neutral possibility to reply.

Questions / statements	Result
I have a clear understanding of the role of Staffing	88%
I know my responsibilities regarding Staffing at my career level	81%
Staffing has had a positive impact on my work-life balance	49%
How impactful is Staffing in your everyday life at work? (not impactful 1 to 5 very impactful)	3,2/5

Table 2: Survey part 2 results

However, the responses varied between career levels: respondents at higher career levels felt the staffing had more impact than respondents at lower career levels. (Table 3)



Grade	Director - Partner	Manager – Senior Manager	Senior Consultant / Assistant Manager	Trainee - Consultant	Total
1		1	1	1	3
2		5	3	3	11
3	2	6	13	10	31
4	4	13	2	3	22
5	1	2	1		4
<b>Total</b>	7	27	20	17	71

Table 3: Question 4 results per career level

After the question 4 (How impactful is staffing in your everyday life at work?) respondents were asked why they feel so and why they graded as they did. The open responses ranged from negative to positive (data from Staffing & Talent experience survey 2022):

**Negative:**

Feels like a time-consuming bureaucracy.

I don't really have the opportunity to actually choose an engagement its more just what am I available for.

The nature of consulting; overlapping priorities, fighting over same resources, balancing between situations where too much demand vs too little demand.

It helps to organize my own time and work-life balance.

Lots of effort has to be put to update staffing all the time.

Too slow and complicated process to keep up to date.

**Neutral:**

I've only been in projects of my own team, coordinated by our managers.

I've usually had longer projects with 100% allocation and clear what I do after one ends, so I haven't needed Staffing's support that much.

Most of the staffing decisions are made inside the own team.

It gives rough guidelines on what to focus on, but it is not that impactful.

Positive:

Directly influences to work-life balance.

It is crucial to get the right people at the right time.

It is very core process to our business.

Personally, I'm not really directed to the engagements through staffing, and mostly, resources to my projects are dealt with primarily their leaders. Yet, the staffing information is very important to support such discussions.

I manage projects and how these are staffed is impacting my work basically all the time.

All the rest of us are very poor at keeping the big picture of team members availability and allocations to projects, so it is good to have somebody supporting and chasing us when needed.

When resources are needed, staffing knows the situation.

In the second part of the survey, one question was about the stakeholders who affect the career development of the employees (Appendix 1, Question 5). It is clearly visible from the results, that respondents feel that staffing has the least impact on their career development, and most influential is the Coach, i.e., the immediate supervisor (Figure 11). This result was expected and confirms the hypothesis that the Coach is the most influential person in regards of the career development. This is how it should be, as Staffing Specialist and Coach are supposed to work closely together in regards of the employees' staffing and careers.



Figure 13: Result of question 5

Some comments were given about how staffing has impacted the career development of the respondents. Following feedback was given (Appendix 1, Question 6):

Staffing has impacted by

Advocating for allocating time to employees' development to the leadership.

Enabling systematic planning within a fiscal year also in respect to personal goals.

Providing opportunities in engagements.

Mainly supporting work-life balance.

In these comments we can assume that staffing has functioned as it should, i.e., provided opportunities in new projects, helped to settle the time schedules and supported the management in planning.

#### 4.2.3 Part 3: Staffing communications

Part 3 of the survey concentrated on the communications of staffing: the staffing helpdesk, trainings, newsletters, and intranet (Appendix 1, questions 8-13).

Questions / statements

Result

I have a clear understanding on when to contact Staffing Helpdesk	77%
Staffing Helpdesk: Clarity of communications	4,1/5
Staffing helpdesk: Request processing time	4,0/5
I read communications about Staffing (staffing newsletter)	74%
I find the newsletters informative	79%
I refer to Staffing intra for information	25%
I have joined staffing introduction training during the past year	41%
I found the materials in the training relevant	100%
I found the delivery informative in the training	100%
I think the timing of the training was spot on	91%
I feel there were areas of staffing that should have been covered in more detail	18%

Table 4: Survey part 3 results

According to the results (Table 4), 77% of the respondents know when they should contact staffing helpdesk. The service of staffing helpdesk was also appreciated, as the clarity of communication and request processing time both scored over 4 out of 5. Before the survey, the staffing team was not very sure that how their newsletters have been received, and it was a positive result that almost 3 out 4 respondents read the newsletters, and 4 out 5 think the newsletters are informative. Staffing team also has their own intranet page, and it was just recently updated last autumn to be more informative and user friendly. However, it seems that not many of the respondents use the intranet page (25% of the respondents). Nevertheless, as it seems that the communication by staffing team is otherwise informative, it may be that the employees do not feel necessary to seek additional information from the intranet.

41% of the respondents had joined the staffing introduction training during the past year, meaning that they had started working in the company during the recent year. All the respondents that had joined the training, felt the training materials were relevant and the training was informative. 91% also thought the timing of the training was very good. The staffing training is usually arranged on the second week of the orientation program. 18% still felt that there were areas that should have been covered in more detail. (Table 4)

These areas were for example:

- The role, tasks and responsibilities of staffing
- Transparency of the pipeline
- The dynamics between coach, staffing and engagement manager work
- How to actually find the best people for the project.

This feedback is valuable for the staffing team when the team develop the introductory training further. There was also open feedback given, proposing that it would be useful to have staffing refresh training upon promotion to manager or assistant manager.

In addition, the staffing team received positive feedback on weekly emails about available practitioners and weekly staffing calls.

Weekly emails on available colleagues are powerful because they have a short summary in skills too.

Thank you for doing an important work, replying fast and helping me out in tight situations couple of times!

Weekly staffing calls are superb, very well organized.

#### 4.2.4 Part 4: Staffing tools

In the part 4 the respondents were asked about tools related to staffing. The main tools related to staffing are:

- STAFFIT software, where employees' projects are planned
- STAFFIT mobile app
- Company People Network (CPN), a database for employees' skills and CVs
- Staffing report in Power BI
- Staffing request template in excel sheet

Otherwise, the tools were found useful and rather easy to use, but the STAFFIT mobile app and staffing request template had lower scores (Table 5).

I confirm my STAFFIT schedule once a week	75%
I know how to update my STAFFIT schedule	90%
I use STAFFIT mobile app	24%
I know the relevance on Company People Network (CPN)	90%
I regularly update my CPN	67%
I know where to find the Staffing Power BI	89%
I know how to use the Staffing Power BI	83%
I know where to find the staffing request template	40%
I know how to use the staffing request template	42%

Table 5: Survey part 4 results

The usage of STAFFIT mobile app is not widely encouraged or marketed, but employees can upload the app to their mobiles if they feel it is relevant. Only 24% of the respondents were using the app (Table 5).

Also, the staffing request template is only relevant for those who act as engagement managers (project managers), that is, career levels at senior consultant or assistant manager and above. If we exclude the career levels from trainee to consultant out of the result, 76% of the respondents from senior consultant to partner know how to use the staffing request template (Table 6).

Do you know how to use the staffing request template?	
<b>Director - Partner</b>	7
<b>Manager – Senior Manager</b>	27
<b>Senior Consultant / Assistant Manager</b>	21
<b>Trainee - Consultant</b>	17
<b>Total</b>	72

Table 6: Question 15h, divided by career level

In the open feedback, respondents highlighted for example the importance of Company People Database (CPN):

CPN is very much a place to go for all CV (or it should be at least for all of us)!  
More we can use it, the better.

In addition, Staffing Power BI report was praised:

Power BI is one of the best developments on internal tooling in many years.

The Staffing Power BI is super useful.

PowerBI tool I use almost daily so that is a big plus for me compared to the old setup.

Most negative comments got the STAFFIT tool, which is a global staffing tool developed for the case company:

Staffing takes a lot of effort in smaller projects, need to manually update it weekly is time consuming

It would be easier if the staffing request could be made in the Staffit tool.

It is not clear to me which staffing entries I can update/change myself and which changes have to be requested from the staffing personnel.

## 5 Results and conclusions

The aim of this thesis was to discover how staffing can help in the case company to improve talent experience and keep the current talent in the company. Research question for the study was: How can staffing function help to improve employee experience?

The study started by familiarizing with the theoretical background of staffing, talent experience and employee motivation. The theoretical framework gave a strong background for the survey's question setting and guided the researcher to finetune the research question and objectives of the research.

The work continued by conducting secondary research from the previous company surveys and using primary research through initiating a questionnaire for the two business units of the case company. Questions were co-created with the staffing team of the case company and verified with the Business Unit leaders. Survey results were analyzed and discussed by the researcher in cooperation with several stakeholders, including the HR Business Partners of the involved business units and the staffing team. Furthermore, the results were presented in several forums in the case company. First, the results were presented for coaches in a Coach Forum, and later the results with planned next steps were introduced for the entire business units, which were involved in the survey.

In general, the survey results mainly supported the hypothesis that the organization had before the survey. The results showed that the staffing team is on the right track on their development path. It is evident, that the practitioners do not want to be considered as “resources”, but rather as employees actively in charge of their career development. They want to share the same values as the employer they work for. Especially the millennials, or generation Y, perceive themselves as talent, rather than mere workforce. They want to create results, do work that is meaningful and continuously learn new things. They value autonomy, purpose, and good communication. This result was comprehensively backed up by the theoretical background of employee motivation.

Generally, the goals and metrics of staffing are more on the financial side, for example looking after high utilization rates and securing good project profitability. However, targets within these metrics will not be reached, in case the talent experience is poor, or the employee engagement is low. It is essential to set the talent experience to the center of focus, to reach good financial results. During this study, it came evident that talent experience is the core, and when we concentrate on that, we get better employee engagement, customer experience, company profitability and employee well-being.

Staffing can impact on the talent experience mainly through better work-life balance and feeling of capacity and by offering suitable projects that offer learning and growing opportunities for employees. In addition, staffing team can help practitioners by offering better visibility to their schedules and upcoming projects. This can be done through good communication and up to date data at reliable and good quality tools. Moreover, staffing can support engagement managers by helping them to organize the project teams and schedules and giving up to date information on the availability of different team member options. Also, for engagement managers the staffing reporting and communication is crucial, and the data validity is critical.

Moreover, staffing is not supposed to be the most important stakeholder for practitioner’s’ career development, but the coach (immediate supervisor) is. Coach is the number one connection for an employee to discuss their career goals and coach is the one who should have the best knowledge on coachees’ skills and capabilities. Thus, the relationship and communication between staffing and coaches must be even closer than it is now, in order the stakeholders to communicate the skills and goals of the employees better. Also, the research results supported the idea that the Company People Network (CPN) could be more utilized for the communication of skills of employees, meaning that this media should be taken into focus in the future and find out how it could be more effectively utilized.

The results will be considered when planning for the next fiscal year’s development agenda. Like said in the introduction, the staffing function in the case company is still relatively young



and considered as start up. Before the centralized staffing function was implemented, the staffing was done in the business units, within the functional teams. Now with these survey results, we can start planning for the closer cooperation of staffing and business units. Like already discussed in the chapter 2.4, rapid and big changes are not required in this case based on the research, but the change will be managed gradually, through effective communication and gentle nudging. The change will be tangential and continues the change management process that already started few years ago. The staffing team will continue to use nudging as a change management tool, for example by using the digital nudging, reminders, social norms nudging and precommitment strategies. Certain processes and policies have been agreed with business units concerning staffing, and it is evident that we need to revise those policies in order to crystallize the goals for the relationship of staffing and coaches.

## 6 Recommendations

Next steps after the research, is to revise the staffing policies and processes, and find connection points where we can improve the communication most effectively. Like concluded, there is no need to rewrite the processes and policies, rather to make subtle changes that make the communication more efficient and transparent. More transparent communication will foster the talent experience for all stakeholders.

Other project is to focus on Company People Network (CPN) database and find ways how to utilize it further. In this project, it may be worthwhile to consider asking guidance and advisory from other country units, who may use the database more effectively. Staffing team will need to investigate how to better employ the skills and practitioner preferences into the database. Also, the CV templates need to be revised and harmonized across the company. Moreover, there is a need promote the usage and support the update intervals for the practitioners.

Third development point is to further improve the staffing training for newcomers, as that is the most powerful communication channel for newcomers. That is an important contact point where staffing and employee connect for the first time, and the employee forms the first impression and perception of the staffing and builds further expectations based on that. It is critical that the information given during the training is clear, concise, and correct. Moreover, it must give a clear picture for the employee about his/her roles and responsibilities, and what is the employee journey linked between staffing and the employee. For this purpose, it could be considered, that the orientation trainings are tailored for different career levels, so that the employee gets better picture on what is important at

his/her career level. Furthermore, like suggested in the survey feedback, a refresher training could be considered, when employee is promoted to a higher career level.

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Appendix 1: Questionnaire questions, primary research

## Staffing and talent experience

Survey questions 14.-25.3.2022

**Staffing** is one of our *key business processes*. In short, it refers to project resourcing: *connecting open roles with matching professionals*.

Staffing has a profound impact on the profitability of our business and on our talent experience. Therefore, it is crucial that staffing is working as well as possible.

In this survey, **Staffing** refers primarily to **Staffing team and function**, and how the team or your designated **Staffing Specialist** impacts your talent experience.

### Background questions

1. Business unit
  - a. X
  - b. Y
2. Career level
  - a. Trainee - Consultant
  - b. Senior Consultant / Assistant Manager
  - c. Manager - Senior Manager
  - d. Director - Partner

### Survey questions

page 1

#### Staffing and talent experience

A wide network of people are involved in staffing, and everyone has a part to play in ensuring that we do staffing well. In order to ensure a well-working staffing process, each party involved needs to understand their role and expectations in terms of staffing thoroughly.

The role of staffing is to help to identify suitable team members for projects and manage the overall workload of practitioners. Staffing specialist makes updates to STAFFIT and has



ownership of staffing data and resource management. More detailed descriptions of the roles can be seen in intra.

1. Do you / did you have a clear understanding of the role of Staffing?
  - a. Yes/no
2. Do you know what are your responsibilities regarding Staffing at your career level?
  - a. Yes / no
3. Has Staffing had a positive impact on your work life balance?
  - a. Yes/no
  - b. Open Q: How Staffing has impacted your work life balance?
4. How impactful is Staffing in your everyday life at Deloitte? on a scale of 1-5, 1=not relevant at all, 5=very relevant
  - a. Open Q: Please indicate why you feel so?
5. What is the level of impact the following stakeholders have on your career development? (on a scale of 1-5)
  - a. Your Coach
  - b. Engagement Manager
  - c. Engagement Partner
  - d. Staffing
  - e. Other colleagues in your network, who?
6. Open Q: if Staffing has impacted your career development, how?
7. Has staffing assisted you in joining other BU / country projects? Yes / no
  - a. Open Q: What are your expectations regarding this?

page 2

### Staffing communications

8. Staffing Helpdesk
  - a. Do you have an understanding on when to contact the Staffing helpdesk?
  - b. How satisfied are you on a scale 1-5 (1 not satisfied at all - 5 very satisfied)
    - i. Request processing time
    - ii. Clarity of communications
9. Communicating about Staffing (staffing newsletter, weekly newsletter)
  - i. Do you read them? Yes/no
  - ii. Do you find them informative? Yes/ no
10. Do you refer to Staffing intra for information? Yes / no
11. Staffing introduction is offered on the second week of newjoiner onboarding. Have you joined Staffing introduction during the past year? Yes / no
  - a. If yes,
    - i. were the materials relevant? Yes / no
    - ii. was the delivery informative? Yes / no
    - iii. was the timing (second week of onboarding) spot on? Yes / no
  - b. Were there areas of Staffing that you feel the training should have covered in more detail? Yes / no
    - i. If yes, what were these?
12. If you have been with the company for a longer time, do you feel you would need some / refresher training on Staffing processes and tools? Yes / no
  - a. If you have been promoted, would you have benefited from a career level specific staffing training?
    - i. Yes / no
13. Open feedback for Staffing communications.

page 3

### Staffing tools

14. How often do you confirm your STAFFIT schedule?
  - a. once a week
  - b. once a month
  - c. rarely
  - d. not at all
    - i. If not, why?
      1. No time
      2. don't know how
      3. Don't remember to
      4. doesn't seem to be relevant / have an impact
15. Staffing tools:
  - a. Do you know how to update your STAFFIT schedule?
    - i. Yes/no
  - b. Do you use STAFFIT mobile app?
    - i. Yes/no
  - c. Do you know the relevance on Company People Network (CPN)?
    - i. Yes/no
  - d. Do you regularly update your CPN?
    - i. Yes/no
  - e. Do you know where to find the Staffing report?
    - i. Yes/no
  - f. Do you know how to use the Staffing report?
    - i. Yes/no
  - g. Do you know where to find the staffing request template?
    - i. Yes/no
  - h. Do you know how to use the staffing request template?
    - i. Yes/no
16. Open feedback on Staffing tools
17. Any other feedback or comments you would like to give for Staffing?