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Preface

Dear reader,

I'm proud to refer to the document in front of you as my Master's Thesis on "Physical and Meditative Activities at Work". It marks the end of an era and the keystone of my studies at NHTV Breda University of Applied Sciences.

This thesis celebrates my choice to extend my studies after a bachelor in sports. Spending the last two years at NHTV has proven to be a great choice. I was given the chance to broaden my perspective on the leisure industry, but more importantly, advance my scientific skill-set during the pre-master and master program. These skills have been of great importance in writing my thesis.

The last couple of months I've been working on the very relevant subject of stress reduction. I knew I wanted to use the knowledge from my bachelor studies and take it to a next level. During a peak of workload in the master program, I experienced work-related stress for the very first time myself. I had neck and shoulder complaints and my physiotherapist advised me to be more physically active during my day. Additionally, I was advised to try mindfulness meditation to relax my muscles and my brain. From that point on, I think I was more susceptible to news on work-related stress, because during the orientation for a master thesis topic, stress and burn-out were frequently in the news. Absenteeism due to work-related stress seemed to occur more than ever. When I did some more research, I found that absenteeism due to work-related stress was highest in the educational sector. That's when I decided that I wanted to incorporate physical activity, meditation and work-related stress in a case study for my master thesis.

If there's one thing I learnt, it is that after two years I still enjoy doing research. No wonder I look at this thesis as the representation of my personal growth as a researcher. Though, without the help of a few dear people I would not have made it. Therefore, I'd first like to thank dr. Agnes Elling-Machartzki my supervisor at the Mulier Instituut in Utrecht. Agnes gave me the opportunity to combine my master thesis with an internship at the Mulier Instituut. More importantly, Agnes challenged me to use different methodologies and provided encouraging feedback to reflect upon. The internship provided the perfect context for writing my thesis. Being surrounded by other (sports) researchers and working with an external company has been a boost for my motivation. Furthermore, I'd like to thank Mirjam Stuij for her feedback and input, especially with writing the narratives. Of course, I'd also like to thank my supervisors, dr. Marco van Leeuwen, dr. Adriaan van Liempt and dr. Kirsten Stam from NHTV for their helpful input, read-throughs and feedback. Additionally, special thanks go to the participants and the university of applied science who helped me with gathering all the data for this case study. Last but not least, I'd like to thank my fellow students for their 'timeless time', input and humour.

Enjoy reading this thesis and know I'm always available to discuss its contents.

Kind regards,

Coen van Bendegom

Table of contents

Preface.....	3
Abstract	6
Chapter 1 – Introduction.....	8
1.1 Problem definition	9
1.2 Societal relevance of the study.....	10
1.3 Academic relevance of the study.....	11
1.4 Thesis outline	12
Chapter 2 – Literature review	13
2.1 Time allocation in the Netherlands	13
2.2 Work-life balance in the informational society	13
2.3 Postmodernisation and the integration of labour, care and leisure	14
2.4 Post-fordist work and mental health	16
2.5 Physical and meditative activities for mental health	18
2.5 Conceptual model.....	20
Chapter 3 – Methodology	23
3.1 Research design	23
3.2 Data collection and sampling.....	24
3.2.1 Qualitative data collection and sampling	24
3.2.2 Quantitative data collection and sampling.....	25
3.3 Operationalization	26
3.3.1 Open interviews.....	26
3.3.2 In-depth interviews.....	26
3.4 Data analysis	27
Chapter 4 - Results	28
4.1 Results desk research: employee satisfaction survey	28
4.1.1 Satisfaction with workload	28
4.1.2 Unwanted behaviour	30
4.2 Results narrative interviews	30
4.2.1 Experienced causes of work-related stress	31
4.2.2 Result of experienced work-related stress	33
4.2.3 Coping with work-related stress.....	35
4.2.4 Physical and meditative activities at work	38
4.3 Results semi-structured interviews	40
4.3.1 Causes work-related stress (1): characteristics of work.....	40
4.3.2 Causes work-related stress (2): characteristics of employees	44
4.3.3 PMA and work-related stress	46
4.3.4 Integration of PMA and work	48

Chapter 5 - Discussion and conclusions	51
5.1 Interpretation of results	51
5.1.1 Interpreting employees' narratives	51
5.1.2 Interpreting professionals' interpretations	53
5.1.3 Interpreting the integration of work and PMA in the educational sector	54
5.2 Limitations	56
5.3 Conclusion.....	57
5.4 Recommendations for further research and practise	58
References.....	60
Appendix A: Open interview preparation	63
Appendix B: Topic list in-depth interviews	65
Appendix C: Distel's narrative	66
Appendix D: Inge's narrative	70
Appendix E: Ivy's narrative.....	73
Appendix F: Leon's narrative.....	77
Appendix G: Anna's narrative	80
Appendix H: Jack's narrative	83
Appendix I: Floor's narrative	87

Abstract

Stress at work is the number one reason for absenteeism in the Netherlands among the working population. It is estimated that sixty-six percent of work-related absenteeism, and thereby loss of productivity, is due to work-related stress. Work-related stress has various financial costs, especially for employers, and personal costs, especially for employees. These personal costs include physical, mental and social health issues. Politics as well as business have recognised these effects of work-related stress and focus on mobility and vitality programs to reduce or prevent work-related stress. This thesis focusses on vitality which aims to reduce or prevent work-related stress through physical and meditative activities (PMA). Scientific evidence is cautiously positive on the attributed beneficial effects of PMA for stress reduction. Meta-analysis studies show small to moderate effects for some, but certainly not all individuals. It could therefore be more adequate to study the meaning of PMA for employees who experience work-related stress. This study does so by a holistic approach which takes the perspectives of employees and professionals with an occupational responsibility to reduce work-related stress into account. Methodological pluralism and a case study research design can contribute to previous research by studying the socially constructed meaning that PMA and work-related stress have for employees. The main research question is therefore formulated as;

How can physical and meditative activities be meaningful for employees in an educational institute who experience work-related stress?

If PMA are considered meaningful for reducing stress among employees from the viewpoint of both employees and professionals this study could contribute to the debate of employees' mental health in our contemporary societies. Moreover, it could demonstrate the need for a shared responsibility from employers and employees to balance and potentially integrate work and PMA. Three sub-questions were formulated to answer the research question; 1) *How can physical and meditative activities be meaningful for employees who experience work-related stress according to these employees?*, 2) *How can physical and meditative activities be meaningful for employees who experience work-related stress according to professionals?*, 3) *Why is or isn't a further integration of paid work and leisure through PMA desirable according to employees and professionals?*

The research and sub-questions were studied by using a mixed methods approach in a case study research design. Quantitative data was used to delineate the case study as a large portion (80%) of the population had taken part in the survey. This gave a general image of work-related stress in the case as the data included eight items which linked to causes of work-related stress. The quantitative data was strengthened by asking seven employees for their lived experience on work-related stress. Additionally, six professionals were interviewed and provided their perspective on work-related stress, on PMA to reduce work-related stress and on the integration of work and PMA.

The results show that employees report a substantial work overload, 38 per cent of the employees (n = 639) report that their workload is too high or way too high. Moreover, a shocking 49 per cent of the teaching staff (n = 304) indicated that their workload was too high or way too high. Complementary, the qualitative data from employees' narratives confirmed that employees experience peaks in workloads which can be stressful. In addition to high workloads employees mentioned other stressors which were mostly recognised by the professionals. Furthermore, the interviews with employees have shown that all the respondents have experienced mental and physical

complaints due to work-related stress to a greater or lesser extent. Respondents reported difficulties falling asleep, being exhausted, having experienced a burn-out or having palpitations.

One of the most important findings is that all the employees have experienced that PMA can help to reduce work-related stress. For some this is through high intensity physical activity; when participants are fully immersed in the activity, they can let go of thoughts. For others low intensity physical activity or meditation are an escape from the need to deliver a (high) performance. In both cases it seems that PMA are used as a coping strategy, a behaviour used to avoid being psychologically harmed by an over-demanding social experience. Although highlighting other causes of work-related stress and contributing to a better understanding of work-related stress, the professionals recognise PMA as meaningful for stress reduction among employees. According to the professionals PMA can contribute to stress reduction by; 1) relaxation, 2) abreaction, 3) regeneration and 4) a mind shift. Some professionals state that PMA could possibly be meaningful for stress prevention by; 1) teaching or developing skills to be more resilient to stress, and 2) teaching a healthy balance between effort and relaxation.

Furthermore, the professionals have argued that due to the type of work and the type of people in the educational sector, the sector is at an increased risk of experiencing work-related stress. This could demand more backing and support from the employer to create and design a shared responsibility which aims to diminish or prevent this increased risk. It is not a question whether the boundaries between the spheres of work and life are blurring for employees in the educational sector. Especially for lecturers who work at the educational institute of this case study. It would rather be an exception if a lecturer didn't bring work home. However, bringing work home is not always forced upon employees. The advantages of bringing work home are frequently mentioned by employees; focus and flexibility. Though, the blurring of boundaries between work and life seem to be a one-sided affair. It is work seeping into life rather than a twofold integration of work and life. The integration of work and PMA could be a step towards a twofold integration of work and life. There are 'supporters', 'considerators', and 'sceptics' of the integration of work and PMA among employees and professionals. Besides the meaning PMA can have for stress reduction, the most noticeable benefit mentioned is efficient time use.

We conclude that employees and professionals consider PMA as quite meaningful for stress reduction and possibly meaningful for stress prevention. However, there is individual variability among employees and professionals on how PMA is perceived and expected to be meaningful. Most consistently, employees and professionals agree on the use of PMA as a coping strategy to reduce work-related stress. Moreover, if reducing work-related stress is perceived as a shared responsibility of the employer and the employee, the integration of work and PMA can be desirable. It is recommended to continue the discussion on shared responsibility to reduce work-related stress in the educational sector. A shared responsibility to support employees to do their work in a good physical and mental condition will help to reduce financial and personal costs employers and employees are dealing with and thereby contribute to a healthier workplace.

Chapter 1 – Introduction

Stress at work is the number one reason for absenteeism in the Netherlands among the working population (van der Ploeg, van der Pal, de Vroome, & van den Bossche, 2014). Currently, there has been a lot of attention for this problem which affects many in today's postmodern society. In the Netherlands academics and policymakers plea for a radical change in handling work-related stress (Haegens & Leeuw, 2017; Kremer, Went, & Knottnerus, 2017; Nieuwsuur, 2017). Also, politics are highly involved in the discussions on work-related stress. In February 2017, the Minister of Social Affairs and Employment, Lodewijk Asscher, argued; *“working hard won't make people ill, working too hard makes everyone ill”* (NOS, 2017). There are even suggestions for legislation on the attainability of employees through micro-electronic communication devices, such as mobile phones, outside working hours (NOS, 2017).

Van der Ploeg et al. (2014) distinguishes multiple causes of work-related stress: a high workload, emotionally exhaustive work, and unwanted behaviour from inside or outside the organization; e.g. aggression, bullying, discrimination and sexual harassment. This group of psychosocial sources which can cause work-related stress are categorised as the psychosocial workload (PSA). Work-related stress as a result of PSA seems to occur most often in service economy sectors, for instance; finance, education, professional services and energy and water companies (van der Ploeg et al., 2014). Work in the educational sector has the highest percentage of absenteeism related to PSA. It is estimated that sixty-six percent of work-related absenteeism, and thereby loss of productivity, is due to PSA, this represents 47.000 employees yearly (van der Ploeg et al., 2014).

The Dutch national platform for sustainable labour (NDPI, n.d.) has collected best practices of companies that handle work-related stress well according to their employees. These best practices include mobility and vitality programs to restore physical and mental health or strengthen employees' resilience to prevent work-related stress. Mobility programs aim for lifelong learning and the development of career paths. Vitality programs are programs which often comprise of physical or meditative activities (PMA) (NDPI, n.d.). The focus of this study is on vitality to reduce or prevent work-related stress as a result of PSA. However, work-related stress cannot be seen in isolation, due to spill over between work and the rest of life (Lewis, 2003). It is assumed that PMA could benefit employees in the educational sector who experience work-related stress. Scientific evidence is cautiously positive on the attributed beneficial effects of PMA for stress-reduction (Chiesa & Serretti, 2009; Goyal et al., 2014; Hartfiel, Havenhand, Khalsa, Clarke, & Krayner, 2011; Ospina et al., 2007; Stavrakakis, 2015; Zuzanek, 2004). However, most evidence is weak and many studies are of low quality according to authors of several meta-studies. These studies conclude that PMA can have small to moderate effects on stress reduction. This occurs for some, but certainly not all individuals (e.g. Chiesa & Serretti, 2009; Goyal et al., 2014; Ospina et al., 2007). It could therefore be more adequate to study meaning of PMA for employees who experience work-related stress. This study does so by a holistic approach which takes the perspectives of employees and professionals with an occupational responsibility to reduce work-related stress into account. These professionals are, for instance; company doctors, operational managers, and HRM-employees. Besides the meaning of PMA for employees who experience work-related stress, this study investigates whether the use of leisurely activities to reduce or prevent work-related stress in the workplace is desirable.

1.1 Problem definition

This thesis will focus on the meaning of PMA for employees who experience work-related stress. Furthermore, this thesis purposes to study the potential benefits of PMA for mental health in the context of the postmodern or informational society. The informational society is described as a shift away from the industrial society, which is based on information technology instead of manufacturing technology. It has substituted the industrial mode of production as the most important mode of production. Due to globalisation and deregulation this information ‘flows’ through global networks of individuals and organizations (Castells, 2010). In this world, individuals are ever connected to the outside world; from family and friends, to the news and their favourite leisure activities, and of course, work. Furthermore, the ‘technologization’ of society has made many of our performances instantly visible, whether it is in sports or at work, pushing us to improve (Pfauth, Verkade, & Hofstede, 2017). This has fundamentally transformed the nature of the capitalist labour market, from a manufacturing economy to a knowledge economy, demanding more flexible organizations (Rojek, 2004). Workplaces in these organizations have become diversified in the first decade of the 21st century, with possibilities for more control, autonomy and responsibility for the employee. Parallel to this development, there has been a rise in dual-earner families and single parents which contributed to the diversification of the workplace (Bianchi & Milkie, 2010). Hereby, the combined workload of a household has increased while time budget studies in the Netherlands show that time spent on paid work has not significantly increased (SCP, 2013). The consequences are that the boundaries of work and the rest of life are blurring which can result in the feeling of time pressure and stress (Lewis, 2003; Zuzanek, 2004).

As a student of leisure studies I will not take an economic or medical sciences perspective, but rather a social sciences approach. The former scientific perspectives have focussed on the medical and economic consequences of work-related stress. Furthermore, these perspectives have shown a quantitative approach towards measuring work-related stress. A mixed methods social sciences approach can contribute to these perspectives by researching the socially constructed meaning that PMA and work-related stress have for employees. This study addresses the meaning of PMA for employees who experience work-related stress by performing a triangulation with employees and professionals with an occupational responsibility to reduce work-related stress within a case study design. Thereby, this study can contribute to the approaches from other scientific disciplines. Additionally, this thesis addresses the broader issue of the integration of work and life. It addresses whether a further integration of PMA and work in the educational sector is desirable. PMA are generally regarded as leisure activities. Leisure time, although constrained, is often perceived as the time where an individual can pursue his or her free choice (Rojek, 2009). It could be paradoxical to supersede the freedom of leisure time with PMA at work to reduce or prevent work-related stress. Moreover, there could be a paradox in regaining productivity at work through PMA as these activities seem to address symptoms of work-related stress, not the cause(s).

This thesis will try to explore and understand the meaning of PMA for employees’ mental health and well-being at work. Furthermore, the literature review will shed light on the tensions involved caused by major socio-economic developments and blurring boundaries between work and the rest of life. The study is conducted as a case study at an educational institute, as quantitative research shows that this sector has the highest percentage of absenteeism because of PSA (van der Ploeg et al., 2014). The aim of this study is to gain a deeper understanding about the meaning PMA for employees who experience work-related stress. In pursuing a holistic approach, the role and function of professionals is emphasized, because in the Netherlands a formal network of employers, employees

and company doctors is responsible to tackle work-related absenteeism, including PSA related absenteeism (Ministerie van Sociale Zaken en Werkgelegenheid, n.d.). The main research question of this thesis is formulated as;

How can physical and meditative activities be meaningful for employees in an educational institute who experience work-related stress?

1.2 Societal relevance of the study

Every year, one million people in the working population show signs of a burn-out or other psychological illness (van der Ploeg et al., 2014). This is roughly one out of every eight people in the working population of the Netherlands (CBS, 2016). According to research by van der Ploeg et al. (2014), more than one third of work-related absenteeism is caused by work-related stress. It is estimated that absenteeism because of PSA costs Dutch employers around 2.7 billion euros yearly.

In another research, van der Ploeg, van der Zwaan, Houtman, Eysink, & van den Bossche (2015) estimated that the total costs for absenteeism, incapacity to work, and the costs for professional care as a result of psychosocial work overload are around 4.6 billion euros yearly. These do not include the costs of presentism; the costs of the loss of productivity because of ill employees who are still going to their work (van der Ploeg et al., 2015). Moreover, the costs that are described are only the financial costs of work-related stress due to PSA, however it can also result in various personal costs. These personal costs are mostly physical and mental health issues. Common health issues related to PSA are: burn-out, depression, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD), cardiovascular disease and arm, neck and shoulder complaints (Eysink, Dekkers, Janssen, Poos, & Meijer, 2012). Additionally, a Dutch survey in 2013 on working conditions among 23.000 employees (NEA 2013) found that the most self-reported effects of PSA by employees are; burn-out symptoms, not able to meet the psychological demands of work, and a distressed balance between work and private life (van Zwieten et al., 2014).

Thus, work-related stress has a significant influence on the loss of productivity. Moreover, work-related stress negatively affects the well-being of employees and includes substantial financial costs for employers and society. According to a letter from the Dutch minister of Social Affairs and Employment to the House of Representatives in 2013, PSA is one of the biggest challenges of this time (Asscher, 2013). PSA is seen as a risk resulting from work and as such it is included in the law working conditions, *'Arbeidsomstandigheden'* in Dutch. Thereby, it is the responsibility of the employer to take appropriate measures to regulate PSA (Wet Stb. 2006/675). Currently, employers in the Netherlands seem to focus on changes in the organization, creating possibilities for counselling and giving employees more space to prevent work-related stress through mobility and vitality programs (van Emmerik, de Vroome, Kraan, & van den Bossche, 2015). However, 40 per cent of the respondents of NEA 2013 desire (more) measures to prevent high workloads and work-related stress (TNO & CBS, 2014; van Zwieten et al., 2014). Whether that could be physical or meditative activities at work remains one of the questions. This study is relevant in the societal discussions on how to deal with PSA in the workplace, especially in the educational sector. Moreover, this thesis will try to demonstrate a deeper understanding of the complexity of work-related stress, well-being and productivity through studying the meaning of PMA for employees who experience work-related stress and includes suggestions for future policymaking.

1.3 Academic relevance of the study

Traditional research on work-life, work-leisure or work-family balance treated labour, care and leisure as separated, gendered spheres. These spheres are divided between the workplace and the home and only occasionally spill-over between these sphere occurred (Hilbrecht, 2007). However, more recently due to major socio-economic changes these spheres have started to integrated and boundaries started to blur (Lewis, 2003). According to the literature there are multiple causes for these blurring boundaries. One of the most influential changes is the transformation from an industrial society towards a globalised and more deregulated informational society. Due to interconnectivity in the informational society, time is compressed, as individuals are able to connect to multiple platforms and activities at the same time. This can lead to feelings of time pressure both in work and in personal life (Castells, 2010). Parallel socio-economic developments in recent decades are the influx of women in the labour force (Hilbrecht, 2007; Lewis, 2003) and diversification of families and employment statuses such as dual-earner households (Bianchi & Milkie, 2010). Western capitalist economies, especially knowledge workers, have adapted to these technological and socio-economic changes which demand more flexible working arrangements with greater uncertainties for employees (Rojek, 2004). Multiple studies suggest that feelings of time pressure and work-related stress are a result of the subsequent adaptations of the western capitalist economies to the socio-economic changes mentioned above (Bianchi & Milkie, 2010; Kremer et al., 2017; Lewis, 2003; Schor, 1991; Zuzanek, 2004). These and other studies will be further elaborated upon in the literature review.

The manifestation of work-related stress in our informational societies demands new strategies to deal with this issue. Work-life balance is often uphold as an ideal (Lewis, 2003). However, Lewis (2003) asks whether an imbalance or fragmented work-life is acceptable or even preferable. Maybe a further integration of paid work and the rest of life is desirable, maybe it is not. This research could shed light on that thesis and could contribute to the way the traditional spheres and the integration of these sphere of labour, care and leisure are regarded. Additionally, this study could help to parallel the substantial quantitative research on time allocation, work-related stress, productivity, absenteeism and health by Dutch research institutes such as TNO (van der Ploeg et al., 2014, 2015; van Zwieten et al., 2014), CBS (Hoofman et al., 2016; van Zwieten et al., 2014) and RIVM (Eysink et al., 2012) with a case study design and a mixed methods approach, with a focus on qualitative methods.

This thesis is written in close cooperation with the Mulier Instituut and VUmc and can contribute to their current research. The Mulier Instituut is a social-scientific sports research institute that undertakes qualitative and quantitative research projects to collect data and monitor trends and developments within the domain of sport and sport sociology. VUmc is a university medical centre closely cooperating with the Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam. Mulier Instituut and VUmc cooperate in an expertise research department; sports in time of illness (STZ), in Dutch "*Sport in Tijden van Ziekte*" (www.stzverhalen.nl).

1.4 Thesis outline

The structure of this thesis consists of five chapters. After the introduction to the topic and the relevance of this study (chapter 1), the thesis continues in chapter two with the discussion of relevant literature on time allocation, work-life balance and knowledge work to denote the context of society in which the case is situated. Subsequently, the literature review pursues on mental health, well-being and PMA. Chapter two finishes with a conceptual model in which the literature is linked to the research and sub questions. In chapter three the methodology of the study is justified. This study opts a mixed methods approach in case study research in which multiple perspectives are researched. Quantitative research provides the data to context the case study. This is followed by a qualitative approach in which narratives are used to provoke the meaning of PMA for mental health and well-being in employees. Also, the perspective of professionals with an occupational responsibility to reduce work-related stress is included. In chapter four the multiple perspectives are integrated and interpreted. Most importantly, the experience of work-related stress, PMA as a coping mechanism and PMA in the workplace. Chapter five emphasizes the interpretation of the results by relating them to the literature and by answering the sub questions. Finally, chapter five continues with the limitations of this study, a conclusion and recommendations for further research and the practice.

Chapter 2 – Literature review

2.1 Time allocation in the Netherlands

Time is a resource in life that is not infinite, a week only has 168 hours. Most people live by structured routines in which they divide time for different tasks (SCP, 2013). These tasks are allocated to three main clusters of time by the Dutch Institute for Social Research (SCP). The first is obligatory time which is time spent on paid work, education, household tasks and care tasks. Second, personal time is spent on sleeping, eating and drinking and personal care. The third is free time, which is not just the time free from obligatory tasks, but free time in this sense that time is devoted to leisure (SCP, 2013). When these clusters of time are divided to an individual's satisfaction, it is argued that there is a balance in the time devoted to obligatory tasks, personal care and leisure. This also means that a misbalance between these three clusters of time can result into dissatisfaction (Haworth & Veal, 2004).

Research on the history of time allocation shows that weekly working hours have decreased from the late 1800s from averaging 54 hours a week, to the 40-hour working weeks which were established in most European countries around the 1960s (Cross, 2005). Longitudinal time use survey studies in the Netherlands show that the time spent on paid work by the working population, the age group 20 to 65 years, slightly increased between 1975 and 2005, mostly due to female labour participation (SCP, 2013). Since 2006 the national time use survey is changed to the harmonized European time use surveys (HETUS). Therefore, comparing the data from before 2006 with the data from 2006 must be performed with care. However, between 2006 and 2011 time spent on paid work by the working population did not increase significantly showing a break in the trend of previous studies. Additionally, time spent on household tasks and care duties decreased significantly while time spent on education remained the same (SCP, 2013). So, the total time spent on obligatory tasks and personal care together roughly remained the same. However, stress as a result of labour and feelings of time pressure seems to occur more frequently (Haworth & Veal, 2004; Kremer et al., 2017; Lewis, 2003; Schor, 1991; Zuzanek, 2004). It seems that stress is not bound to temporal tasks, but transcends the spheres of labour, care and leisure. The next paragraph elaborates on the possible causes of experienced time pressure.

2.2 Work-life balance in the informational society

Traditionally, paid work, care and leisure were studied separately. Leisure in the early work-leisure research from the 1950s and 1960s was seen as residual time when obligatory and personal care tasks were completed (Hilbrecht, 2007). Theories from that time focussed on the male breadwinner model and the manufacturing economy, leisure, care and paid work were studied as separated, gendered spheres. However, in the last few decades, major socio-economic changes have occurred which have a profound influence on work and private life and the traditional boundaries between them are blurring (Haworth & Veal, 2004; Hilbrecht, 2007; Lewis, 2003).

One of the most influential socio-economic change is the technological development in information technology (Castells, 2010). Castells (2010) argues that developments in information technology are what developments in energy technology were to the industrial society. The use of new telecommunications technologies enables technological innovations to be directly distributed among its users. Moreover, Castells (2010) states that we have entered the informational society as information has become the dominant mode of production. In this informational or postmodern society, micro-electronic telecommunication technologies such as the internet and mobile devices are

a fundamental source of power and productivity in society. An important consequence of a highly connected society is that time and space are becoming less relevant if one is connected to the network. Castells (2010) describes the no longer geographically bound space as the space of flows, as opposed, but parallel to, the space of places. The space of flows is the space where communication and information flows, an open and dynamic system that allows innovation to emerge from the network. In this system, linear time is also becoming less relevant. In what Castells (2010) refers to as 'timeless time' a person is able to be in several places at the same time and participate in more than one activity in one place. This does not mean that linear time disappears, although according to Castells (2010), it has become less significant. While each person in an interaction is situated and bound to a spatial and temporal realm, the interaction itself transcends those realms. Thereby, "*temporal and spatial boundaries between paid work and personal life have become increasingly blurred.*" (Lewis, 2003:343).

Consequently, this affects the existing economic structures of doing businesses. In this new environment, digitalisation made global interaction easily accessible and enabled companies to operate on a global level. Furthermore, liberalization and deregulation of the markets of the world paved the way for global networks and increasing competition (Castells, 2010). Castells denotes these networked companies as network enterprises which adapted to the open and dynamic new way of doing their business. Critics of Castells argue that he is too technological deterministic and optimistic about micro-electronic telecommunications. However, this shift in society towards a more informational society has caused tensions in existing social and economic structures.

Another socio-economic development that affects the work-life balance and can contribute to feelings of time pressure which results in stress could be explained by changes in family diversity and labour participation (Bianchi & Milkie, 2010; Lewis, 2003). Since the 1960s the gap between men and women and their participation in paid work and household and care tasks has decreased due to female labour participation. Thereby the gendered, separated spheres of paid work and household tasks have diminished in Western societies. However, men are still working more hours than women and women are still more occupied with household and care tasks (Lewis, 2003). Another development is an increase in family diversity; single parents, gay families and dual-earners since the start of the 21st century (Bianchi & Milkie, 2010). In their study on work and families, Jacobs and Gerson (2001) focussed on the combined commitments of household instead of individual workers. Complementary to time budget studies of individuals, this shows that individual working time did not increase. However, it did show that combined commitments of some households increased due to an increase in family diversity, especially dual-earners. The effects were strongest for highly educated workers with prestigious jobs (Jacobs & Gerson, 2001). So, the increase in combined commitments of households can lead to a misbalance, or work-life conflict, between obligatory tasks and the rest of life. Bianchi and Milkie (2010) argue that high quality family time is hard to achieve which leads to feelings of stress and guilt.

2.3 Postmodernisation and the integration of labour, care and leisure

The shift from the industrial society to the informational society is also referred to as the postmodernisation of society (Hilbrecht, 2007). Postmodernisation, especially affects organizations that are dependent on knowledge and information as modes of production (Rojek, 2004). Post-fordism is a term used to denote the shift away from manufacturing economy and its characteristics which include: a hierarchical structure, centralised command, an inflexible production process, capital intensive and involved in large-scale plants (Rojek, 2004). Post-fordist labour organizations are workplaces that are characterized by greater flexibility achieved through the micro-electronic

telecommunications and individualised organizational autonomy. Moreover, hierarchies are flatter, working hours are flexible and extendible outside the workplace, and individual employees are part of a network in which teamwork and empowerment are key characteristics (Castells, 2010; Rubery, 2005; Van Echtelt, Glebbeek, & Lewis, 2009). The accumulation of wealth by post-fordist organizations is flexible and requires a skill-set that includes innovation, adaptability and mobility. Moreover, flexible accumulation demands flexible employees with flexible work contracts, *“since the essence of innovation, adaptation and mobility is versatility.”* (Rojek, 2004:56). The educational sector is a service sector which makes it likely that similar tensions have occurred in the educational institute of the case study.

According to a recent report by the Dutch Scientific Council for Governmental Policy the Dutch labour market has one of the most flexible working force in Europe due to flexible contracts, temporal contracts and self-employed personnel (Kremer et al., 2017). The increased flexibilisation of the Dutch labour market since the 1990s has led to more job insecurity, financial insecurity and thereby stress. Especially those in flexible and temporal job contracts experience this stress (Kremer et al., 2017). Kremer et al. (2017) note that the insecurity on the labour market spills-over in personal lives as it is harder to get a mortgage and start a family.

Thus, employees in the service sector economy seem to have the choice of more flexible workhours and workplaces, they have more autonomy and are therefore empowered to make their own decisions. However, this choice is not unconstrained, it comes with a price, more insecurity because of flexible or temporal work contracts. Lewis (2003) argues that flexible working hours are more often used to work more instead of fewer hours. Home-based working is often associated with work interfering with non-work time and thereby spills over in other obligatory tasks, leisure time and personal care (Hill, Miller, Weiner, & Colihan, 1998; Sullivan & Lewis, 2001). Furthermore, employees in the educational institute can always be connected to their workspace through micro-electronic telecommunications. The informational society provides employees and employers the possibilities of being connected even when they are not in the same geographical place or time zone. As a result of these developments the boundaries between work and private life are blurring (Lewis, 2003). In addition to other developments, this can result in feelings of time pressure although time budget studies of individual citizens show that objectively time allocation in paid work has not significantly increased (SCP, 2013; Zuzanek, 2004).

This body of literature on the work-life balance in the informational society clearly shows that the transformation to the informational society has an impact on both the organization of labour as the organization of obligatory tasks at home. Of course, this is not the case for all work and family life in society, as not all work is post-fordist and not all family life is organized in dual-earner households. However, this thesis focusses on those who work in flexible labour markets and have to deal with a disrupted work-life balance. It is the ability of post-fordist labour to transcend the workplace and worktime that poses challenges for the work-life balance of those employed in post-fordist organizations as boundaries between work and non-work time are increasingly blurred. Moreover, theories on work-life have moved from spill over, which is perceived as a passive or reactive attitude of the employee, to the proactive integration of paid work in the rest of life (Lewis, 2003). Labour in the workplace, care at home and leisure in free time used to be treated as separated spheres in early work-life literature. Nowadays, in our contemporary informational society these spheres have moved from passive, reactive spill-over towards a proactive integration of the three spheres. This is facilitated by the socio-economic changes that have been discussed. In the next part, we will examine the value of post-fordist work for individuals and the effect on leisure and mental health.

2.4 Post-fordist work and mental health

Suzan Lewis explores in her paper whether post-fordist work can become the new leisure. Lewis (2003) and Rojek (2009) define leisure as the non-obligated time in which activities are perceived as freely chosen. Lewis (2003) argues that leisure activities are mostly defined as enjoyment and a space for self-expression. However, also work activities can be strong determinants for enjoyment and identity affirmation. Some studies even suggest that work is experienced more positively for positive well-being than leisure activities (Haworth, 1997). According to Sullivan and Lewis (2001) work, especially post-fordist work, is becoming more enjoyable and seductive than work in the industrial society. As post-fordist work is more flexible and extendible outside the workplace it can be difficult to distinguish work activities from leisure activities (Lewis, 2003). Work is also an important source for self-esteem, recognitions and status (Hochschild, 1997). Work-based achievement is highly valued by our contemporary society, thereby work becomes a major source of self-esteem and identity. Having no job or temporal jobs can deny people that source of self-esteem and identity (Kremer et al., 2017). Additionally, many who work in post-fordist organizations claim to be self-driven to work longer hours and continue working at home (Lewis, 2003). The total involvement in work gives them enjoyment and intense satisfaction (Hochschild, 1997; Lewis, 2003).

Besides Suzan Lewis, also other scholars have tried to explain why work is chosen over leisure. Hochschild (1997) argues that paid work is more stimulating than obligatory activities at home and therefore preferred. According to Schor (1991) work is preferred over leisure time, because it provides access to participate fully in consumer culture. Gratton and Taylor (2004) add that leisure time is given up to be able to keep up with the work and spent cycle. Every extra hour of work provides more resources to engage in the consumer culture, also known as the income/leisure trade-off. Therefore, work has taken a central role in our society which is becoming more dominant.

It seems that these theories try to explain the motivations or choice of individuals to be totally involved in work. However, a total involvement in work does not seem to be unconstrained or free choice, there still is a sense of obligation or inevitability. The claim to be self-driven is strongly related to occupational identity in service sector workplaces (Lewis, 2003). Especially in with work in the service sectors *“notions of client service and professionalism that imply constant availability are integral parts of professional identity.”* (Lewis, 2003:349). The importance of providing an excellent service asks for constant availability and long working hours, which are notions that become professional identity affirming. Occupational identity is being constructed in a certain given social context. While for some long working hours and constant availability are a choice, others have to meet similar expectations to affirm their professional identity in their social context. Hereby an organizational culture can be created in which long, flexible working hours and constant availability are becoming impossible standards for others to meet (Lewis, 2003). Additionally, in response to globalisation and international competition in the informational society companies are downsizing to cut on budget spending and demand higher efficiency. This creates an intensification of work for those who endure the organizational changes. Often this goes in sync with more autonomy and responsibility to get the work done which makes higher workloads inevitable (Lewis, 2003). As a result, *“people try to adapt to ever increasing workloads by working harder and smarter, often constructing this as an active choice because it is difficult to envisage deriving the rewards of identity affirming work in any other way.”* (Lewis, 2003:353). A workload is (too) high when employees are not able to meet the demands of their daily tasks and are not capable to change the causes of this workload (van Zwieten et al., 2014). Lewis (2003) concludes that post-fordist work is not the new leisure for most people. It is rather the socially constructed organization of work than just individual factors that determine

workplace and worktime behaviour. This can cause friction and stress when striving for an ideal work-life balance or a proactive integration of work and the rest of life.

As we have seen, post-fordist work in the informational society can lead to feelings of time pressure, because of longer paid or unpaid working hours due to major socio-economic developments (Hilbrecht, 2007; Lewis, 2003; Schor, 1991). Perceived time pressure or time crunch could also be driven by the general speeding up of life in the informational society (Zuzanek, 2004). A greater fragmentation or modularisation of time with rapid changes from one activity to another, is also associated with subjective feelings of time pressure (Rojek, 2004; Zuzanek, 2004). Zuzanek (2004) found that work overload and feelings of time pressure influence emotional well-being. Emotional well-being was negatively influenced by work overload and feelings of time pressure, especially the use of non-working time and the balance between work and family life. Additionally, it was found that people working long hours could have no feelings of time pressure when they are doing work that interests them and when they have freely chosen to work long hours. On the contrary, people working short hours might feel time-stressed when they are not interested in their work or have little autonomy (Zuzanek, 2004). Interestingly, Lewis (2003) argues that greater autonomy can also lead to work overload as greater autonomy brings greater responsibility. This in turn can also lead to perceived time pressure as much post-fordist work is 'never' done.

The difference between perceived time pressure and psychological stress is comprehensively explained by Zuzanek; "Perceived time pressure results from excessive demands on time, while psychological stress is born out of excessive demands on human capacity to deal with physical and emotional challenges of work and life in general." (Zuzanek, 2004:133). This means that perceived time pressure can fuel psychological stress. Moreover, this does not mean that people who aren't psychologically stressed are always dealing adequately or satisfactorily with their perceived time pressure. So, perceived time pressure due to high workloads and work-life conflict(s) can lead to a point where people are not able to deal with physical and emotional challenges of work and life.

Stress at work can spill over into the home and equally personal life affairs can affect people at work (Greenhaus & Parasuraman, 1999; in Lewis, 2003). Research among the Dutch working population suggest that work-life conflict can be a cause for, as well as the result of work-related stress (van der Ploeg et al., 2014; van Zwieten et al., 2014). However, it is not just work-life issues that can cause work-related stress. Besides high workloads and perceived time pressure other factors are described that can result in stress at work. Emotionally exhaustive work is described as lack of autonomy and repetitive work. Furthermore, unwanted behaviour from inside or outside the organization; for instance, aggression, bullying, discrimination and sexual harassment also have an effect on work-related stress (van der Ploeg et al., 2014). Dutch researchers describe these factors as the psychosocial workload (PSA), as they encompass both psychic and social aspects (Eysink et al., 2012; van der Ploeg et al., 2014, 2015). The factors described can lead to a psychosocial work overload of which common health issues are: burn-out, depression, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD), cardiovascular disease, and arm, neck and shoulder complaints (Eysink et al., 2012). Self-reported effects of PSA by employees are: burn-out symptoms, not able to meet the psychological demands of work, and a distressed balance between work and private life (van Zwieten et al., 2014). These physical and mental health issues can lead to absenteeism and presentism. Thereby, PSA and its physical and mental health issues have a significant influence on the loss of productivity. Moreover, work-related stress negatively affects the well-being of employees and includes substantial financial costs for employers and society (van der Ploeg et al., 2015).

2.5 Physical and meditative activities for mental health

In the Netherlands the employer is responsible for the well-being of employees at work by law (Wet Stb. 2006/675). The employer is obliged to work with a company doctor who is a medical specialist on work and health. A company doctor is an independent body who consults in the interest of both the employer and the employee. As a consultant, the company doctor aids with prevention programs and policies. Furthermore, a company doctor is obliged to ensure privacy of the employee and assesses (work-related) illness. When an (work-related) illness is identified professional care is provided and the employee undergoes rehabilitation and reintegration (Ministerie van Sociale Zaken en Werkgelegenheid, n.d.).

The Dutch national platform for a sustainable labour force (NDPI, n.d.) provides management tools and best practices to cope with the complexity of work-related stress. In their programs, mobility and vitality are the key for a successful change towards a sustainable labour force. Mobility includes possibilities for the development of career paths, vitality includes physical and mental health, and a balance between work and private life. Vitality programs for physical and mental health frequently aim at physically active or meditative leisure activities. It is generally accepted that physical activity has a positive effect on well-being and mood (Ströhle, 2008). Physical activity and exercise are widely used in treatment for depression and mental disorders (Stathopoulou, Powers, Berry, Smits, & Otto, 2006). Based on eleven studies Stathopoulou et al. (2006) argue that physical activity can be a powerful intervention for clinical depression. However, it seems that the use of physical activity for mental health and well-being is mostly applied to clinical groups, healthy subjects are less studied. A different study reviewed over 30 narrative and meta-analysis reviews (Fox, 1999). This study focussed on multiple potential beneficial outcomes of physical activity found in the literature aside from depression. Moderate intensity physical activity has shown to contribute to subjective well-being and positive mood in large scale surveys and experimental research (Fox, 1999). According to Fox (1999) physical activity to reduce stress has shown equivocal results due to difficulties in measurement or a lack of effect. Also Zuzanek (2004) states that empirical data on physical activity provide little support for general stress-reducing abilities. Recent longitudinal research by Stavrakakis (2015) in the Netherlands found that there is a weak relationship between physical activity and the prevention of depressive symptoms for adolescents and young adults. The relationship is weak because strong individual differences are found, some individuals benefit from physical activity while for others no effect is found. There are even respondents that feel worse after physical activities. The reason for these differences remain unclear, furthermore it is not known which individuals could benefit from an active lifestyle. Stavrakakis (2015) also concludes that an early engagement in physical activity could not prevent a first episode of depression. Moreover, the empirical data shows that the onset of depression could not be prevented by physical activity. Stavrakakis (2015) emphasizes the importance of personalisation in treatment of depressions and depressive symptoms. Zuzanek (2004) agrees that direct and indirect effects of leisure participation, personality dispositions, social support and health are often contested and can point in different directions. Thus, physical activity seems to have a positive effect on well-being and can reduce stress for some individuals. However, previous studies do not provide a convincing answer whether physical activity could reduce work-related stress for employees in the educational sector who experience this work-related stress.

Besides physical activities the NDPI suggests the use of meditative activities to prevent or cope with work-related stress. There is a lack of consensus about an academic definition on meditation, however most scholars agree that it requires some form of mental training through emptying the mind (Ospina et al., 2007). In academic literature, yoga and mindfulness meditation are meditative activities

that have frequently been studied for their contribution to stress reduction. Most of these studies focus on subjects with chronic illness, however some studies also included healthy subjects. Meta-studies can help to gain an overview of the research conducted. Yoga and mindfulness meditation are seen as a subcategory of meditation which is *“an umbrella term that encompasses a family of practices that share some distinctive features, but that vary in important ways in their purpose and practise.”* (Ospina et al., 2007:10). As a subcategory, yoga entails a broad group of techniques with physical and mental activities; e.g. postures, breath control, and meditation and is rooted in yogic tradition. The term yoga itself is an assembly of many different techniques of which some date back thousands of years (Ospina et al., 2007). According to NOC*NSF, the umbrella sports federation in the Netherlands, yoga is the fastest growing sport among women in 2015 (NOC*NSF, 2015). Another popular subcategory of meditation is mindfulness meditation which has been described as *“the ability to attend to thoughts and emotions as they arise and to be fully conscious of the present-moment experience.”* (Schure, Christopher, & Christopher, 2008:47). According to Schure et al. (2008), the mindfulness-based stress reduction (MBSR) program is one of the thoroughly researched stress reduction program. The MBSR program consists of an integration of contemporary clinical and psychological practices and Buddhist mindfulness meditation and is mostly used in clinical groups over an 8-12 week course (Chiesa & Serretti, 2009). Though, convincing evidence that yoga or mindfulness meditation has stress reducing capabilities in healthy subjects are scarce.

Several meta-studies on the practise of meditation in general and on MBSR programs are conducted. Ospina et al. (2007) state in their meta-analysis that too many uncertainties surround the broad practice of meditation to draw any conclusions. More specific meta-analysis and critical review studies seem to be the most reliable academic source for the effects of meditative activities on stress reduction. One meta-analysis study of ten studies by Chiesa and Serretti (2009) found that mindfulness-based stress reduction (MBSR) programs showed significant nonspecific effects on stress reduction in nonclinical, healthy subjects. The effects were classified as nonspecific because the MBSR program is a twelve-week program consisting of guided meetings and homework assignments (Chiesa & Serretti, 2009). A second MBSR meta-analysis of 20 studies also demonstrated significant positive effect sizes with subjects of clinical populations as well as stressed nonclinical groups (Grossman, Niemann, Schmidt, & Walach, 2004). However, both studies admit that many studies that were included in their meta-analyses are of low quality and had methodological shortcomings such as small sample size, non-randomization, self-selection of respondents and the use of a waiting list as a control group. A third meta-analysis reviewed 47 trials of meditative programs for psychological stress and well-being with an active control; *“a program that is matched in time and attention to the intervention group for the purpose of matching expectations of benefit”* (Goyal et al., 2014:359). This study found that meditative programs, in particular mindfulness meditation, showed small improvements in stress reduction. A fourth critical review on the effectiveness of yoga found short term improvements for the reduction of depressive symptoms (Cramer, Lauche, Langhorst, & Dobos, 2013). Nevertheless, the study only found evidence for meditation-based yoga interventions, not for exercise-based yoga interventions. The authors claim to have conducted the first meta-analysis on yoga interventions and depression which included twelve studies. However, the study also emphasized caution in the interpretation of the results because of the heterogeneity of yoga interventions and poor methodological reporting of the included studies (Cramer et al., 2013). Besides meta-analysis reviews on quantitative studies, a 4-year qualitative study showed that graduate students who followed a three credit MBSR program commonly mentioned an increased ability to cope with stressors such as anxiety, depression or fears (Schure et al., 2008). Furthermore, according to Davis and Hayes (2011) studies

have shown that *“meditation activates regions in the brain associated with more adaptive responding to stressful or negative situations.”* (p. 201).

Thus, the authors of these meta-analyses and critical reviews are carefully optimistic about the results of meditative programs for the reduction of stress. From the meta-analysis studies only two studies were identified which conducted research on meditative activities in the workplace. One study among 239 employees of an insurance company found a significant reduction of perceived stress for both yoga and mindfulness interventions (Wolever et al., 2012). Wolever et al. (2012) also measured the improvements in work productivity, but no significant improvement because of the yoga and mindfulness interventions was found. Hartfiel et al. (2011) found that a six-week yoga program among 48 employees of a British university had substantial positive effects on resilience to stress and on emotional well-being. However, the study used a wait-list as control design and self-selection of respondents which is criticized by the aforementioned meta-analysis studies (Chiesa & Serretti, 2009; Grossman et al., 2004). The target group of the study by Hartfiel et al. (2011) closely resembles the population of this study. The outcomes could be a reason why some large companies in the Netherlands (e.g. KLM, ING, Essent) focus on yoga as a prevention program for work-related stress (Business Yoga Nederland, n.d.).

So, PMA for mental health which includes moderate intensity physical exercise, yoga or mindfulness meditation can have benefits for mental health and reduce work-related stress for some individuals. However, some critical questions need to be asked. Should PMA be promoted as the answer to work-related stress? Aren't these stress-reducing activities ways to treat symptoms instead of causes of work-related stress? Moreover, does a further integration of paid work and leisure activities conflict with the fundamental notions of leisure? Is this further integration of paid work and leisure activities desirable? These are questions that are not yet answered in current academic debates. This study could contribute to a deeper understanding of the possible positive effects of meditative and physical activities in taking a holistic approach towards the meaning of PMA for employees in an educational institute.

2.5 Conceptual model

The theoretical review has discussed the relevant topics for this study and many critical questions have arisen. In order to study these questions a conceptual model with sub questions is constructed, figure 1. Figure 1 shows the conceptual model of this study which is represented as a scale to symbolize the balance between the main concepts in this literature review. The aforementioned macro socio-economic and technological developments have changed the nature of most work, especially knowledge and service sector work (Rojek, 2004; Rubery, 2005; Van Echtelt et al., 2009). Professional identity affirming behaviour (Lewis, 2003), diversified workplaces (Hilbrecht, 2007), feelings of time pressure (Zuzanek, 2004), interconnectedness (Castells, 2010), increased psychosocial workloads (PSA) (van der Ploeg et al., 2014), and the value of work-based achievement (Kremer et al., 2017), can all lead to experiencing work-related stress. It is acknowledged that stress can spill over from work to life and life to work, however the main focus of this study is on work-related stress. Work-related stress has various financial costs, especially for employers, and personal costs, especially for employees. These include physical, mental and social health issues which are thoroughly described by Dutch research among the working population (Eysink et al., 2012; van der Ploeg et al., 2014, 2015; van Zwieten et al., 2014).

Furthermore, figure 1 shows that PMA could act as a counterweight. Previous studies have shown that PMA can reduce stress in healthy subjects (Fox, 1999; Hartfiel et al., 2011; Stathopoulou

et al., 2006; Wolever et al., 2012). Hereby the scale could act as a balance. Moreover, figure 1 also illustrates the separated spheres of work and leisure which are blurring in many ways, although PMA and work still seem to be separate.

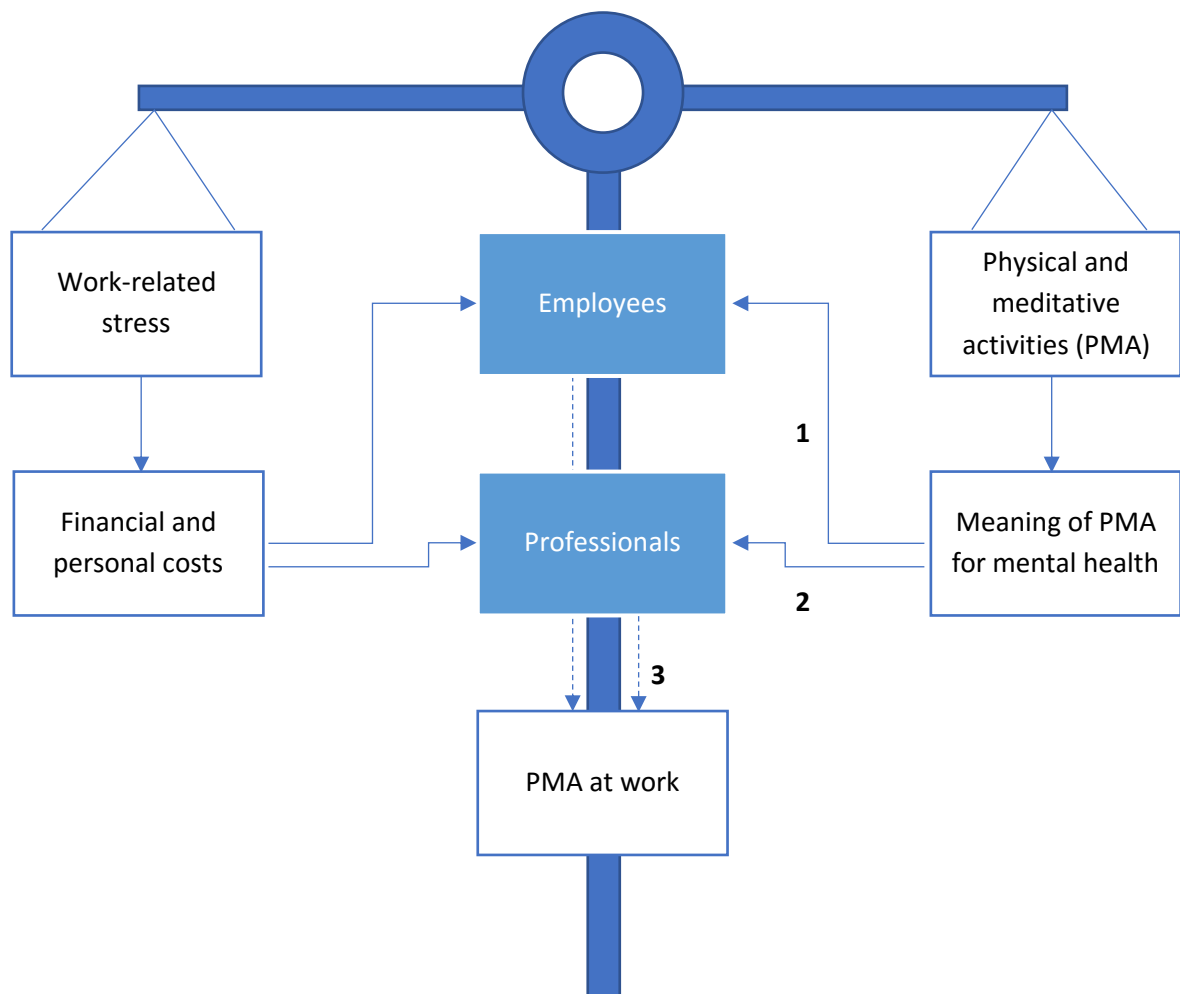


Figure 1. Conceptual model of balance between work-related stress, PMA, employees and professionals.

This conceptual model and the critical literature review provide the basis of this research. Most of the previous studies on PMA and (work-related) stress are quantitative studies which aim to measure the effect of PMA on mental health. This study purposes to use a more qualitative mixed methods research approach and case study design to explore how PMA can be meaningful for employees in the educational sector who experience work-related stress. Therefore, the grand research question aims to explore the meaning of PMA for employees who experience work-related stress from the perspectives of these employees and professionals with occupational responsibilities to reduce work-related stress. In addition to the grand research question, three sub-questions are formulated.

Grand research question: *How can physical and meditative activities be meaningful for employees in an educational institute who experience work-related stress?*

Sub question 1: *How can physical and meditative activities be meaningful for employees who experience work-related stress according to these employees?*

Sub question 1 aims to gain a deeper understanding from the perspective of the employee. Due to the high levels of PSA in the educational sector (van der Ploeg et al., 2014), it can be expected that employees of the university of this case study experience work-related stress. Another expectation is that employees who participate in PMA report its influence on their experienced work-related stress.

Sub question 2: *How can physical and meditative activities be meaningful for employees who experience work-related stress according to professionals?*

In addition to sub question 1, sub question 2 tries to explore and explain the perspective from multiple professionals with occupational responsibilities to reduce work-related stress. These professionals can include but are not restricted to; the company doctor, HR-employees, operational managers and/or confidential counsellors. It can be expected that this perspective recognises and emphasizes the value and meaning of PMA to reduce stress and improve (mental) health. Furthermore, these professionals are expected to complement the employees perspective and to critically reflect on the use of PMA to reduce work-related stress.

Sub question 3: *Why is or isn't a further integration of paid work and leisure through PMA desirable according to employees and professionals?*

The final sub question aims to explore whether a further integration of work and leisure is desirable. Work and leisure are already blurring on multiple levels. However, it seems like a one-sided integration of work seeping into private life, and thereby affecting personal time and leisure time (Hill et al., 1998; Sullivan & Lewis, 2001). What if the integration of work and life would become twofold? It is expected that both employees and professionals sum up and argue on the benefits and downsides of such an integration.

Chapter 3 – Methodology

3.1 Research design

In this thesis, a case study is conducted with a mixed methods research design. A case study is an empirical inquiry in which the focus is on a contemporary phenomenon within a real life context (Yin, 2009). A similar definition is used by Simons (2009):

“Case study is an in-depth exploration from multiple perspective of the complexity and uniqueness of a particular project, policy, institution or system in a “real life” context. It is research based, inclusive of different methods and evidence-led.” (p. 21).

This definition emphasizes the in-depth exploration from multiple perspectives which is applied by this research by using a mixed methods design. According to Simons (2014), case study research has become *“a major methodology for understanding complex educational and social programs”* (p. 456). Moreover, its use can help the researcher to understand and represent complexity in fair and just ways by puzzling through the ambiguities that exist in many contexts and programs. However, some authors caution that the use of a case study needs to be a systematic investigation which leads to knowledge creation (Gerring, 2007; Simons, 2014; Yin, 2009). Simons (2014) describes that in designing the case study research it is essential to describe the boundaries of the case. This is done by describing the focus of the research, the stakeholders involved and by framing the research questions.

This is an exploratory and explanatory study. The study aims to explore the value through inductive research on how and why prevention programs are meaningful for employees’ mental health in the educational sector. Moreover, it is explanatory since the study aims to gain a deeper understanding of complexity of work-related stress and prevention programs. The outcomes of the study could benefit other cases in the educational sector. The educational sector is selected for this research as work in the educational sector has the highest percentage of absenteeism related to PSA (van der Ploeg et al., 2014). The unit of analysis in this case study is a mid-size educational institute in the Netherlands. The institute, a university of applied sciences, educates in bachelor and master programs. The case study is delimited to all stakeholders who are concerned with prevention programs for mental health. In 3.2, data collection and sampling, these stakeholders are described in more detail. In 3.3 the research questions are operationalised to further frame the case study. Due to confidentiality and privacy regulations, no further details can be provided about this particular case.

Simons (2014) continues that the term ‘case study’ is widely used and that there are many variations on conducting a case study. Traditionally, case study research has focussed on the use of multiple qualitative methods of analysis. However, the study of a case is not limited to qualitative techniques (Gerring, 2007; Yin, 2009). The use of quantitative and qualitative data, data from different types of sources, or data collection with different techniques, is often referred to as mixed methods or triangulation. Methodological pluralism is a key characteristic of mixed methods in which the researcher tries to use the strengths of two or more methods (Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004). Creswell and Plano Clark (2011) state that the use of quantitative and qualitative data in a mixed methods design can provide a better understanding than one of the two methods separately in researching complex phenomena. Thus, applying a mixed methods design to a case study can strengthen the proposition of gaining knowledge from multiple perspectives.

This case study therefore incorporated both quantitative and qualitative data collection to analyse the case. The researcher's standpoint is pragmatist, which means choosing the best combination of methods to answer the research questions (Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004). By making use of existing quantitative data and collecting qualitative data the mixed methods approach strengthens this study. I recognize that the research questions asked for co-constructed knowledge creation. Therefore, the exploratory and explanatory nature of the study demands a greater emphasis on qualitative over quantitative methods. To use the strength of both approaches, the quantitative data is therefore more supportive to the qualitative data. Furthermore, two methods are used to collect qualitative data. In the next part the data collection and the selection of respondents is discussed more extensively.

3.2 Data collection and sampling

In this part the data collection and sampling is divided in a qualitative and quantitative part. The quantitative data was derived from an existing data file provided by the educational institute. Qualitative data were gathered through narrative and in-depth interviews with key professionals in the organization. These professionals come from different occupations from within the educational institute. The advantage of the qualitative data is the possibility to learn how PMA can be meaningful at for work-related stress without decontextualizing the data (Simons, 2014). Hereby, different perspectives on the meaning of PMA for participants' mental health can be collected.

3.2.1 Qualitative data collection and sampling

The qualitative data which are collected are referred to as generated data (Ritchie & Lewis, 2003). The generated data comes from individual interviews with different stakeholders in the organization. According to Ritchie and Lewis (2003) generated data through interviews can provide insight in the personal perspective of the respondent in the context of the phenomenon that is researched. Different interviewing techniques were used during the data collection. The interviews with the participants were open interviews with a narrative approach. Narratives, or stories, are frequently used by social scientists in a broad range of fields and especially useful when the researcher is interested in the lived experience of people (Elliott, 2005). Additionally, narratives allowed the respondents to contribute in the generation of knowledge on the case (Simons, 2014). The interviews with professionals, for instance; the company's doctor, HRM-employees, confidential counsellors or operational managers, were semi-structured, in-depth interviews. However, these will also have a narrative approach as they sought the personal experience and opinions of the professionals. A more open, narrative approach allows for the complexity of narratives compared to a structured questionnaire.

When conducting the research explicit attention was paid to research ethics. The data protocol for conducting research of the Mulier Instituut and VUmc for the '*sports in times of illness*' (STZ) research project was used as a guideline (Mulier Instituut, 2017)¹. It was of great importance to ensure confidentiality and privacy and thereby reduce traceability as much as possible. As discussed in the introduction, the topic of work-related stress overlaps with other areas, most notably economics and health. Six measures were taken to ensure privacy and confidentiality, as economic interests such as an employee's productivity or health issues are not retraceable to individual employees. First of all, no

¹Internal source, not publicly available.

further specifications of the educational institute were made in any statements. Second, prior to the interview, the respondent received a letter with detailed information about the research and participation. Furthermore, the researcher and the respondent signed a letter of informed consent. Third, all participants to the interviews were anonymized and fictitious names are used. Wherever possible, personal characteristics that were retraceable are altered. Respondents could choose their own fictitious name. Fourth, the audio files, real names and contact details of the respondents are kept on a protected hard drive only available to the research department STZ. Fifth, an opportunity to give feedback on the transcript was organized in consultation with the respondents ('member check'). Sixth, respondents could withdraw from the study at any point without specifying their reasons.

Eight employees were interviewed during this study of whom one interview was considered unreliable due to time constraint issues from the respondent's side. Those who participated in the interviews were approached through an invitation on the educational institute's internal website. Though, this process was slow and took too much time. Therefore, the respondents were selected through what Ritchie and Lewis (2003) refer to as convenience sampling. Informal network ties were used to find respondents through ease of access. Subsequently, those who were approached for the research were selected based on whether or not they had experienced work-related stress and their willingness to participate in the interview. Furthermore, other selection criteria were; 1) whether the respondent worked at the university of this case study, and 2) whether the respondent (had) worked in the primary process, in other words, worked with students. The interviews were conducted on a location preferred by and in consultation with the respondents.

The in-depth interviews were performed with professionals with occupational responsibilities to reduce work-related stress who have experience with; work-related stress, absenteeism, coaching and/or managing employees. This choice was made to complete the triangulation and to gain a holistic view on the meaning attributed to PMA for employees who experience work-related stress. Moreover, these respondents were asked about their vision on the integration of PMA at work to reduce or prevent work-related stress. Five professionals were interviewed. These respondents will be chosen selectively in accordance with a contact from the educational institute through more formal ties. The operationalization of the open interviews as well as the in-depth ones will be discussed in part 3.3.

3.2.2 Quantitative data collection and sampling

The quantitative data which was used came from the employee satisfaction survey or in Dutch "*medewerkerstevredenheid onderzoek*" (MTO). The MTO is conducted in a two year cycle by the educational institute and distributed among all the employees at the university, including lecturers, management, technical support and others. The data were gathered through an online questionnaire which was completed by more than 80% of the employees. In the questionnaire measured the employee satisfaction with various topics. For this study only workload and unwanted behaviour was included as these topics were recognised in the literature as causes for work-related stress. Furthermore, the questionnaire included background variables, the perceived working environment and satisfaction with work and work-life balance. Due to confidentiality, working with the raw data was not permitted. However, the data provided a helpful insights for the case study. The data was used to strengthen the qualitative data and to gain an overview of work-related stress in the organization and employee satisfaction.

3.3 Operationalization

The research question and sub-questions that arose from the literature review and the conceptual model in paragraph 2.5 were operationalized. Figure 1 has shown the conceptual model for this study. This conceptual model was subsequently studied and analysed by the research- and sub-questions and by using multiple methods which are explained above. The quantitative data was used to delineate the case study as a large portion of the population had taken part in the survey. This gave a general image of work-related stress as the data included eight items which related to satisfaction with workloads. That data was strengthened by asking the seven employees for their lived experience on work-related stress. The narratives in appendix C to I provided a deeper understanding of employees' experience with work-related stress. Additionally, six professionals were interviewed and provided their perspective on work-related stress, on PMA to reduce work-related stress and on the integration of work and PMA. The holistic approach towards the data from the survey, interviews with professionals and the narratives of employees demonstrated a deeper understanding and provided context to the case. This section of the methodology elaborates on operationalization of the open interviews with employees who experience work-related stress and the in-depth interviews with professionals who have an occupational responsibility to reduce work-related stress.

3.3.1 Open interviews

In this study, narrative, open interviews were used to learn how PMA can be meaningful for employees who experience work-related stress. The narrative interview consisted of three phases. According to Elliott (2005) the researcher needs to ask the right questions to encourage the production of a narrative and should avoid interrupting a story whenever possible. The questions asked needed to be open questions which shouldn't be too focused on the interests of the researchers. Therefore, the first phase of all the narrative interviews started with one question: *"Can you tell me about your experiences with work-related stress?"*.

In the second phase, five topics were included in the preparation of the narrative interviews to help employees to tell their stories; 1) how employees are dealing with work-related stress, 2) the meaning of PMA in general, 3) the meaning of PMA when experiencing work-related stress, 4) how employees experienced the guidance and support by professionals, peers and family, and 5) the integration of PMA and work.

Subsequently, the third phase included circles of different sizes to help the respondents to reflect on the impact of work-related stress on their personal lives. The respondents were asked to visualise their personal lives in times of high workloads or work-related stress and in times of relative ease. Hereby, the (dis)balance between work-related stress, PMA and personal life were illustrated. This was congruent with the narrative approach the Mulier Instituut and VUmc had successfully implemented in other STZ research. The preparation of the open interviews is shown in appendix A.

3.3.2 In-depth interviews

Besides the narrative interviews with employees, in-depth interviews were conducted to learn how PMA can be meaningful for employees who experience work-related stress according to professionals on the matter. These interviews were more structured than the open interviews, however also had a narrative approach as they sought the personal experience and opinions of the professionals and allowed the complexity of personal stories. The topic list for these semi-structured interviews is included in appendix B. The order in which the questions from the topic list were asked

was fluid and dependent on the professional. Besides the professional involvement with work-related stress, the professionals were asked how work-related stress, physical and mental activities influence or have influenced their personal lives. Hereby the researcher could gain a more holistic view of how the personal experience of professionals could influence their professional role and view upon the subject.

3.4 Data analysis

All the interviews were recorded with a voice recorder and subsequently transcribed. After the interview the researcher wrote a reflection report to reflect on the interview and the researcher's own actions. In the data analysis that followed, a combination of thematic and narrative analysis was used to analyse the stories of the participants. The data from the interviews with employees was analysed in two phases. In the first phase, the transcripts were rewritten to create summarised narratives of the interviews. This is in line with what Elliott (2005) suggests for narrative research; a narrative approach with focus on the content aims to analyse a single, whole narrative. *"The emphasis in this type of analysis is on understanding an individual narrative, usually a biographical narrative, in its entirety."*(Elliott, 2005:39). These narratives are to be found in appendix C to I. Writing the narrative helped to gain a deeper understanding of the personal experiences of the respondents. This was followed up by a thematic analysis in the second phase. Coding was achieved by inductive reasoning. Recurring themes and topics were identified by analysing the narratives. The citations were then translated and used in the results section.

The interviews with professionals were analysed through both deductive and inductive reasoning. The codes were derived from the literature and complemented by codes from themes that were recurrent in the interviews with the professionals. Thematic analysis was used to exemplify the meaning that the respondents attributed to PMA and help to clarify the expert opinions of the professionals on the most recurring or distinct themes. Furthermore, the quantitative data was adapted from the employee satisfaction survey report and displayed using Excel. In the results chapter, chapter 4, the quantitative data was linked to the qualitative data.

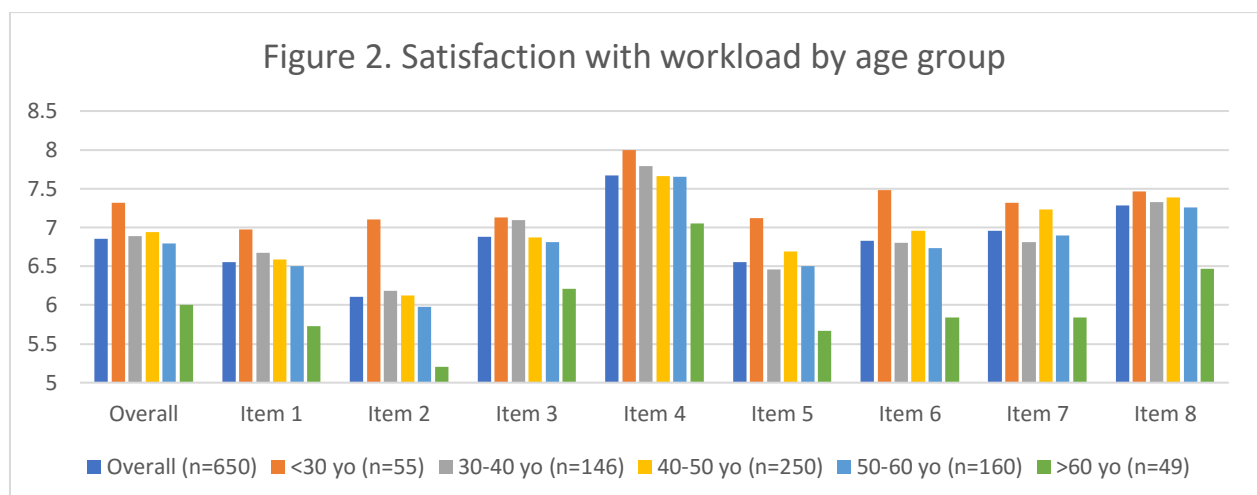
Chapter 4 - Results

4.1 Results desk research: employee satisfaction survey

Every two years a survey is distributed among the employees of the educational institute of this case-study². This survey aims to measure employee satisfaction on several key items; work and perspective, workload, teamwork, manager, head of department, participation councils, quality of the university of applied sciences, quality of the curriculum, resources and safety, and working conditions. Results from the employee satisfaction survey report 2017 that were applicable to this study are presented in this part. These include satisfaction on workload items and unwanted behaviour. Results for workload were broken down to age category and type of function within the organisation. The results for unwanted behaviour could only be broken down for type of function within the organisation. A total of 650 employees completed the survey.

4.1.1 Satisfaction with workload

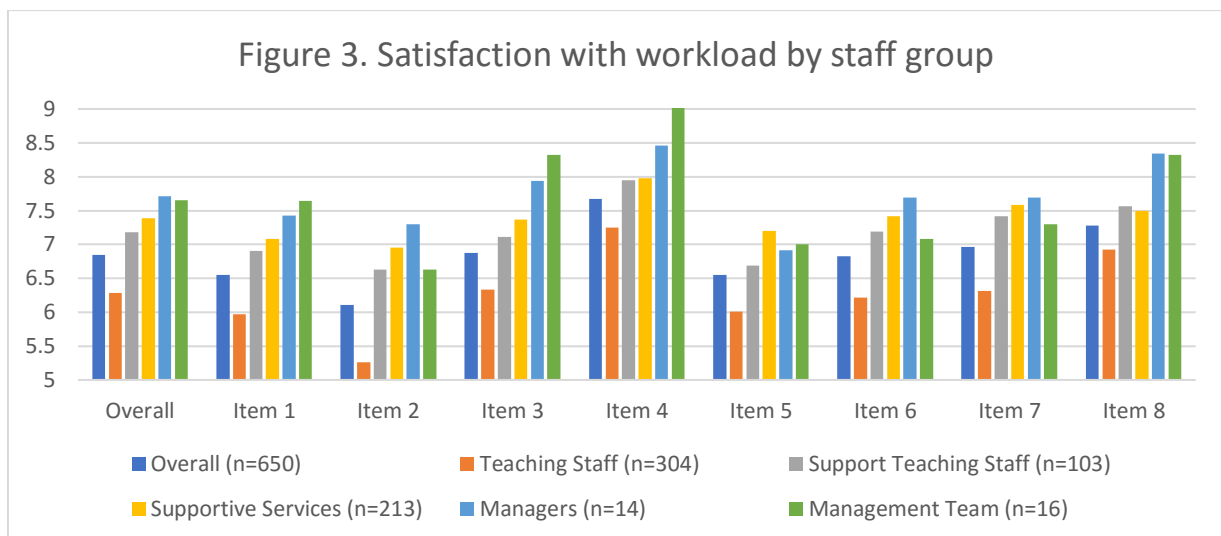
The satisfaction with workload scale consisted of eight sub-items. These sub-items were; 1) satisfaction with the amount of work I have, 2) satisfaction with the amount of time I have for the work I have, 3) satisfaction with the emotional pressure due to my work, 4) satisfaction with the ability to mentally cope with my work, 5) satisfaction with the ability to relax at work, 6) satisfaction with recovery from work in my leisure time, 7) satisfaction with my work-life balance, 8) satisfaction with the ability to discuss my workload with my manager. Data from the employee satisfaction survey of 2015 have shown a reliability of $\alpha = 0.893$ from seven items³. Item 5, satisfaction with the ability to relax at work, was a new item in the 2017 survey and was therefore not included. Figure 2 shows the sub-items from satisfaction with workload contrasted with age groups. Respondents could score the items from 1 to 10. The data collected demonstrated that the age group >60 years old was the least satisfied age group. This was the case for the overall score on satisfaction and also for every single item. Age group <30 years old scored the highest on average and also in every single item.



² Medewerkerstevredenheidsonderzoek 2017; report available upon request

³ Analyse MTO 2015; report available upon request

However, from the data it does not become clear what could be the cause of the differences between age groups, nor does it become clear whether the differences are significant. It can only be assumed that there is a significant difference for satisfaction with workload between respondents over 60 and under 60 years of age. This is notable, considering those over 60 years of age are more likely to have past the stage of making a career or having care duties for young children. This is also illustrated by Distel’s narrative, appendix C. The difference in the cause(s) of work-related stress between age groups is discussed in some of the interviews with professionals. These causes might be related to the differences in satisfaction with workload. The data that was obtained from the employee satisfaction survey report could also be broken down to five staff groups; teaching staff, support teaching staff, supportive services, managers, and management team.



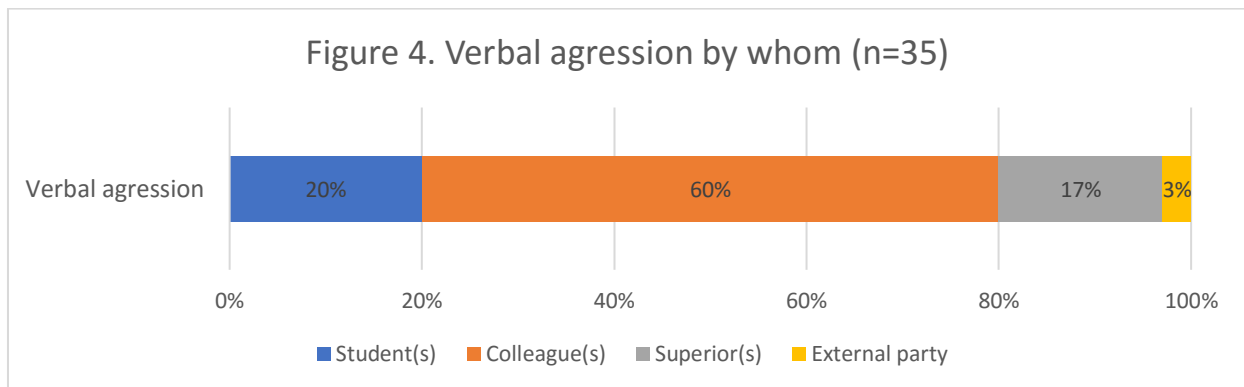
The data in figure 3 shows that the teaching staff is the least satisfied with the workload items from the survey. Managers and management team members are the most satisfied with the workload items from the survey. Again, it is not clear whether the differences are significant. The possible causes for difference in work-related stress between staff are also discussed with the professionals. Moreover, most of the employees who were interviewed for this study were from the teaching staff.

In addition to the sub-items of satisfaction with workload, respondents were also asked to rate their workload from too low to too high. 38 Per cent of the respondents who answered this question (n=639) stated that their workload was too high or way too high. The data from the survey also showed that there was a clear difference between staff groups. 49 Per cent of the teaching staff indicated that their workload was too high or way too high. The other staff groups scored between 25 and 29 per cent.

So, first and foremost it is important to recognise that key causes of work-related stress are experienced by a large portion of the teaching staff. These results show that workload is experienced as too high or way too high by a substantive amount of employees. Moreover, those who are closest to the primary process in education, namely the interaction with students, are the ones who rate their workload the highest.

4.1.2 Unwanted behaviour

Besides satisfaction with workload, experiences with unwanted behaviour in the past year was measured. As discussed in the literature review, unwanted behaviour can be a cause for work-related stress (van der Ploeg et al., 2014). Although only a small percentage of the respondents indicate that they have experienced unwanted behaviour at work, it is important to note that these issues are also at play. Unwanted behaviour was broken down to bullying, verbal aggression, physical aggression and unwanted sexual attention. Ten out of 625 respondents explicated that they encountered bullying at work by other colleagues. Another 35 out of 626 respondents indicated experiences with verbal aggression. Figure 4 shows a specification of verbal aggression towards the respondent. There were no respondents who reported physical aggression in the past year.



Furthermore, eight out of 624 respondents reported discriminative behaviour, six reported discrimination by colleagues, two reported discrimination by their superior. Four out of 624 respondents reported unwanted sexual attention by colleagues.

4.2 Results narrative interviews

The second method of data collection was based on open, narrative interviews with employees of an educational institute in the Netherlands. This resulted in seven narratives which are presented in appendix III to IX. In this part, the most important and relevant results to answer the research question are shown. Table 1. shows the respondents' pseudonyms, gender, age and profession.

Table 1. Employees' pseudonyms, gender, age and profession

Pseudonym	Gender	Age	Profession	Appendix
Distel	F	62	Lecturer	C
Inge	F	52	Administrative secretary	D
Ivy	F	47	Lecturer	E
Léon	M	43	Lecturer	F
Anna	F	45	Lecturer, study career coach	G
Jack	M	32	Lecturer	H
Floor	F	25	Lecturer, study career coach	I

4.2.1 Experienced causes of work-related stress

Central to the open, narrative interviews was the personal experience with work-related stress. Some respondents stated that they didn't experience work-related stress, others however argued that work-related stress affected them personally and professionally. The narratives from the respondents were summarised and rewritten as personal stories, see appendix C to I. From these narratives it seems that the experienced causes of work-related stress can be clustered around three main recurring topics: peaks in workload, role ambiguity and performance-related pressure.

Highs and lows: peaks in workload

In the interviews, most employees stated that they encountered highs and lows of workload in the educational sector. Distel for example explained how highs and lows cause distress:

"I notice that the educational sector comes with its highs and lows. For example, at the start of each trimester many things have to get going, projects have to be prepared, a lot of ICT work, and administration work. This always causes stress for me." (From Distel's narrative)

These highs and lows are also referred to as a wave-like repetition. Ivy explained that she knows when a wave is coming and prepares herself for it. She always tries to put things in perspective. Ivy uses the quieter periods to plan and prepare for the next wave. Ivy sometimes experiences a tremendous workload, however she doesn't experience it as (too much) stress.

"I have some periods in the year that I'm tremendously busy. At those moments I really think, if this would be my life, I quit. Well, I wouldn't quit my life, but I would definitely not enjoy living and working like that. It's just, you always know that a quieter period will come. If that means that I'm extremely busy this month, so be it. That's how I try to deal with it." (From Ivy's narrative)

Léon explained that he experienced more work-related stress this year than in previous years. At his department a major change in the curriculum is occurring. Therefore, it costs Léon much more time and energy to prepare his lectures. Especially the start of the year was demanding for him:

"Yeah, that period in September was really busy, busy, so busy I almost got a burn-out myself. Almost, I was just OK, but yeah, too busy." (From Léon's narrative)

Jack elucidated that he only experiences stress in ten per cent of his time at work. These are mostly the times when a one semester ends and a new one begins. Jack is in the lead for three courses at his department, which he experiences as a great responsibility. He explained the transition from one semester to the other:

"For me, that is a moment when everything comes together, like a bottleneck. My workload could than easily be 50 hours per week. 50, maybe even 55 hours, at least a lot more than the 40 hours which it should've been." (From Jack's narrative)

It seems that work in the educational sectors demands careful planning and resilience to cope with the peaks in workload. It seems that the amount of workload employees experience is a regular irregularity.

Role ambiguity: indicating boundaries

Besides experiencing highs and lows in workload, some employees mentioned that they are engaged in (too) many roles. Floor is a first-year lecturer and study career coach. From the very start of her employment she has experienced this as (too) many and different responsibilities. Floor explained that she is very committed and enjoys her work. However, she added that her pitfall is indicating boundaries. Floor wants to do the things she does in a good manner. However, she experienced difficulties with this because of many (little) responsibilities. Floor started to forget little things and had trouble identifying her role:

“I had the feeling is was lost in my own maze. I constructed this maze myself, I chose to work in this maze. It went well for a long period of time. I complete two academic masters without too much trouble. However, all of a sudden it did not go well anymore. At that point I truly experienced what stress is and can do with your life. It was tough.” (From Floor’s narrative)

Anna also had difficulties with indicating her boundaries. Anna, formerly a professional in the catering and hospitality industry, has experienced work-related stress before. However, according to her, it’s different in the educational sector:

“In the catering and hospitality industry you’ll experience stress at work. Though, it’s because of working under great time pressure. You have to deliver a performance in a limited amount of time. In education it’s a different kind of stress. It’s more like that there is no one to help you to indicate your boundaries. It’s something you have to learn. I’ve learned it the hard way. After two years of work in the educational sector I was burn-out.” (From Anna’s narrative)

Having too many roles seems to create fussiness in responsibilities, especially when employees find it hard to indicate their boundaries they seem to get easily tangled up in responsibilities that they are unable to manage.

Performance-related pressure: imposed and self-imposed expectations

Distel made a link between role ambiguity and performance-related pressure in the interview. Distel mentioned that quality of content is important to her. However, it proves to be difficult to find the time to improve quality because of other responsibilities.

“If you want to improve quality, it will cost a lot of time and energy.” (From Distel’s narrative)

Furthermore, Distel described her role as chair of the graduates committee, which can be stressful. She has to agree with colleagues whether a student has completed his or her bachelor sufficiently. Distel recalled that it sometimes feels like she is pressed to agree on the grade while she’s still in doubt:

“It’s not often, maybe once or twice a year. That I’m thinking; ‘I should not have agreed. I really should’ve given an insufficient grade instead of a sufficient. I’ve made the wrong decision. I just keep thinking about it. It is like, did I make the right decision?’. I think everyone has that every once in a while.” (From Distel’s narrative)

It seems Distel has self-imposed expectations with which she struggled. Distel was not the only employee who experienced performance-related pressure. Inge, who used to teach, felt it was hard to entertain an audience of a hundred students. She focused on the content of her lectures, while connecting with the students proved to be more difficult:

“I think stress levels were much higher when I was still teaching. Because, for example, there is a lecture tomorrow. Hundred students will be there to hear what you have to say. To entertain hundred students demands quite a lot.” (From Inge’s narrative)

Léon, like Distel, is sometimes worried about the quality of the courses, especially at his department because they are in the middle of a curriculum development:

“Look, often you experience stress, not because it is too much, but because sometimes you worry about the quality of the courses. I feel like that should improve, we can do better. However, the management doesn’t see that. It can cause some tension.” (From Léon’s narrative)

Floor experienced social performance-related pressure. She felt like she was obliged to keep in touch with friends through social media networks. Therefore, Floor decided to delete some social media apps like Facebook from her phone. Moreover, her phone is banned from her bedroom.

“When I came home from work and I had been in meetings and lectures all day, I had a list of at least 20 conversations on WhatsApp. This really felt suffocating. Times were better when we only had SMS messages. Then you got like three messages a day and that was great. Now you have 400 messages a day, it’s completely ridiculous.” (From Floor’s narrative)

So, imposed or self-imposed expectations seem to be a cause of stress for employees. In most cases the expectations seem to be more self-imposed than imposed, though it might feel that others also have high expectations of an employee’s performance.

4.2.2 Result of experienced work-related stress

In most narratives the respondents explained the result of experience work-related stress. Some experienced mental and/or physical complaint, others mentioned a misbalance between their work and private life.

Mental and physical complaints: insomnia and palpitations

Floor experienced work-related stress to the extent that she had to stay at home a couple of days. She felt completely empty and had to recover. Floor recalled the moment when she knew something was wrong:

“It was here at work, just suddenly... I was correcting a report, which normally takes half an hour. However, this time I was just staring at my screen for four hours and nothing happened. I got angry with myself, this doesn’t make any sense! It was then that I noticed, I’m just completely empty. I felt really stupid, yeah.” (From Floor’s narrative, a 25-year old lecturer and study career coach)

Inge tried to explain what she felt when she experienced work-related stress with a metaphor:

“It feels a bit like you’re on a boat and you can’t get off. What to do?... It’s not like... How to say this... It’s all hands on deck, because you have a certain level of ambition. You try to reach this level in every single way. I think I didn’t have the abilities to adapt my level of ambition. I think the combination of a high level of ambition and time pressure was fateful.” (From Inge’s narrative, a 52-year administrative expert)

Distel stated that work-related stress can cause serious physical complaints:

“Sometimes it can be so severe that I have physical complaints. I have that sometimes. It doesn’t occur frequently, but if it does I have palpitations. That’s when you think; oh dear, that’s not good. When you’re running from A to B, that is not great.” (From Distel’s narrative, a 62-year old lecturer)

Anna, Jack and Ivy all stated that they have difficulties falling asleep when they experienced stress. They all deal with this in different ways. Anna undertakes sport activities, when her body is tired she falls asleep easier. Jack listens to peaceful music and Ivy sometimes uses an app with mindfulness meditation. So, all employees conveyed to have experienced mental or physical complaints to a greater or lesser degree.

Work-life balance: when life becomes work

Employees also experienced spill-over from their work to their private life. It is common for lecturers to bring work home, which can influence their free time. Though, some employees argued they work at home because then they won’t be interrupted. It can help them to focus. Ivy, for example, also worked in weekends and evenings when she experienced a peak in workload. Ivy guides students from a student company which is connected to her department. In this role she’s in close contact with the students, every day of the week. According to Ivy this is part of the job:

“I expect them to be flexible and take responsibility when something is urgent, so I’ve to do that myself too. When students contact me via WhatsApp in the weekend because there is an issue at hand, I call them. I don’t really mind. I’m that kind of person who checks her email all the time. Maybe I shouldn’t do that, maybe I should try to distance myself some more from that. Still, I don’t really mind.” (From Ivy’s narrative)

Jack said he works seven days a week, which is completely normal to him. Normally Jack works three hours on average on Saturdays and Sundays. However, when Jack experienced a high workload this can increase to six hours. Jack argued that the balance between work and private life can shift entirely to work, which influences his private life:

“I personally think you can’t sustain this for a very long time. Maybe two, three or four weeks, but more than that will automatically be stressful for anyone.” (From Jack’s narrative)

Sometimes it’s a conscious choice to work at home according to some of the respondents. The work environment at the workplace is not always a good place to work. Léon has flexible working arrangements. He can work at home when he doesn’t have any appointments or lectures. He actually

always works at home when he doesn't have to be at the workplace, because he can focus better at home. Distel put forward a similar argumentation. Especially when she's busy with a task that demands her full attention, she works at home:

"When you have to write an article for example. I notice that when I'm at home, it's easier to work without any interruptions. When I'm at the workplace there is always a student who wants to ask something of whatever. That's the reason I take complicated tasks home with me." (From Distel's narrative)

Taking work home and working from home seem to be ordinary in the educational sector. In many cases this doesn't cause stress, it rather creates an opportunity to focus better. However, especially in periods of peak workload work can dominate employees' private lives.

4.2.3 Coping with work-related stress

In most of the interviews the respondents described their personal experiences with work-related stress and the result of stress on both their physical and mental health and well-being. Furthermore, the respondents discussed how they tried to cope with work-related stress. One coping strategy seems to be that employees work harder during peaks in their workload. In the interviews the respondents also explained how they tried to find relaxation or distraction from work in peak periods. In line with the research questions this part was mostly focused on physical and meditative activities. However, other propositions were also taken into account.

Relaxation by physical effort: running, strolling and recreational sports

When Anna experienced work-related stress she deliberately takes lunchbreaks and goes for a stroll. Additionally, Anna runs to relax. This was an advice from her therapist when she had a burn-out:

"Of course I started running after my burn-out. It still really helps me. That's something I'll keep doing, whether I'm busy or not, I'll keep doing that. I've convinced myself that I must continue to do that. I just have to run three times a week." (From Anna's narrative)

Anna runs with a group at a sports association, she enjoys the combination of physical and social activities. Also, by running her body gets tired and she falls asleep easier when she experiences stress. Floor was also advised by her coach to take part in physical activities. She is dedicated to the gym. Yet, when Floor experienced stress this felt to demanding. She also wanted to deliver a performance in the gym. Therefore, her coach advise her to go strolling:

"You know what it is, when I'm in the gym I feel like I have to achieve goals again, I have to compete. When I go strolling I don't need to achieve anything. I think that when you're dealing with stress, it only makes sense to recharge your battery instead of demanding more." (From Floor's narrative)

Anna and Floor have both had advice about their engagement in physical activities. All of the other respondents weren't advised by a coach or therapist. Still, every respondents participated in physical activities to a greater or lesser degree. Jack, for instance, explained that sports is hundred per cent relaxation to him. He enjoys football the most:

“When I’m participating in sports, I don’t know what your experience is, but then I really think about nothing else. Just chit chatting, not talking about work or the courses or whatever. Just letting go of thoughts, that’s important to me. That’s what sports does for me.” (From Jack’s narrative)

Jack was talking about football specifically. He also enjoys playing football with colleagues and students in a yearly tournament. However, Jack stated that he finds it difficult to find time for sports. Léon had a similar argumentation. He also has difficulties to find time for sports:

“Every Saturday I’ll participate in sports, during weekdays however, I’ll only go when I have time. On Sundays I play volleyball. I’m always looking forward to that. It helps me to reduce stress a little bit. At least that’s my perception. That it help. Whether it really helps I don’t know, I didn’t measure. However, I feel like it helps me.” (From Léon’s narrative)

Léon added that the frequency of participation in sports really depends on how much work he takes home. Also Distel felt like she should participate more often in sports, however sometimes she’s just too tired.

“I know I should participate in sports and all that. It’s just, I’m sometimes too stressed out to sport. I feel like... I feel like a need to recuperate first, but then I’m too tired, it’s hard for me.” (From Distel’s narrative)

Distel explained that she does like to go for a hike in the weekends when she has more time and energy. Just like Distel, Ivy also felt that she needs to participate in sports more often. Due to an injury she is not able to participate in her favourite sport, field hockey. However, Ivy forces herself to participate in physical activities. She participates in running, although she hates it.

“I don’t participate in sports as often as I once did. But, now and then I go running. I really dislike it... I just have an aversion for it, so it takes a lot of effort to motivate myself. It’s just, you have to do something, right? If you don’t, you’ll become obese.” (From Ivy’s narrative)

Although Ivy dislikes running, it does help her to not think about work. Inge said she dislikes sports in general. Inge has never enjoyed participating in sports. She likes to live an active lifestyle, working in the garden and going to work by (electric) bike every now and then. This helps Inge to relax she said:

“Look, I just hate sports, I’ve always hated it. You’ll never see me running for the sake of running. I like it to be useful. I like gardening and I decided to buy an electric bike to cycle the 33 to 34 kilometres from home to work. It takes me three quarters of an hour longer than by car. However, that’s my choice and I ride through a bit of forest and that’s great.” (From Inge’s narrative)

All of the respondents participate regularly in physical activities such as; running, strolling, cycling or recreational sports. They all seem to agree that physical activity is beneficial for their physical and mental health and well-being. Though, some seem to have difficulties finding the time to exercise and others don’t really enjoy being physically active.

Relaxation by meditation

Inge, Distel and Ivy have all tried yoga or participated in yoga activities which they described as meditative activities. Inge and Distel have participated in yoga for a longer period of time. Ivy only took part in an introduction to yoga. Inge was advised by a yoga teacher to try multiple types of meditation because it takes time to learn to meditate and find what type suits you. Inge found that yoga suited her best, she disliked variations of meditation that were too vague or woolly. However, after a while Inge found that she wanted to achieve goals instead of relaxation.

"I just wanted to be able to stand on my head. When I failed I bothered me." (From Inge's narrative)

Inge then decided to quit. For Distel a reason to quit yoga was the timing of the yoga class. She always had to hurry to be there in time. Although Distel quit, she enjoyed the yoga lessons and especially the closing part of the class.

"You had to take a yoga-mat and was given a blanket. Lights were dimmed, candles were lit and there was music and incense. The yoga teacher guided us to become aware of the relaxation of your muscles. Let go, let them go. Slowly you got in some kind of trance, it was something special." (From Distel's narrative)

According to Ivy yoga or meditation was not her thing. She tried yoga with a friend but couldn't stop laughing during the introduction. Ivy, like Inge, dislikes it when it becomes too vague or woolly.

"I don't know if meditation would be something for me. I think that it could be beneficial for me, especially when my mind is experiencing an overload when I'm working too much. I don't know. I'm just a bit rebellious when it is too woolly, I'm against woolly." (From Ivy's narrative)

Ivy continued that when meditation isn't too woolly, it could fit her. However, she thinks that relaxation by effort would suit her better. Anna explained she is involved in meditative activities together with her 11-year old daughter.

"My youngster is pretty sensitive to stress. Therefore, I thought that it would be good for her to learn how to relax. It was hard for her. There's this book, mindfulness for children, which is a story about a gnome. We read that a lot together. When she went completely out of her mind I said; 'You're the mountain, you are the mountain, think about the mountain!'. Haha, those things, like; breathe with the waves of the sea. So, in that sense I'm involved in meditation. Together with my daughter of course, I'm not doing exercises on my own." (From Anna's narrative)

Anna also explained that she tries to live day by day. Additionally, Anna said that she focused on reflection. To Anna this is a kind of meditation too, being in the present, to stop and reflect on what she is doing. Floor and Jack argued they are not involved in meditation. According to Floor going for a stroll can have a meditative effect, to find peace and a quiet moment. Jack referred to listening to peaceful music to help him to fall asleep.

"I sometimes listen to some kind of lullabies. They're zen-like tunes, you hear birds for example. Are you familiar with those? I do that sometimes, I think it's nice. I notice that it helps me to relax." (From Jack's narrative)

So, according to the respondents meditative activities do not always have to be types of yoga or mindfulness. A few variations of meditative activities are mentioned by the respondents which can help them to find relaxation.

Rationalize work-related stress

Another aspect mentioned by some respondents is the rationalization of peaks in workload and thereby work-related stress. Distel and Ivy explained that they know what to expect and when to expect this peak workload.

"Luckily I know that when it's that time of the year again, when I'm super busy, it's for roughly three weeks. It's the end of one trimester and the start of the next. Students have lots of questions, new project groups are made, those kinds of things. I know, when I think about it rationally, in three weeks this ends. It's not like it's forever of course." (From Distel's narrative)

Ivy complemented that she knows when to expect peaks in workload. Knowing this also helps her to rationalize and put her busy schedule in perspective over the course of the year. However, it seems that younger and starting lecturers especially have difficulties to adjust to the rhythm in education. Floor was absent for a couple of days and Anna recalled that some of her younger colleagues have dropped out, possibly due to not knowing how to deal with high workload, role ambiguity or performance-related pressure.

4.2.4 Physical and meditative activities at work

In the interviews with employees the likelihoods of participating in physical and meditative activities at work was discussed. Partly due to the nature of research question three and the introduction given to the respondent, nonetheless, it was also a logical result of the narrative told by respondents. Not one clear direction was put forward by the respondents; supporters, considerators and sceptics could be identified. Remarkably, none of the respondents mentioned meditative activities at work.

Supporters: integration of work and physical activity

Jack and Distel have explicated to be supporters of the possibility to engage in physical activity at work. When Jack highlighted the importance of sports for relaxation, he also mentioned he has difficulties planning physical activity. Jack advocated for the possibility of physical activity at work.

"I don't have the time for it. Maybe in combination with my work. Imagine that there was a possibility for participating in fitness here at the university, that would be great. Wouldn't that be great? I know that there are companies who already facilitate this, I think it a very good idea." (From Jack's narrative)

Additionally, Distel argued it could help her when there would be more options for physical activity at work.

"I think I would like that. It would be better. My daughter told me that they have bootcamp clinics where she works. It's non-compulsory. They go outside by the end of the day, around half past four, or five o'clock. (...) If there would be a gym here it would definitely stimulate me to go exercising." (From Distel's narrative)

Both Jack and Distel expressed in their interview that they have difficulties planning physical activities in their personal time. It seems that this could be a reason to welcome the integration of work and leisure through physical activities at work.

Considerators: low intensity physical activities at work

Ivy, Floor and Anna were not sure whether they would take part in physical activities at work. Ivy thought it could be a positive add-on to her own participation in physical activity. However, she was in doubt whether she would engage in a high intensity work-out at work.

"When I hear that I think; fun! Easier maybe, you might be motivated by colleagues to go for a run. That motivational part, I think that will be stronger when you participate together with colleagues. Though, I don't really see myself running around on the university campus in my break. With thousands of students being here, I don't see that happening." (From Ivy's narrative)

Ivy added that she also sees the benefits of participating in sports with colleagues. On an excursion she experienced it's good for teambuilding. Ivy did emphasize that this was on a daytrip away from the working environment. She would welcome lower intensity physical activities at work, such as table tennis, just for fun and relaxing. Physical activities at work with a low intensity level is also what Anna and Floor put forward. Anna and Floor both stated that they have built in their physical activity in their personal time. Floor stated that she would like to go for a stroll with colleagues more often.

"I'm fairly positive about that (physical activity at work). For example, going for a stroll or something, I would find that relaxing. I'm not considering to do high intensity exercises at work, because I have my own thing with sports. I truly enjoy to have that to myself." (From Floor's narrative)

When Anna discussed the topic of physical activity at work she was not sure whether she thought it would be a good idea or not. She thinks she doesn't need it because she already built in sports in her personal time. Anna would like a greener environment to go for a stroll during her breaks.

"I would like it if there would be more green space. That when you go outside, you'll be able to sit in a green space. That parking lot is not that inspiring you know." (From Anna's narrative)

So, Anna, Floor and Ivy seem to invest in physical activity with higher intensity in their personal time. They don't really see why they would also participate in high intensity exercises at work. Though, Anna, Floor and Ivy have a positive attitude towards lower intensity activities.

Sceptics: physical activity out of (the) office

Inge explained that her private life is very important to her. It's also a reason why she doesn't live in the same city as she works. Therefore, she is also not a fan of physical or meditative activities at work. Though, she would appreciate it when her employer would stimulate physical and meditative activities

more explicit. As far as Inge knew, there is only one option and that's the local gym. That's exactly the option Léon used in the past. However, he claimed that this program was terminated. Léon articulated that he sports together with a colleague.

"I'm participating in sports together with a colleague. If I did it on my own, I'm sure I would have quit after a month. It motivates me to exercise with someone else. However, here at the university, no, not really. I would like to exercise somewhere else, not with all my colleagues. It's OK to exercise with some colleagues, but not with everyone." (From Léon's narrative)

Inge and Léon seem to prefer that work and personal time are separated. Léon is open to exercise with some colleagues, but on his own terms. Inge doesn't want to be involved in sports with her colleagues at all.

4.3 Results semi-structured interviews

Besides employees, this case-study conducted interviews among professional facilitators, those who are professionally involved in employee health and well-being. Five professional facilitators who are responsible for health and well-being of employees at the educational institute were interviewed. Table 2 shows an overview of the respondents and their profession.

Table 2. Professionals' pseudonyms and profession

Pseudonym	Age (years)	Years of experience	Profession
Jip	>50	>10	HR-advisor, focus on mobility
Michelle	<50	>10	HR-advisor, focus on mobility
Kalulu	>50	>10	Company doctor
Daan	>50	>10	Manager of staff at a department
Thomas	<50	<10	Manager of supportive staff

In the interviews respondents identified causes of work-related stress from their experience as professional facilitators. Respondents distinctively pointed out that work-related stress in the educational institute is partly caused by characteristics of work and employees' characteristics. These causes are broken down in parts 4.3.1 and 4.3.2. The other two main topics that are presented here are: 1) the links between PMA and stress prevention, and 2) the integration of PMA in the workplace, parts 4.3.3 and 4.3.4.

4.3.1 Causes work-related stress (1): characteristics of work

Michelle and Daan emphasized that work-related stress is subjective. When one person experiences something as stress, others can experience it as a high workload. However, all of the respondents argued that there are characteristics of the work that could influence work-related stress among employees in the educational institute. The main characteristics that were distilled from the interviews with professionals were; autonomy, peaks in workload, performance-related pressure, (in)security and role ambiguity. These characteristics are illustrated by quotes from the interviews.

Autonomy

Michelle mentioned that autonomy can be a cause of work-related stress among employees.

“Well, in a certain sense you have a lot of autonomy as a lecturer, because you can determine your own lectures in your way, or at least within a certain range. However, on the other hand, schedules are still made for you. You have a little influence, but in the end, the schedule is determined for you. (...) When your schedule is determined for you and you have a certain peak workload it can be a source of work-related stress.” (Michelle – HR advisor)

So, as schedules are determined for lecturers it can be harder to adapt to fluctuations in workload. This is what other professionals and employees also mentioned in the interviews. Just like the employees argued, professionals see the peaks in workload as a cause for work-related stress.

Peaks in workload

The peak in workload are broadly recognized. Thomas argued that the workload in the educational sector is underestimated.

“What strikes me the most is that the deadlines in education are always strict. When you’re in business, you can discuss other options when you can’t make a deadline. However, in the educational sector, your lecture has to be ready. An exam has to be ready, it can’t be a day later. This means there is very little margin in your planning.” (Thomas – supportive staff manager)

Moreover, the outside world seems to think that lecturers have many holidays.

“I think that the workload in the educational sector is frequently underestimated. If I look back at when I was still working in commercial business, I always thought, what are they talking about? They have so many holidays. Well, they really do not have it. Most of the time you are preparing your lectures or correcting exams. You need that time because of the peaks in workload and strict deadlines.” (Thomas – supportive staff manager)

Also Michelle referred to the holidays employees in educational institutes have. Though, she seems to see holidays as recovery time from peaks in workload.

“You have a lot of holidays of course. That’s not what you see in the business. Though, what I also recognize is that there are peaks in workload. People have to do many lectures in a short amount of time which creates that peak.” (Michelle – HR advisor)

Kalulu, the educational institute’s company doctor added that the Dutch government imposed measures for administration which also has to be executed by employees.

“Everything has to be administered, evaluated and planned, over and over again. Which is not a bad thing as such, however it is also becoming a increasingly larger part of the employees’ work.” (Kalulu – company doctor)

According to Daan the skills to be a lecturer are underestimated. He argued that it's not just about workload, but also on the lecturer's performance in the classroom.

"I think lecturing is a craft. I think many people underestimate that. I always tell first-year lecturers, listen, when you're in the classroom, the floor is yours. So, when you have a 12 week cycle and the first lecture didn't go so well, you'll feel the pressure for the second lecture. In that sense it's a craft and also a very honest feedback loop. The group takes it or leaves it. So, there is pressure on being successful as a lecturer, especially for first-year lecturers." (...) The craftsmanship of education and the individual performance of a lecturer could be a cause of stress, it's certainly under pressure. It could be workload related, but also performance related." (Daan – staff manager)

Daan argued that lecturing is a craft. This can result in feelings of stress because of the workload to prepare, however, according to Daan, it can also be performance-related.

Performance-related pressure

Jip and Michelle are both HR-advisors with a specialty in mobility. They also recognize performance-related pressure among employees as a cause of stress. Michelle explained that new employees can struggle with their performance in the classroom.

"In education there is not much time for a proper introduction to your job. I notice that with employees who haven't been working here for too long. There is some kind of buddy system to guide new lecturers, however there is still room for improvement. It's because everyone has their own courses and their own schedules. So, new employees are rather quickly put to work in the classroom. When you're not used to that it can cause stress, it can be tense." (Michelle – HR advisor)

In addition to Michelle's argument, Jip stated that more experienced lecturers have their own difficulties. There are many employees who are working at the educational institute for a long period of time according to Jip.

"The average age here is over 45 years old. In comparison with other universities of applied sciences we're still fairly low. Still, some employees here are working as lecturers for more than 20 years. Things change, the question then is; can you still manage it all?" (Jip – HR advisor)

Michelle added that organizational and technological change have an impact on the performance of more experienced lecturers.

"The developments are going faster than ever. Ten years ago you could hold on to; this is the way I do it, my lectures are like this. That's not an option anymore. This means that some people who are working here for a longer period of time can experience performance-related pressure. Things like, you have to teach in English, or, you have to do more with e-learning. You have to do and present your lectures differently, and it's going fast." (Michelle – HR advisor)

It seems that the older employees and employees who work at the university of applied sciences for a longer period of time have more trouble keeping up with organizational and/or technological developments. This could explain why the population over 60 years old is less satisfied with their workloads than other age groups, see figure 2.

Insecurity

Another issue which is mentioned by Daan and Thomas is insecurity and flexible jobs. The system in the Netherlands, as Daan referred to it, is aimed at a flexible working force. This also impacts employees.

“I think that there is more work-related stress in education, because of the system. I can give one or two years to a starting lecturer and then I have to fire them. That causes stress. (...) I think the system is a cause of work-related stress, because when there is doubt about an employee, we let them go after one or two years. If you don't do that, you'll have to pay for someone for their entire working life. Is that smart? I think that is felt by employees too. They have the feeling that they have to perform superbly, if not they're out...” (Daan – staff manager)

What Daan tries to explain here is that the implementation of regulations for flexible jobs impedes employers to hire employees with flexible contracts longer than two years. After two years employees get a contract with more security, a fixed contract. However, employers are hesitant to give these contracts as these make it harder to fire people in less prosperous times. Thomas gives an example from his department:

“At the department there's a lot of insecurity, as we were told to reduce capacity. From 2014 onwards we've said not to hire anyone for fixed contracts. Everyone who is new here, can only stay for two years. That insecurity can cause stress, however it's a different type of stress than a workload which is too high.” (Thomas – supportive staff manager)

Role ambiguity

Finally, role ambiguity was mentioned by the Kalulu and Jip. Jip made a link between workload and role ambiguity.

“Due to the high workload, it's not possible to plan or oversee responsibilities. Everyone is busy, colleagues can help temporarily, but not structurally.” (Jip – HR advisor)

“I have to say that I don't come across supportive staff with burn out or similar complaints. Their role is more clear of course.” (Kalulu – company doctor)

The company doctor added that she almost never sees supportive staff in her office. She stated that she thinks their roles are more clear. Hereby she seems to imply that those who do visit her, have issues regarding role ambiguity.

4.3.2 Causes work-related stress (2): characteristics of employees

Aside from characteristics of work as causes of work-related stress among employees, the professionals also emphasized that the characteristics and (generalized) personality traits of employees can be causes of work-related stress. The professionals mentioned five characteristics frequently; 1) coping with workload, 2) flexibility, 3) performance/prestige, 4) responsibility and loyalty, and 5) indicating boundaries.

Coping with workload; individual variability

All the professionals that were interviewed have put forward that coping with workload varies greatly between employees. They explained that this is the reason why for some a certain workload is seen as challenging or doable and for others the same workload can result in work-related stress. Moreover, they noted that this can also differ for any given situation. Daan's comment illustrated the variability among employees;

"The experienced workload and the experienced work-related stress, those are interesting definitions, because everything you enjoy won't lead to experiencing stress. I can have a lot of workload if it's something I like. There are also people who don't have too much workload, but do experience work-related stress. It's also a personal thing, it's about individual competences. (...) One person will experience a group of 200 students as a workload, the other, also based on personality traits, will experience it as stressful." (Daan – staff manager)

Also Michelle stated that work-related stress is very subjective. Both Michelle and Kalulu explained it also has a lot to do with an employee's capability to reflect. This also came back in some of the interviews with employees. However, the quantitative data in figure 2 shows that there is also a great objective work overload. The experienced workload and coping skills seem to be indicators for work-related stress. Moreover, they could be indicators for absenteeism.

Flexibility

The professionals seem to assume that flexibility is not a key competence of employees in the educational sector. Michelle for example, argued that the average lecturer is not the most innovative or flexible person;

"Resolutely put, the average lecturer is not someone who is very innovative, willing to change or flexible. Of course there are exceptions, but the average lecturer feels better when he or she knows what to expect; stability, security. Wanting to do thing decently and deliver quality. Those are also personality traits that might collide with what is asked of you." (Michelle – HR advisor)

Thomas explained that lecturers are often specialist, they are very good in their subject. Though the educational institute sometimes demands something else. Lecturers want quality and improvement, this is not always possible in the available time.

"You need to be an all-rounder and a planner. That is to say, you can't be perfect in this job. You have to prioritise. Sometimes things just don't work." (Thomas – supportive staff manager)

Quality and flexibility seem to frequently clash, especially for lecturers. Controlling the balance between perfecting the quality of education and flexibility to react to unexpected situations are likely to be very different competences. According to some of the professionals the abilities to craft and improve are better developed than innovation and change management skills. Dealing with flexibility can resolve into stress. Though, on the contrary, change seems to be slow in education. Anna stated in her narrative that especially new colleagues want to learn and improve quickly, however due to the nature of education, changes can only be made in the next year or in the next set of lectures. This can also lead to work-related stress. More subtly, from Michelle's quote it seems that there is a risk of 'blaming'. The HR-department provides training, though, it seems that it is the employees' own responsibility to learn and adapt. Michelle and Jip both mentioned that training is rarely visited by lecturers due to time and planning constraints. It could be that certain target groups could use more support than they're getting now.

Performance

Another source of work-related stress is the performance in the classroom. It asks for a set of skills. Daan argued that lecturers are often too focused on the content instead of the message.

"The individual competences of a lecturer are an important factor when working with students. We want to perform in terms of content. However, I don't think content is the most important. Most lecturers think it is. Though, I think the didactic skills and an inspiring story are often more important than the content of the lecture." (Daan – staff manager)

Not performing well in the classroom can have a direct effect on the received feedback by the students. This might make it more difficult to try something new. Keeping to the safety of a successful idea seems to be the norm. This could overlap with the lack of innovation and willingness to change mentioned by the professionals. Also a high workload could prevent lecturers from being innovative.

"Some experience this pressure to perform as an opportunity. Like, I think it's going to be a challenge to teach in English, but I'll go for it. Others think it's a threat. That can resolve in stress as well. When something is asked of you, but you're not sure if you can do it. Maybe there is a fear to that." (Michelle – HR advisor)

The quote from Michelle shows that she also thinks there might be a fear to undertake a challenge. Undertaking a challenge could detract from the performance that lecturers want to deliver.

Responsibility and loyalty

Most professionals also agreed that employees in the educational sector feel very responsible for the greater good of the organization. They seem to raise the bar high for themselves.

"Lecturers feel like they have to do everything what is asked of them. Even a little bit more than what was asked of them, I see that very often. That employees raise the bar even higher than they are asked to do." (Kalulu – company doctor)

Lecturers feel also responsible for and are loyal towards students. Thomas explained he feels like there is a psychological contract from a lecturer towards a student.

“There is strong solidarity from lecturers to students. You have a relationship with students. Some kind of psychological contract that you’ll help them in developing their personal skills. When you can’t handle that due to your workload or do whatever, then you’ll experience that as a failure. (Thomas – supportive staff manager)

Feeling responsible and being loyal towards the employer, colleagues and students seems to make it hard to indicate boundaries. Floor mentioned in her narrative that she felt overwhelmed by all the small responsibilities she had and started to forget some of them. For her this felt like failing at her task.

Indicating boundaries

Indicating boundaries seems closely related to loyalty, peaks in workload and performance related pressure. When it’s hard to indicate that your plate is full the workload or the perceived workload can become even higher. Moreover, it could be that employees have difficulties indicating boundaries because they are asked too much.

“I think employees at our institute are very loyal towards their employer. They are very involved and take responsibility, therefore they easily take too much on their plate.” (Jip – HR advisor)

Besides that it can be hard to indicate boundaries it can also result in feelings of failure.

“I notice that indicating your own boundaries or admitting that you can’t do something is hard to accept. It gives you the feeling that you’re not good enough or that you’re failing your task.” (Michelle – HR advisor)

The five characteristics that were identified are closely related. It appears that lecturers are quality-driven. This can cause them to experience difficulties in coping with the workload. Moreover, the available time seems to be insufficient for the quality and therefore the performance lecturers want to deliver. As Thomas illustrated; *“you can’t be perfect at everything.”*. In addition to quality, lecturers feel responsible for students and are loyal to their employer. Indicating boundaries is therefore troublesome. As Michelle put it; *“it gives you the feeling that you’re not good enough.”*. This could also cause lecturers to keep to the safety of trustworthy methods and that they’re not keen on dealing with flexibility, innovation and change.

Interestingly, supportive staff is seldom mentioned by the respondents. Thomas, a supportive staff manager, argued that there aren’t any cases of absenteeism among the supportive staff due to work-related stress. He only knows from the planners and back office teams that they experience higher workloads. This seems to align with the narrative of Inge, she stated that she experienced more work-related stress in her previous job as a lecturer compared to her current job as an administrative secretary.

4.3.3 PMA and work-related stress

Sources of work-related stress are clearly pointed out by the professionals with occupational responsibilities to reduce work-related stress. Furthermore, to address the research questions the link between PMA and work-related stress was made in the interviews. The professionals were asked how PMA could be meaningful for employees when experiencing work-related stress. Stress reduction was

mentioned by all the respondents. Additionally, PMA as a way to find relaxation, find a balance between work and life, to abreact oneself and to let go of thoughts. The professionals were more critical about PMA as a institutionally supported way to prevent work-related stress.

Stress reduction: relaxation, abreaction, regeneration and mind shift

All of the respondents discussed ways of how PMA are meaningful for employees. Jip explained how PMA help to find relaxation and can be a way to abreact.

“I think you need PMA to find relaxation, to find a way to abreact. Your frustration, your anger, your sadness, you name it. It will give you energy, temporarily. You reduce the stress, but if you don’t change something about your workload it will come back.” (Jip – HR advisor)

Daan strongly believes that physical activity can help to achieve mental health and well-being.

“I think no one will deny that PMA can reduce stress. I believe in the unity of the body and the mind. I think that the body needs its physical activity. I also think that there is a positive relation to a healthy brain. Physical exercise helps me to be mentally fit. I strongly believe that.” (Daan – staff manager)

Kalulu as a doctor also makes the link between physical activity and mental health and well-being. She explained that the employees she sees have stopped relaxing and only focused on work. These employees have dropped out. Kalulu strongly recommends PMA for employees who are burn-out or overworked;

“When employees are burn-out or overworked I often advise them to do physical exercises. If you like to do sports, try to engage in sports again. If employees don’t like sports I tell them to go for a walk. I always tell them to leave their troubles at home, because when you get back from your activity there is still plenty of time to think about that.” (Kalulu – company doctor)

Michelle focused more on the balance between work and life. Peaks in workload are not a bad thing, however you also need time to regenerate.

“I think it can be meaningful for a balance between work and life and to relax. It’s about effort and relaxation. That is personal to every employee. It is about being able to let go, mentally and physically. It’s ok to have a peak in workload as long as there is also time to relax. That is balance you have to guard yourself too. You have to reflect on it regularly.” (Michelle – HR advisor)

Thomas reflected on the meaning of PMA on his own life. For him sports, and later meditation, have been a way to let go of thoughts.

“Well, when I look at myself, sport is a way to express myself. I can’t do high intensity sports anymore due to a hernia. I meditate now, if I don’t do something to release tension or relieve stress it bothers me. I believe in PMA, just to let go of thoughts.” (Thomas – supportive staff manager)

Thus, different aspects were highlighted, though respondents agreed that PMA contributes to a reduction of stress.

Stress prevention

The professionals were not convinced that PMA can help to prevent work-related stress. Jip argued that PMA can't prevent stress entirely, she emphasized that it's important to keep talking about the causes of work-related stress.

"I think PMA can relief work-related stress. However, if you don't do something about the cause of stress it will come back. I don't think it will disappear entirely. It is a way to treat the symptoms of stress. I think PMA can help people to be in balance. That way it can be a method to prevent stress. However, if you really want to do something about work-related stress you need to examine the source of the stress." (Jip – HR advisor)

Although Daan believes PMA can't prevent work-related stress, he thinks PMA can teach people how to deal with work-related stress. Not only work-related stress, but all kinds of trouble people go through in their lives. He seems to see PMA as a teacher of life lessons.

"Look, I think everyone will experience shit in their lives. It's more, how to deal with it? I can't remove the shit people are going through. That mindfulness thing that's happening now, it won't solve your problem, but it teaches you how to deal with it. People who participated in sports know what losing is. If you've never been a sporty person, you don't know what losing is. So, dealing with loss or with resistance and overcoming it is something which leads to a certain mind-set; 'it didn't work this week, but who cares, next week we have another chance.'. I strongly believe in a mind-set development which you can learn through meditation and physical activity. I can't remove the stress or the tension. I think it's the same at home, young kids can also cause stress, but you can't take away the kids, you have to learn to handle that situation."

However, whether that mind-set development to prevent work-related stress or reduce stress is a shared responsibility of the employer and the employee remains one of the questions. Moreover, if there is a shared responsibility from the employer and the employee, the integration of PMA and work could be a vehicle for this development. In the final part of the results the integration of PMA and work is discussed with all the respondents.

4.3.4 Integration of PMA and work

Similar as with the employees there are supporters and sceptics on the integration of PMA and work. In general, the supporters argue that they see it as a way to facilitate employees and reduce work-related stress among employees. Though, there is also some critique from both the supporters as the sceptics of the integration of PMA and work.

Supporters

Thomas argued that PMA should get a more structured and supportive platform. Not only for PMA organised by the educational institute, but more aimed at facilitating ideas or activities organised by employees for employees.

“I think it would be a good thing to do. We should facilitate in that; ‘This is happening, you should participate!’. I would advocate that. We should stimulate and structure it more, give it a platform. When I was still teaching we had something called ‘Independent Sport Event’. One colleague would take his or her colleagues to his or her own sport. We went rowing, sport climbing, archery, baseball, all sorts of things. I think that’s great for teambuilding and reducing stress. I think it would really help if we have our own sport facilities. It would also be great for bonding between departments and between students and lecturers.” (Thomas – supportive staff manager)

Thomas also sees it as an opportunity for teambuilding and bonding within and between departments. Though this approach seems to be focussed on sports and less on lower intensity physical activities or meditation. This could result in leaving out non-sporty employees who also have a need for PMA to reduce work-related stress. Also, lesser known alternatives such as mindfulness meditation could be overlooked.

Jip is also enthusiastic about an integration of PMA and work. She sees opportunities for taking an extended lunchbreak to regenerate. Though she is also critical towards the idea. Because when you have a high workload, where do you find the time to participate? According to Jip it is vital to discuss with managers how this can be organised properly.

“I think it would be great. I assume that there will be sport accommodations with the campus development. Some kind of gym. Who or what will stop you then from taking a break for an hour instead of half an hour to do physical exercises and have lunch. Or yoga or meditative activities or something. It’s important to make arrangements with your manager and managers should stimulate and facilitate this. However, you first need to arrange your own tasks. If your workload is too high, you might not have time to do so. The dialog with the manager is therefore vital.” (Jip – HR advisor)

Michelle discussed her own experiences as she participated in a theatre group at the educational institute. Her experience might also apply to PMA. However, also she has an important side note. When an employer facilitates and stimulates employees to make use of PMA for physical and mental health, it could be something to talk about when an employee didn’t make use of any of the activities.

“Well, I participated in the theatre group, which was great fun. You meet people from other departments, I enjoyed that. Someone else might want to do sports or meditation. (...) They might do sports straight after work because it’s more efficient. I think that could work. I think that you’re than facilitating as an employer. It’s the employees choice to make use of the facilities. However, I do think it’s a responsibility of both the employer and the employee. If you drop out and you didn’t make use of any of the activities we facilitate, it could be a topic to discuss. We’re offering this, why didn’t you make use of it?” (Michelle – HR advisor)

So, the supporters see great opportunities for reducing work-related stress, efficient time use, bonding within and between departments, and plain fun. Their critique is focussed on removing barriers to participate, without it, the integration of PMA will not be successful.

Sceptics

Daan and Kalulu are more sceptic on the integration of PMA and work. They see the benefits of PMA for employees but doubt that the workplace is the right place for these activities.

“I must say I haven’t heard about PMA at work yet. Maybe once in a while but not structurally. I can imagine that when employees are already 40 hours a week working with colleagues, that they don’t feel the need to also engage in PMA with colleagues. I do think it’s important to stimulate it more.” (Kalulu – company doctor)

In addition to Kalulu Daan argued that there are already plentiful options to arrange PMA around work. He is also critical about allowing too much leisure activities in the workplace.

“I think it would be nonsense to do meditation at work. It really gets me thinking, what are we doing? I think it’s an individual’s thing. If you’d like to go swimming at 8 a.m. fine, then you just start at 11 a.m. If your schedule allows it, I don’t mind. We have so many flexible working arrangements. I want it to be demand-driven, not supply-oriented. Would going to a pub quiz also be included? Why not? I think that’s pretty similar. When I see them the day after and when I hear their stories they certainly didn’t think about work. It doesn’t feel right to me to do that at work. (...) You know, we have people here to run marathons. We also have people here who wouldn’t even want to think about that. They have a glass of wine when they get home. I think it’s both valuable. You just shouldn’t go straight back to work. Then things will go wrong.” (Daan -

Daan and Kalulu seem to argue that it’s also important for employees to take their own responsibility and do their own thing. Daan seems to be worried about where to draw the line. If an activity is considered beneficial for employees, should it become part of the workplace? Kalulu added that she can imagine that employees want to keep PMA to themselves. This is also what the considering and sceptical employees said.

Chapter 5 - Discussion and conclusions

5.1 Interpretation of results

In this part of the thesis the results are interpreted and linked to the literature from the theoretical framework. Furthermore, the quantitative data, data from the employees' narratives and the data from the professionals with occupational responsibilities to reduce work-related stress is connected to each other to gain a holistic view and answer the sub-questions. This is followed by the limitations of this research and a conclusion to answer the research question. Finally, recommendations are formulated for further research and the practice.

5.1.1 Interpreting employees' narratives

The first sub question that is addressed here was aimed at finding how PMA can be meaningful for employees who experience stress at work. First, a closer look is taken at work-related stress, followed by how PMA can be meaningful for employees who experience work-related stress. The sub question was formulated as;

How can physical and meditative activities be meaningful for employees who experience work-related stress according to these employees?

The employees mostly experienced work-related stress due to peaks in workload, role ambiguity and performance-related pressure. First, peaks in workload are part of the nature of the educational sector. The transition from one period to another is often mentioned as the cause of these peaks as is the desire to deliver quality towards students and colleagues. Van der Ploeg et al. (2014) distinguish a high workload as one of the key causes of work-related stress which is also recognised by the employees and professionals.

Second, as is discussed in the literature, the educational sector is a service sector which is also referred to as a post-fordist organization (Rojek, 2004). One of the characteristics of these types of organizations is that individual employees are a part of a network in which teamwork and empowerment are key competences (Rubery, 2005; Van Echtelt, Glebbeek, & Lewis, 2009). For some employees, having too many and too diverse responsibilities leads to role ambiguity and therefore to work-related stress. Additionally, according to Zuzanek (2004) the greater the fragmentation of time, the stronger the feelings of time pressure are.

Third, performance-related pressure refers to a performance driven society. Work-based achievement is highly valued in our contemporary Western societies (Kremer et al., 2017). Likewise, demonstrating social skills and performing in social life can also put pressure on individuals. Floor, for example, explained she feels the pressure to perform at work, but also in her social life. Floor felt she had to respond to all her WhatsApp messages; *"That really felt suffocating."*

Furthermore, the interviews with employees have shown that all the respondents experience mental and physical complaints due to work-related stress to a greater or lesser extent. Respondents reported difficulties falling asleep, being exhausted, having experienced a burn-out and palpitations. For example, Ivy and Jack, who indicated that they don't experience a great deal of work-related stress, have experienced difficulties falling asleep. According to (Eysink et al., 2012; van Zwieten et al., 2014) these are common health issues for those who experience work-related stress. Additionally, in the

literature it is also suggested that a disrupted work-life balance can also be a cause of work-related stress (Lewis, 2003; van der Ploeg et al., 2014; van Zwieten et al., 2014). This is confirmed by employees who argued that their work-life balance can shift to work when they have a high workload.

This research included seven employees. When connecting the data from the narrative interviews with the data from the employee satisfaction survey a rather worrying image is created. The extent to which all employees of the educational institute are confronted with mental and physical complaints due to work-related stress can only be estimated. When observing the data from the employee satisfaction survey, 38 per cent of the respondents (n=639) reported their workload as too high or way too high. According to van Zwieten et al. (2014) a workload is too high when employees are not able to meet the demands of their daily tasks and are not capable to change the causes of this workload. A shocking 49 per cent of the teaching staff in the educational institute (n=304) reported their workload as too high or way too high. This clearly demonstrates why the educational has the highest percentage of absenteeism due to work-related stress (van der Ploeg et al., 2014). It also emphasizes the need to work on ways to diminish the workload, change the organization of work and reduce work-related stress. Besides a high workload and other causes mentioned by employees, the literature also suggest that unwanted behaviour can be a cause of work-related stress (van der Ploeg et al., 2014). However, unwanted behaviour, although not to be taken lightly, seems to be just a speck in this study when compared to those who experience high workloads.

Some employees argue that it can help to rationalise the peaks in workload. Especially more experienced employees know when to expect a high workload and prepare themselves. The employees also state that PMA can be meaningful to reduce work-related stress. Although the employees argue that PMA doesn't change the causes of work-related stress, they argue that PMA are meaningful as they seem to function as coping strategies. All the employees have experienced that PMA can help to reduce work-related stress. Moreover, PMA can be meaningful as a coping strategy to find relaxation through; 1) a mind shift, and 2), non-performative behaviour. For some employees physical effort helps to find relaxation. Others find relaxation in meditative activities. A mind shift can be described as not thinking about work as PMA are used as a distraction from work. It can be a way to let go of thoughts, as participants are fully immersed in the activity. Jack mentioned this explicitly in his narrative; *"Just letting go of thoughts, that's what sports does for me."*

Non-performative behaviour can be described as participating in activities that do not demand a performance. It seems that this applies most to low intensity physical activity or meditation. It seems that this helps employees to escape from the everyday pressure to perform. Floor explained that going for a stroll helps her to reduce stress and recharge; *"I think that when you're dealing with stress it only makes sense to recharge your battery instead of demanding more."*

Thus, this thesis confirms the careful positive stress reducing effects attributed to PMA by other studies (Hartfiel et al., 2011; Stavrakakis, 2015; Wolever et al., 2012; Zuzanek, 2004). More specifically, according to employees of the educational institute, PMA are meaningful for reducing work-related stress through a mind shift and non-performative behaviour. For some this is achieved through high intensity exercises and for others through low intensity physical activity or meditation. However, two remarks need to be made here. First, meditation is not put forward as convincingly by the employees as physical activities are. All employees are familiar with physical activity, but only a few have actually tried meditation to reduce stress while evidence from MBSR-programs is promising (Chiesa & Serretti, 2009; Davis & Hayes, 2011; Schure et al., 2008). Second, a coping strategy or mechanism is a behaviour used to avoid being psychologically harmed by a social experience (Pearlin

& Schooler, 1978). This implies that the causes of work-related stress are suppressed and not resolved. This is also put forward by some of the professionals and is discussed in the next paragraph.

5.1.2 Interpreting professionals' interpretations

The second sub question was aimed at the views of professionals with occupational responsibilities to reduce work-related stress on how PMA can be meaningful for employees who experience stress at work. First, the professionals' view on work-related stress is explicated, followed by how PMA can be meaningful. The sub question was formulated as;

How can physical and meditative activities be meaningful for employees who experience work-related stress according to professionals?

The professionals argued that they recognise work-related stress is present in the educational institute. Moreover, they recognised that absenteeism due to work-related stress is occurring. Furthermore, some even recognised an increase in cases of overworked or burn-out employees, especially among new employees. According to the professionals the above seems to be caused by; 1) the characteristics of work, and 2) the typology of employees. First, five characteristics of the work that cause work-related stress are identified by the professionals; 1) peaks in workload, 2) autonomy, 3) insecurity, 4) performance-related pressure, and 5) role ambiguity. Second, besides characteristics of the work the professionals emphasized that the typology of the average employee is also of influence on work-related stress. The professionals again identified five characteristics that are associated with the experience of work-related stress; 1) coping strategies, 2) flexibility, 3) performance driven, 4) responsibility and loyalty, and 5) indicating boundaries.

Similarly to what the employees have put forward, the peaks in workload are a cause of work-related stress according to the professionals. Additionally, the professionals connected the peaks in workload to the lack of autonomy that lecturers have. This is where the educational service sector seems to deviate from what is expected in post-fordist organizations. According to Rubery (2005) and Van Echtelt et al. (2009) empowerment is a key characteristic of work in post-fordist organizations. Although lecturers have autonomy over the content of their work, the schedules are made for lecturers. Thereby, they are less flexible to smoothen their workload. This is illustrated by a quote from Thomas who explains that this is a significant difference compared to businesses. When there's an exam or a lecture, it is a strict deadline, it has to be ready; *"This means there is very little margin in your planning."*

Furthermore, the typology of the average employee that is described by the professionals seems to deviate from the typology that fits post-fordist organizations. Rojek (2004) argues that employees need a skill-set that includes innovation, adaptability and mobility. This is exactly what lacks with employees in the educational institute according to some professionals. It seems there is a mismatch between quality and flexibility, especially for lecturers. Controlling the balance between perfecting the quality of education and flexibility to react and deal with change are likely to be very different competences.

In addition to the causes of work-related stress that were identified by the employees, the professionals mentioned insecurity. Due to the flexibilisation of labour it is harder for new employees to get a fixed contract. According to the professionals this can also cause work-related stress among employees. This is supported by research of Kremer et al. (2017), they argue that insecurity on the labour market spills over in personal lives.

The professionals don't see PMA as the answer to the causes of work-related stress. The professionals stated that they think that PMA can be meaningful by contributing to stress reduction and possibly stress prevention. According to the professionals PMA can contribute to stress reduction by; 1) relaxation, 2) abreaction, 3) regeneration and 4) a mind shift. According to some professionals PMA could possibly be meaningful for stress prevention by; 1) teaching or developing skills to be more resilient to stress, 2) providing a healthy balance between effort and relaxation. PMA as meaningful for stress reduction was also mentioned in a similar fashion by the employees. Though, the view Daan explicated for PMA as meaningful for stress prevention was rather unique.

“Look, I think everyone will experience shit in their lives. It's more, how to deal with it? I can't remove the shit people are going through. That mindfulness thing that's happening now, it won't solve your problem, but it teaches you how to deal with it. People who participated in sports know what losing is. If you've never been a sporty person, you don't know what losing is. So, dealing with loss or with resistance and overcoming it is something which leads to a certain mind-set; 'it didn't work this week, but who cares, next week we have another chance.'. I strongly believe in a mind-set development which you can learn through meditation and physical activity.” (Daan – staff manager)

Thus, according to professionals and employees PMA could be a tool to cope with work-related stress and thereby reduce work-related stress. Furthermore, professionals and employees seem to agree PMA could contribute to better physical and mental health and well-being. Though, a critical question that can be asked is whether stress reduction or prevention is the responsibility of the employee or a shared responsibility of employer and employee. Especially because the characteristics of the work as well as the typology of employees in the educational institute are intertwined. Apparently, the type of work and the type of people in the educational sector are at an increased risk of experiencing work-related stress. This could demand more backing and support from the employer to create and design a shared responsibility which aims to diminish or prevent this increased risk. The integration of PMA and work could be such a design and is discussed with professionals and employees in the next paragraph.

5.1.3 Interpreting the integration of work and PMA in the educational sector

The third sub question focusses on the integration of paid work and leisure through PMA at work. Moreover, whether an integration of PMA and work is desirable. Before following up on that proposition it should be clear that it is not a question whether the boundaries between the spheres of work and life are blurring for employees. Especially for lecturers who work at the educational institute of this case study. It would rather be an exception if a lecturer didn't bring work home. However, bringing work home is not always forced upon employees. The advantages of bringing work home are frequently mentioned by employees; focus and flexibility. However, especially in times of peaks in workloads this integration can also cause work-related stress by shifting the balance between work and life towards work. Lewis (2003) argues that flexible working hours are more often used to work more instead of fewer hours which is also emphasized by the employees. Furthermore, it seems like a one-sided integration of work seeping into life, and thereby affecting personal time and leisure time (Hill et al., 1998; Sullivan & Lewis, 2001). What if the integration of work and life would become twofold? What are the benefits and what could be the downsides? The third sub question was therefore formulated as;

Why is or isn't a further integration of paid work and leisure through PMA desirable according to employees and professionals?

Some of the employees think it is desirable to integrate work and leisure, others however do not. The employees could be evenly categorised in 'supporters', 'considerators' and 'sceptics'. Interestingly, the employees only mentioned the integration of physical activity and work. It seems that mediation at work is a barrier to some, especially to those who have never engaged in meditative activities. This could be related to the Dutch culture which focusses more on sports associations and physical activities than on meditative activities. Although, this is also contested as yoga is one of the fastest growing sports among women in the Netherlands (NOC*NSF, 2015).

The 'supporters' are enthusiastic about a further integration of physical activity and work. Especially when the educational institute would facilitate more options to engage in physical activity at work. When more options are available at work this could lead to more efficiency. It could considerably diminish the time spent on commuting and preparation. According to the 'supporters' it would therefore become easier to plan and engage in physical activity when options are available at work. Interestingly, Lewis (2003) argues that adapting to increasing workloads by higher efficiency can impose impossible standards for others to meet. So, when some employees engage in PMA at work this could result in an organizational culture that demands these impossible standards for others. This closely connects to the shared responsibility of employees and employers to guide the implementation of PMA at work.

The 'considerators' were mildly positive about an integration of work and physical activity. They made a clear distinction between high intensity and low intensity physical activities. The 'considerators' argued that they already participate in high intensity physical activities at home. Therefore, they are doubtful on high intensity physical activities at work. According to the 'considerators' high intensity physical activity is a personal matter. However, they would enjoy low intensity physical activities at work such as walking in their lunchbreak. Although the 'considerators' are doubtful on high intensity physical activity at work, Ivy explained that an incidental high intensity activity could be great for teambuilding. The 'sceptics' main argument for not having PMA at work is that they see this as something personal, something to do without colleagues or as Léon put forward, with befriended colleagues.

So, it seems there is a clear distinction between those who would support and engage in physical activity at work, those who would enjoy low intensity activities at work and those who want to keep physical activity to themselves.

In the interviews with the professionals with occupational responsibilities to reduce work-related stress a similar pattern emerged. However, it was harder to distinguish 'supporters' and 'considerators'. It could be argued that there are 'supporters' who mention important side notes. These 'supporters' see great opportunities for reducing work-related stress, efficient time use, bonding within and between departments, and plain fun. Though, the three professionals who were enthusiastic about the opportunities of an integration of PMA and work mentioned possible constraints. Their critique is focussed on removing barriers to participate, without it, the integration of PMA will not be successful according to the 'supporters'. One of these barriers is the workload. When workloads are high, where do employees find the time to participate? According to Jip, this is a vital point of consideration which should be discussed with the managers. Additionally, the use of PMA

at work might also help to remove boundaries by informal interaction between students, colleagues and managers.

Furthermore, a second side note which is made by the 'supporting' professionals aims at demand-driven or supply-oriented integration of PMA and work. When the integration of PMA and work is demand-driven the organization should stimulate, facilitate and promote existing ideas according to the professionals. When the integration of PMA and work is supply-oriented freewheeling should be avoided. Reducing work-related stress should be a responsibility of both the employer and the employees according to the professionals. Michelle states that not participating in supply-oriented PMA should be a topic of conversation when an employee drops out and did not make use of any of the facilities provided. Though, this might be a risky strategy of blaming as this could be an example of what Lewis (2003) refers to with impossible standards for others to meet.

Some professionals are categorised as sceptics. They think the integration of work and PMA is undesirable. The 'sceptics' argue that in the first place PMA are an employee's own responsibility. Furthermore, they see potential difficulties in dealing with grey areas such as; when should the employer facilitate and when is it the employee's own responsibility. The 'sceptics' warned that the workplace could become too leisurely and also argued that it's healthy to have a life outside work.

Thus, according to employees and professionals the integration of work and PMA can have positive effects and therefore be desirable. Besides the meaning PMA can have for stress reduction, the most noticeable one mentioned is efficient time use. Though, on the other hand, the integration of work and PMA is less desired by others. The main argument of the more sceptical employees and professionals is that PMA belongs to the sphere of personal time and is therefore an employee's own responsibility. On the basis of what I've learnt writing this thesis, I would suggest to discuss the integration of work and PMA more thoroughly. If reducing work-related stress is perceived as a shared responsibility of the employer and the employee, the integration of work and PMA is desirable. A shared responsibility to support employees to do their work in a good physical and mental condition will help to reduce the financial and personal costs employers and employees are dealing with and thereby contribute to a healthier workplace.

5.2 Limitations

Before drawing conclusions the limitations of this study are discussed. These are relevant to keep in mind when weighing the conclusion. First and foremost, the sample of this study could be too small to generalize the results to the entire population of the case study. Only seven interviews are conducted of whom six respondents are lecturers and one used to teach. However, similar topics were recurrent in the seven interviews which could indicate data saturation. The entire population of teaching staff consists of 304 employees of whom 49 per cent reported their workloads as too high or way too high. However, not all of the interviewed respondents argued that their workloads were too high or way too high. Hereby, the 51 per cent of the teaching staff who did not report their workload as too high or way too high, could also be represented by the sample. Moreover, the strength of this study is its multi-methodological approach. Although the sample size is small, the quantitative data and the five interviews with professionals contribute to gaining multiple perspectives on work-related stress in the educational institute. Combining the data and multiple methodological methods resulted in a holistic interpretation of the data.

This case study is specified to a university of applied sciences in the Netherlands. The sample is very likely too small to generalize any results to other universities of applied sciences in the

Netherlands. However, the results might be indicative for, or broadly recognized by, other universities of applied sciences in the Netherlands as absenteeism due to psychosocial, work-related factors in the educational sector is the highest of all industries. It is likely that peaks in workload, role ambiguity and insecurity are also causes for work-related stress in other educational institutes. These causes could be universal among universities in the Netherlands and possibly abroad.

Second, researcher and participant bias should be taken into account. The nature of the narrative approach allows the researcher and respondent to co-construct the lived experience (Elliott, 2005). Moreover, it allows complexity and ambiguity to be taken into account when interpreting the data (Simons, 2014). Still, the narrative approach is also dependent on the skills of both the researcher and the participant. After every interview a short reflection was written by the researcher and every narrative was subject to 'member check'. Hereby, the possible researcher and participant bias are taken into account when interpreting the results.

Finally, the respondents were invited to participate in the research through an invitational letter. This letter contained information that might directed the participants to think about their work-related stress in relation to PMA. The advantage is that employees could highlight their view on work-related stress and PMA. The disadvantage could be that employees left out information that otherwise could have been included in this thesis.

5.3 Conclusion

When taking the interpretation of the results and the limitations into account an answer to the research question can be formulated. From the introduction of this thesis it was evident that work-related stress is a huge challenge for work in our contemporary societies. Especially work in service sectors is perceptive to ever increasing workloads as efficiency, quality and constant availability are professional identity affirming (Lewis, 2003). It is acknowledged by the literature (e.g. van der Ploeg et al., 2014) as well as confirmed by the results of this study that high workloads, especially peaks in workloads, are an important cause for work-related stress. Furthermore, the literature review showed that absenteeism in the Netherlands due to work-related stress is, on average, the highest in the educational sector. Moreover, absenteeism due to work-related stress has significant financial costs for employers and the society at large (van der Ploeg et al., 2014, 2015).

Though also contested by poor methodology, previous studies are carefully optimistic about the stress reducing or even stress preventing abilities of PMA in healthy subjects (Hartfiel et al., 2011; Stavrakakis, 2015; Wolever et al., 2012). This study contributes to the current debates by taking a qualitative social science perspective, contrary to the quantitative economic or medical perspectives on work-related stress by previous studies. The experienced and socially constructed meanings of PMA in relation to perceived work-related stress is emphasized over the quantifiable effects of PMA on work-related stress. The aim of this study was to explore and gain a deeper understanding of work-related stress in relation to PMA in an educational institute. The research question was therefore formulated as;

How can physical and meditative activities be meaningful for employees in an educational institute who experience work-related stress?

The results indicate that employees and professionals consider PMA as quite meaningful for stress reduction. However, there is individual variability among employees and professionals on specific ways in how PMA is perceived and expected to be meaningful. Most consistently, employees

and professionals agree on the use of PMA as a coping strategy. Different aspects are highlighted by individual employees and professionals, however it seems that escaping from work-related stress through relaxation, abreaction and distraction are the key elements to reduce stress. On a deeper level the results seem to suggest that PMA can contrast the excessive demands of work by shifting the mind and non-performative, non-productive behaviour. This mind shift seems to be achieved through high intensity physical activities. When focussing on high intensity sports or exercises it seems to be too physically demanding to think about work or work-related stress. Non-performative or non-productive behaviour seems to be achieved through lower intensity physical activities or meditation. The focus on lower intensity physical activities or mediation seems to work as a way to recharge the personal battery or find peace of mind. Whereas high intensity physical activity can be experienced as a performance and therefore be stressful.

Thus, the blurring boundaries between work and life are, for a moment, clearly distinguished by being fully immersed in the physical or meditative activities. It seems that when engaging in PMA, the spheres of work and leisure are truly separated for the time being.

Furthermore, although hard to quantify by studies, employees and professionals seem to perceive PMA as a way to reduce stress as common sense. Additionally, employees and professionals seem to be convinced that PMA contribute to a better physical and mental health and well-being. Thereby, this study demonstrates empirical evidence that PMA is perceived and experienced as meaningful by employees and professionals of an educational institute. This is portrayed by the narratives from employees in the educational institute and the perspectives of professionals.

Few employees and professionals think PMA can prevent work-related stress. The causes of work-related stress still need to be addressed through communication and cooperation with students, employees and managers to be resolved. Interestingly, one of the professionals argued that PMA can create a learning environment where employees learn new skills to deal with setbacks or unforeseen circumstances. Therefore, PMA could contribute to stress prevention by developing these skills.

In addition to how PMA can be meaningful of employees who experience work-related stress, employees and professionals suggest directions to implement PMA at work. Although some employees and professionals place PMA strictly in the sphere of personal time, others are in favour of a pro-active, twofold integration of work and life. It is clear that employees of the educational institute already pro-actively integrating their work and life by working at home as working hours are flexible and extendible outside the workplace. This one-sided integration could become twofold when PMA are integrated at work. Though, there still are constraints that could impede this integration. In part 5.4 some practical recommendations are given to smoothen the integration of work and PMA.

5.4 Recommendations for further research and practise

In this section, a few practical recommendations for further research and practise are given. First of all, this study is executed as a case study. A case study is by definition the study of one case. Therefore, a logical recommendation would be to conduct further research among other cases. It is strongly suggested to use a similar methodology. International research on quantifying the effects of PMA on work-related stress has not yet shown solid conclusions. However, the value of PMA for employees who experience work-related stress can not only be measured in money or absenteeism. A narrative methodology which allows employees to share their stories can show how PMA are meaningful in a more qualitative sense, f.i. enjoy going to work, or to strengthen informal network ties.

Second, more narratives can help to create a stronger sense of urgency to take action against work-related stress in the educational sector. A shocking 49 per cent of the teaching staff reported their workloads as too high or way too high. Moreover, even those who did not report their workloads as too high or way too high, did report physical and mental complaints and a misbalance between their work and personal life. Showing the everyday experiences with work-related stress, without victimizing employees, could call for a change in how work is organized in the educational sector.

Third, if reducing work-related stress is perceived as a shared responsibility of the employer and the employee, the integration of work and PMA is desirable. It is recommended to continue the discussion on shared responsibility to reduce work-related stress in the educational sector. A shared responsibility to support employees to do their work in a good physical and mental condition will help to reduce financial and personal costs employers and employees are dealing with and thereby contribute to a healthier workplace. The discussion on a twofold integration of work and PMA should be started by the educational institute. The implementation of PMA at work could be executed in different phases. In phase one, the discussion should be started with employees and a framework of possibilities should be provided. It is advised to start phase two of the integration of work and PMA in an experimental fashion. One department could start with organised PMA by extending lunchbreaks with entry level physical or meditative exercises. Another could provide entertainment options such as table tennis in 5-minute breaks during the day. Yet another department could support a relaxation area with hammocks, relaxing chairs and mindfulness meditation. Though, as the results have shown, some employees would like to keep physical and meditative activities to themselves, therefore, it should not have an obligatory feel to it. Creating a walkway or garden for the perfect stroll could contribute to their needs. Hereby, coping with work-related stress is facilitated by the educational institute. By facilitating, supporting and stimulating a demand-driven integration of work and PMA, the educational institute can showcase their willingness to tackle the issue of work-related stress. In a third phase, the extended lunchbreak or a variation thereof could be implemented throughout the university of applied sciences. Furthermore, the value of a stress reduction program can be judged through quality-improvement and meaning for employees instead of efficiency and impressive figures. Then, the educational institute can truly value the integration and implementation of PMA at work.

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Appendix A: Open interview preparation (Dutch)

Format levensverhaal mensen die een werkstress hebben (gehad)

Voor dit onderzoek willen we graag luisteren naar medewerkers die te maken hebben (gehad) met werkstress en die hun ervaringen willen delen.

Geconfronteerd worden met werkstress heeft vaak invloed op de gezondheid, productiviteit, plezier in het werk, en kan de balans tussen werk- en privéleven verstoren. Academisch onderzoek toont aan dat meditatie, bewegen en sport goed kunnen zijn om stress te verlagen. Daarom worden meditatieve of fysieke activiteiten regelmatig ingezet om werkstress te verlagen of zelfs te voorkomen.

Coen is stagiair bij het Mulier Instituut en werkt samen met onderzoekers van het Mulier Instituut en VU Medisch Centrum. Uw deelname aan het onderzoek wordt vertrouwelijk behandeld en uw gegevens worden geanonimiseerd.

Introductie en vragen

- Taperecorder, toelichting: vertrouwelijk, alles wordt anoniem verwerkt: in verslag straks geen namen van personen, plaatsen, etc. (niet herleidbaar); geluidsband wordt na afloop van het onderzoek gewist en transcripten afgesloten bewaard), uitwerking na afloop toesturen, recorder kan uit indien gewenst, men kan gesprek afbreken.
- Het is de bedoeling dat u de ruimte voelt om uw eigen verhaal te vertellen, dus ik zal zo min mogelijk onderbreken of eigen vragen stellen.
- Stiltes laten vallen mag, neem de tijd om na te denken indien nodig.
- Inhoudelijke introductie vergelijkbaar met tekst werving. Geen definities geven of vertellen over eigen achtergrond (evt alleen dat je sociale wetenschapper bent, geen medisch onderzoeker/medicus). Komt in gesprek indien nodig aan bod, anders niet van belang. Nadruk in introductie leggen op woorden als 'verhaal' en 'vertellen'.

– **Wat zijn uw ervaringen met werkstress?**

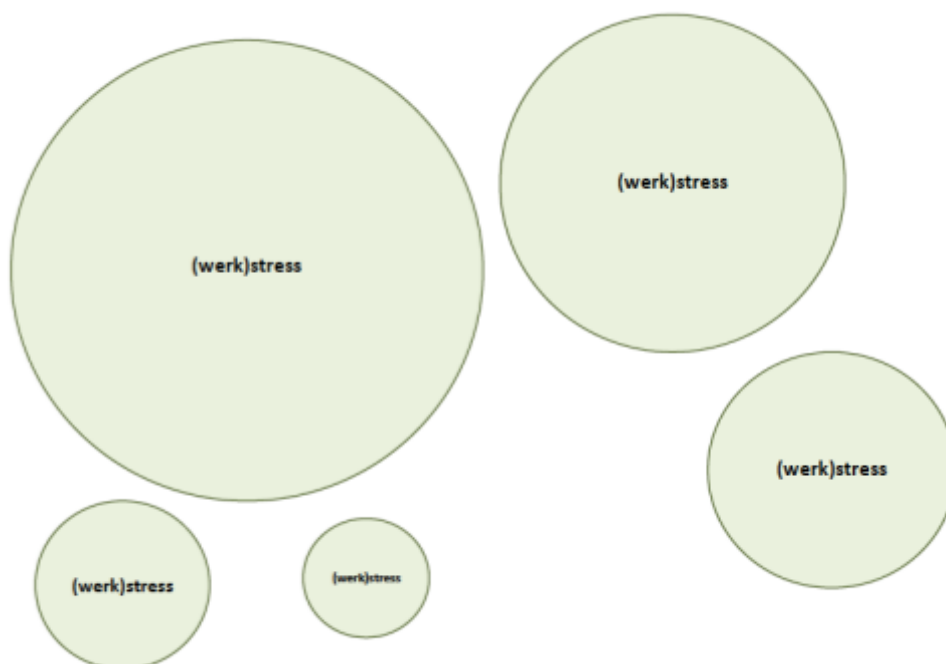
Als niet aan bod gekomen vragen om te vertellen over:

- Betekenis van bewegen, meditatie & sport in het leven algemeen
- Betekenis van bewegen, meditatie & sport in stressvolle periode(n)
- Adviezen en begeleiding bij het ervaren van werkstress door werkgever, collega's, thuis (sport, bewegen en meditatie)
- Bewegen, meditatie & sport op de werkvloer

Na het vertellen van het verhaal

Verschillende cirkels geven: grote cirkel met 'leven', verschillende formaten (5) met '(werk)stress', 'bewegen & sport', 'meditatie' en een lege cirkel. **Kunt u me vertellen hoe u deze onderwerpen in uw leven t.o.v. elkaar zou weergeven?** (groot/klein, wel/geen overlap). Biedt verteller de mogelijkheid om op een andere manier nog even op verhaal te reflecteren.

- *Perioden met meer of minder stress, hoe ziet het er dan uit?*



Figuur 5. Voorbeeld verschillende formaten cirkels

Afronding gesprek

- Achtergrondkenmerken (kunt u wat meer vertellen over uzelf en uw werkzaamheden?)
- Na afloop vragen hoe informant het gesprek ervaren heeft: hoe was het om zo te vertellen?
Wat vonden ze van cirkels? Wat was de reden om deel te nemen?

Appendix B: Topic list in-depth interviews

This is the general topic list which will be used in the interviews with professionals with occupational responsibilities to reduce work-related stress. These interviews can differ between professionals as different professionals can provide a perspective which demands a different approach. The general topic list will be adjusted before each interview.

A. Introduction

1. Can you tell me something about yourself? (labour, care, leisure)

B. PSA and employees in educational organizations

2. Can you tell me why you think PSA is most present among employees in educational organizations?
3. What kind of factors do you think are involved that make employees in education organization vulnerable to PSA?
4. Can you tell me how employees try to find solutions to their PSA?
5. What is your experience in guiding and providing support to employees who have to deal with PSA?

C. Typologies of employees with work-related stress

6. Can you tell me more about the differences between occupations within an educational organization and absenteeism?
7. Can you tell me what kind of stories you hear from employees coping with PSA?
8. Can you tell me more about how PSA impacts employees' personal lives?

D. PMA programs

9. How do you think PMA for mental health can be meaningful for employees?
10. Can you tell me what you think about PMA for mental health being ways to suppress symptoms rather than resolve the cause(s)?

E. Policy making

11. Can you tell me how choices for stress reduction or mental health are made?
12. Can you tell me what your vision is on the use of PMA to reduce work-related stress?
13. Can you tell me what you think of the integration of paid work and leisure embodied by PMA for mental health?
14. What do you think about a further integration of paid work and leisure?

F. Personal experience

15. Can you tell me about your personal experience with work-related stress?
16. Can you tell me about your involvement in sports and movement activities?
17. How do your personal experiences influence your role as professional?

Appendix C: Distel's narrative

Het verhaal van Distel

Door: Coen van Bendegom

Mei 2017

Distel is een 62-jarige docente in het HBO onderwijs. Ze vertelt hier over haar ervaringen met werkstress.

Ervaringen met werkstress

Distel herkent in het onderwijs pieken en dalen terug. Met name in de pieken ervaart Distel werkstress. Ze zegt daarover het volgende:

“Ik merk in het onderwijs dat heel erg pieken en dalen is. Dat je, je hebt bijvoorbeeld aan het begin van het trimester, dan moeten er een hele boel dingen opgestart worden, projecten moeten ingericht worden, je zit veel met de ICT, met allerlei registratiedingen. Dat geeft altijd heel veel stress.”

Distel vervolgt dat ze op haar afdeling werken met trimesters. Naast de opstart van het jaar in september ervaart Distel met name werkstress rond de kerstperiode als het eerste trimester wordt afgesloten en het tweede start. Dit herhaalt zich in het voorjaar en aan het einde van het collegejaar. Distel beschrijft in het gesprek hoe dit proces voor haar verloopt:

“Je moet soms nog tentamens nakijken en dan moet je al nadenken over de voorbereiding en je moet je lessen voorbereiden, je moet dingen op de [elektronische leeromgeving] gaan zetten. Je moet een heleboel dingen tegelijk, dan merk je wel dat het heel veel is. Dat je dan probeert om het op te vangen door bijvoorbeeld werk mee naar huis te nemen of op andere momenten, dat doe je toch al gauw. Dus privé en werk, dat gaat wel heel erg door elkaar.”

Het is Distel niet vreemd om werk mee naar huis te nemen. Dat is volgens haar in het onderwijs altijd al zo geweest. Zowel in haar vorige baan op het middelbaar onderwijs als docent Nederlands als in haar huidige baan kijkt ze vaak thuis na. Distel lijkt een groot verantwoordelijkheidsgevoel te hebben als het op haar taken aankomt. Ze geeft aan dat het wel op tijd af moet zijn. Daarbij heeft ze als voordeel dat ze een vrij rustig privé leven heeft. Haar kinderen zijn de deur uit en dat geeft veel rust. Het is soms ook een bewuste keuze om thuis te werken, omdat de werkomgeving niet altijd stimulerend is. Distel noemt het maken van een tentamen of het schrijven van een artikel als voorbeelden waarvoor ze zich moet concentreren. Dit doet ze dan liever thuis dan op haar werkplek.

“Als je bijvoorbeeld een artikel moet schrijven dan merk ik gewoon dat als ik thuis ben, dat ik dan beter achter mekaar door kan werken dan dat ik hier ben. Dan komt er altijd wel een student binnen of iets anders. Dat is de reden waarom ik ingewikkelde dingen die ik moet doen, die neem ik soms juist wel mee naar huis.”

Voor andere taken is het wel goed om op haar werkplek te zijn. Als ze problemen heeft met ICT of een Excel formulier dan is het fijn dat ze daar een collega voor kan vragen. Naast thuiswerken en collega's vragen om hulp, creëert Distel buffers om de piekbelasting op te vangen. Ze blokkeert hierbij uren in

haar agenda die ze kan gebruiken als taken uitlopen of als er iets tussen komt. Het is dan ook voor haar niet heel erg als ze haar taak niet afkrijgt in de daarvoor geplande tijd. Het inplannen van buffers doet ze op eigen initiatief en ruim voor de deadlines. Collega's onderling overleggen niet over het inplannen van buffers. Distel geeft aan dat werkstress een beleving is die voor haar heel anders kan zijn dan voor een collega. Het onderwerp werkdruk wordt wel eens besproken met het team en de manager. Recent zijn twee collega's uitgevallen met een burn-out. Ze vindt het fijn dat haar manager openstaat voor een gesprek over werkstress. Er wordt dan besproken wat er gedaan kan worden aan de werkdruk. Distel heeft ook een taak als voorzitter van een commissie voor afstudeerders. Deze taak kan voor haar ook wel eens stressvol zijn, omdat ze het samen met de andere commissieleden eens moet worden over het afstuderen van een student. Het voelt dan soms alsof ze onder druk wordt gezet, al geeft ze aan dat het waarschijnlijk niet echt zo is. Soms twijfelt Distel dan aan zichzelf:

“Ik heb het één keer of zo per jaar misschien. Dat ik wel eens denk, verdorie zeg, ik had er toch echt, echt een vijf van moeten maken en geen zes. Ik heb het niet goed gedaan. Dan ga je een beetje malen. Dan krijg je een beetje van, heb ik nou de goede beslissing genomen? Dat maakt iedereen natuurlijk wel eens mee.”

Meestal bespreekt Distel dit gevoel wel met de betrokken collega. Het leveren van kwaliteit van onderwijs is voor Distel erg belangrijk, maar er is niet altijd genoeg tijd om bijvoorbeeld de powerpoints van het jaar daarvoor te updaten. Ze zegt daarover: *“Als je te veel van kwaliteit wilt, dan kost het je ook wel heel veel tijd en energie.”* Dat lukt niet altijd, vooral doordat er veel variatie in taken is. Distel benoemt het als een voordeel dat ze veel afwisseling heeft. De keerzijde daarvan is dat ze niet altijd de diepte in kan gaan. Dat schakelen tussen taken levert soms ook stress op. Gelukkig kan Distel meestal goed relativeren, soms is goed goed genoeg. Heel af en toe resulteert stress ook in fysieke klachten. Het komt niet vaak voor maar Distel heeft hartkloppingen ervaren.

“Soms kan het wel zo erg zijn dat je zelfs fysieke klachten kan krijgen hoor. Dat heb ik ook weleens. Dat komt niet zo veel voor, dan krijg je hartkloppingen of zo, dan denk je jeetje, ook dat nog en dan hollen van a naar b. Dat is ook niet fijn.”

Omgaan met werkstress

In de loop der jaren heeft Distel geleerd dat de drukke perioden tijdelijk zijn. Het helpt dan om te rationaliseren en te relativeren, ze weet dat de drukte niet eeuwig is. In dat geval is Distel meer passief in het zoeken naar ontspanning. Ze ploft dan op de bank neer en kijkt naar een film. In de weekenden gaat Distel wel vaak wandelen, de frisse lucht en het bewegen helpen dan om te ontspannen. Op de vraag hoe ze omgaat met stress antwoordt ze:

“Ik weet gelukkig dat als ik nu zo'n periode heb, dan ben je super druk, maar dat is meestal zo'n periode van drie weken. Dat is de afronding van het trimester en de start van de volgende. Dan komen de studenten met vragen, je moet groepen maken en je moet dit en je moet van alles. Dan weet ik ook wel, dan ga je het rationaliseren, na drie weken houdt het op. Het is niet eeuwig natuurlijk. Dat helpt dan alweer wat... Ik weet ook wel dat ik moet sporten en zo, maar soms ben ik te gestrest om te sporten. Dan voel ik me.. dan moet ik eerst weer afkicken voordat ik ga, dan ben ik eigenlijk te moe, dat is ook lastig.”

Vroeger heeft Distel veel aan yoga gedaan. Dat was fysiek best zwaar. De les werd afgesloten met meditatieve ontspanningsoefeningen. Dat vond ze een bijzondere ervaring.

“Dat was dan de afsluiting van de yogales. Dan was je met ongeveer tien mensen en dan moest je een matje pakken en dan kreeg je een deken over je heen en dan werd het licht gedimd. Kaarsen gingen aan en wierook en muziek en dan ging die yogalerares die ging dan... Eigenlijk bewust worden van dat je je spieren moest ontspannen en zo. Laten hangen, zo van laat vallen en dan zo langzamerhand dan kom je in een soort trance.”

Distel is echter gestopt met yoga, omdat het tussen zes en zeven in de avond was. Ze moest erg haasten om dat te halen vanuit haar werk. Het is voor haar heel moeilijk om het goede moment te vinden voor sport of meditatie. In een drukke periode kan het moeilijk zijn om met sport bezig te zijn. Distel geeft aan dat ze graag meer zou gaan sporten. Dat kan bijvoorbeeld bij een nabij gelegen sportschool, maar ze vindt dat ze dan wel drie keer per week moet gaan. Het sporten kan haar helpen om even met heel andere dingen bezig te zijn, de focus op het fysieke. Echter zou ze het sporten vooral willen oppakken voor de fysieke gezondheid. Het zou haar kunnen helpen om mogelijkheden te creëren voor sport op de werkvloer. Dit zou haar meer stimulans geven om te gaan sporten.

“Dat zou ik geloof ik wel leuk vinden. Dat zou ik wel veel fijner vinden. Mijn dochter vertelt dat waar zij werkt, daar hebben ze van die bootcamps buiten. Aan het eind van de dag, niet verplicht, dan gaan ze om half vijf of zo, of om vijf uur. Dan gaan ze met z'n allen naar buiten en allerlei oefeningetjes doen, met een coach, die wordt door het bedrijf ingehuurd hè. Zo voor de mensen die daar zin in hebben, een beetje echt, eh, het was heel uitputtend, zei ze. Nee, maar als hier een fitnessruimte zou zijn dan zou ik daar, dan zou ik daar nog meer stimulans van krijgen.”

Distel voegt toe dat dit niet alleen fitness hoeft te zijn, maar ook yoga zou goed kunnen. Ze heeft niet het idee dat sport op de werkvloer op het netvlies van de organisatie staat. Ze weet niet of de organisatie daar mee bezig is. Er is wel een infrastructurele ontwikkeling op komst, maar het is haar niet bekend of daar sportfaciliteiten voor docenten bij komen.

Cirkels

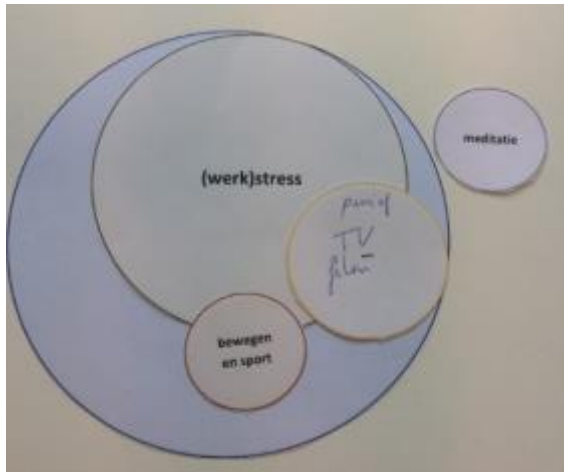
Op mijn vraag of Distel met behulp van cirkels kan weergeven hoe een aantal elementen zich in een stressvolle periode tot elkaar verhouden, geeft ze aan dat ze het moeilijk vindt om dit weer te geven. Distel geeft met de cirkels aan dat werkstress in drukke periodes best veel invloed kan hebben op haar leven. Haar ontspanning bestaat dan vooral uit op de bank ploffen en het kijken naar tv, een film of een serie. Ze zegt daarbij over sporten het volgende:

“Het zou goed zijn om misschien wel te sporten, omdat je dan ook niet zo veel zou nadenken.”

In het weekend probeert ze dan nog wel te wandelen. Nadat ze is gestopt met yoga doet ze op dit moment niets met meditatie.

“Meditatie, daar doe ik veel te weinig aan. Ik zit nou niet zo erg op dat vlak. Dat zou wel moeten, dus dat zou dan ook de kleinste moeten zijn.”

In een minder stressvolle periode geven de cirkels een heel andere verdeling weer. Distel geeft aan dat ze nooit helemaal zonder stress zit, er zijn altijd wel dingetjes. Als ze minder stress heeft is er tijd voor activiteiten waar je een leeg hoofd voor nodig hebt zoals lezen, theater of het museum. Er is ook meer ruimte voor sport en bewegen.



Appendix D: Inge's narrative

“Ik wilde gewoon op mijn hoofd kunnen staan”

Het verhaal van Inge

Periode: Mei 2017

Onderzoeker: Coen van Bendegom

Inge is een medewerker van de ondersteunende diensten bij een HBO-instelling in Nederland. Inge heeft voorheen zelf voor de klas gestaan, ik spreek met haar over werkstress.

Ervaringen met werkstress

In het gesprek met Inge komt direct naar voren dat ze veel meer werkstress ervaarde toen ze nog voor de klas stond. Ze zegt daarover het volgende:

“Nou, wat ik wel zelf heb ervaren is, voorheen werkte ik in het onderwijs, nu zit ik bij de ondersteunende diensten. Ik vond de stress in het onderwijs wel veel hoger dan nu. Want, ja, morgen is er een hoorcollege bijvoorbeeld. Vooral voor hoorcolleges. Daar zitten honderd man en dan om honderd man te kunnen entertainen moet je wel wat weten te brengen. Vooral als je vakken hebt waar geen boeken en verdere ondersteund materiaal voor is, vond ik dat wel, een stresspiek.”

Inge geeft daarbij aan dat de voorbereiding voor hoorcolleges onder tijdsdruk staat. Het kostte haar veel tijd om de inhoud bij elkaar te verzamelen. Hierdoor kreeg ze het gevoel dat ze op didactisch vlak niet de finishing touch kon toevoegen. Het voelde dan voor Inge alsof ze niet helemaal klaar was voor het college en dat gaf onrust. In haar huidige functie kan Inge veel meer schuiven met haar taken. Dit zorgt ervoor dat ze nu weinig tot geen stress ervaart. In het onderwijs is er volgens haar veel veranderd. Inge geeft aan dat het onderwijs in de loop der jaren in een veel vaster stramien is gekomen, met name door de groei van de onderwijsinstelling. Ze geeft daarbij aan dat de deadlines veel minder flexibel zijn dan voorheen, bijvoorbeeld met het aanleveren van tentamens. Inge geeft als voorbeeld dat tentamens veel vroeger moeten worden aangeleverd. Soms is dan nog niet alle stof behandeld. Als Inge gevraagd wordt hoe ze om ging met die stress vindt ze het moeilijk om de vraag te beantwoorden. Ze probeert haar gevoel te omschrijven met een metafoor:

“Poe, dat is lastig. Het voelt een beetje alsof je zit in een bootje en je kan er niet meer uit haha. Ja, wat kun je doen... Het is niet dat je zoiets hebt van... ja, hoe moet ik dat zeggen. Dat vind ik een lastige vraag. Je probeert gewoon alle zeilen bij te zetten, je hebt toch een bepaald ambitieniveau. Dat probeer je op alle manieren waar te maken. Ik denk zelf dat je niet het vermogen hebt om dat ambitieniveau bij te stellen. Ik denk dat als je dat beter zou kunnen, en ik kon dat niet zo goed, dat je het jezelf dan makkelijker maakt. Dus de combinatie van een hoog ambitieniveau blijven nastreven en in tijdnood komen was natuurlijk, ja, funest.”

Inge had in haar functie niet de mogelijkheid om collega's in te schakelen als back-up. Wanneer ze bij het management aanklopte dat ze stress ervaarde in haar werk werd ze wel gehoord maar niet geholpen. Ze kreeg dan tips die ze als een open deur zag, zoals het verlagen van haar ambitieniveau. Inge wist dat het wel klopte, maar het hielp haar niet om haar stress te verminderen. Inge heeft er

bewust voor gekozen om van fulltime naar 80% te gaan. Dit hielp echter niet altijd met het verlagen van werkstress. Zeker niet toen ze merkte dat ze op 80% meer deed dan sommige collega's op fulltime basis. Ze heeft er toen ook nog over getwijfeld om naar 60% te gaan, maar dat heeft ze niet doorgezet.

“Het blijft toch hetzelfde, ik schiet er weinig mee op. Ik denk dat dat wel kenmerkend is voor dit soort werk. Die werkdruk, de correlatie tussen aanstelling en werkdruk... dat die niet helemaal klopt. (...) De mentale belasting zal niet navenant afnemen denk ik. Vooral als je ambitieus bent en je hoge eisen aan jezelf stelt. Dat heb je bij ieder werk natuurlijk, maar, ja. Je wordt ook behoorlijk afgestraft als je het niet kunt hier. “

Met het afstraffen doelt Inge op de directe feedback die volgens haar inherent is aan het onderwijs. Als de les niet loopt dan merkt de groep dat, maar de docent ook. Inge geeft aan dat het frustrerend is wanneer je er als docent veel energie in stopt en er maar weinig uit haalt. Dat is best lastig om mee om te gaan.

Omgaan met werkstress

Naast haar baan bij de onderwijsinstelling heeft Inge veel hobby's en privétaken. Dit heeft voor haar voor de nodige afleiding gezorgd. Zo heeft Inge ruim tien jaar mantelzorg verleent, een kokopleiding gevolgd en werkt ze graag in de tuin. Soms kreeg ze dan een 'awareness'-momentje, een moment waarop ze realiseerde dat ze niet dacht aan haar werk. Dit was voor haar een positief gevoel. Naast haar privétaken en hobby's heeft Inge een tijdje intensief aan yoga gedaan. Haar yoga docent had haar de tip gegeven om heel veel dingen te proberen, want *“mediteren moet je leren”*. Dat heeft Inge er toe gezet om verschillende vormen te proberen en ook weer gemakkelijk afscheid te nemen wanneer ze het niets vond. Ze kwam erachter dat ze het zweverige niets vond en dat het moeilijk was om een goede te treffen. Uiteindelijk bleek dat yoga het beste bij haar paste. Echter realiseerde ze zich dat ze ook daar wilde presteren:

“Ik wil gewoon op mijn hoofd kunnen staan. Als dat niet lukte dan ging ik daar ook van balen.”

Toen Inge verhuisde, moest ze een half uur rijden om naar yoga te kunnen gaan. Daarnaast besepte ze dat het niet goed voelde om de controle in andermans handen te leggen en zich te laten leiden. Inge heeft naar eigen zeggen een hekel aan sport, maar probeert voldoende te bewegen door het werken in de tuin en door te fietsen. Ze heeft een elektrische fiets gekocht waar ze regelmatig gebruik van maakt. Ze fiets graag voor haar beweging, maar ook ter ontspanning.

“Kijk, ik heb een hekel aan sport, altijd al gehad, ik heb niks met sport. Dus ik zal ook nooit gaan hardlopen. Dan heb ik liever zoiets van dan ga ik in de tuin werken en dan heb ik ook mijn beweging en is het nog nuttig ook. Het moet wel allemaal nuttig zijn, niet zinloos hier drie keer de [naam] te gaan hollen. Dat is echt mijn ding niet. Ik heb toen wel besloten, ik ga een elektrische fiets kopen. Het is 33 of 34 kilometer binnendoor. Als ik rij (met de auto) dan doe ik er drie kwartier tot een uur over, want dat is langer, maar als ik fiets is het anderhalf uur. Misschien vijf of tien minuten korter als het heel erg mee zit, maar ik reken anderhalf uur. Nu maak ik dan wel bewust die keuze, afgelopen week even niet, maar oké, ik ga vandaag

fietsen. Dat kost me twee keer drie kwartier extra, maar het is mijn keuze en ik fiets dan een stukje door het bos en dat is allemaal prima.”

Inge ziet het niet zo zitten om iets met sport, bewegen of meditatie te doen op de werkvloer. Ze geeft aan dat ze ook niet graag in dezelfde stad zou willen wonen en werken. Ze vindt haar privéleven ook belangrijk. Ze zou het wel goed vinden als de onderwijsinstelling meer sport, bewegen of meditatie zou stimuleren, nu zijn er alleen mogelijkheden bij de lokale sportschool.

Cirkels

Aan het eind van het gesprek blikken we terug op een stressvolle en minder stressvolle periode die worden weergegeven met cirkels van verschillende groottes. Inge beschrijft in een stressvolle periode dat haar thuishaken en hobby's leiden onder de stress. Daarnaast legt ze wat meer uit over haar mantelzorg die constant door liep en waar ze behoorlijk alleen voor stond.

“Als je dan gestrest bent, dat voelt die ander ook weer. Dat loopt dan ook weer niet optimaal. Dan denk je van, ik moet eigenlijk nog boodschappen doen, dus ik moet eigenlijk zien dat ik hier over een uur of anderhalf uur weg ben. Terwijl je ook wel de tijd wilt nemen om te zorgen. Dan heeft die ander op het moment dat je weg wilt, dan willen ze nog van alles. Dan denk je, was daar nou eerder mee gekomen. Als je relaxter bent dan is dat allemaal minder een probleem.”



Figuur 1. Stressvolle periode



Figuur 2. Minder stressvolle periode

In een minder stressvolle periode heeft Inge meer tijd voor haar huishouden wat ze erg fijn vindt. Een opgeruimd huis is goed voor haar algemeen welbevinden. Op dit moment doet Inge niets meer met meditatie of yoga, terwijl ze er wel van overtuigd is dat het kan helpen. Haar partner heeft zich wel meer verdiept in meditatie, wat ze helemaal niet had verwacht.

“Mijn partner, dat is een ICT'er, dus dat is een licht autistische haha, maar die werkt voor een Indiaas bedrijf, dus nu heeft ie de bakra huppelepup gelezen en hij is er helemaal weg van. Wat ik wil zeggen, iemand waar ik het nooit van verwacht had, die helemaal, nou niet helemaal, maar heel veel dingen oppakt van dat boeddhisme en dat soort dingen.”

Appendix E: Ivy's narrative

“Als je het goed gepland hebt, dan zorg je dat je niet meer hoeft te plannen in die periode dat je geen tijd hebt om te plannen.”

Het verhaal van Ivy

Juni 2017

Onderzoeker: Coen van Bendegom

Ivy is een 47-jarige docente in het HBO onderwijs. Ze geeft les en is coördinator van een leerbedrijf. Ivy woont alleen en hoeft geen gezin draaiende te houden. Ik spreek met haar over haar ervaringen met werkstress.

Ervaringen met werkstress

Ivy herkent in het onderwijs een golfbeweging. Er zijn perioden waarin ze het heel druk heeft en er zijn perioden waar het veel rustiger is. Ivy probeert in drukke tijden te relativiseren, ze weet, er komt ook weer een periode waar ze drie dagen in de week eerder naar huis kan.

“Ik heb ook wel eens periodes dat ik het enorm druk heb, dat ik echt denk, als ik zo mijn leven zou moeten invullen dan kap ik er mee. Nou dan kap ik niet met het leven haha, maar dan zou ik dat niet prettig vinden. Je weet ook altijd, er komt een periode dat het weer wat rustiger wordt. Als je het dan een maand vreselijk druk hebt, dat is dan maar zo. Zo probeer ik daar mee om te gaan.”

Die pieken leveren wel eens stress op voor Ivy, maar ze geeft aan dat ze over algemeen weinig werkstress ervaart. Ze vindt het belangrijk om te kijken wie er verantwoordelijk is voor welke taak. Als de oorzaak van de stress niet binnen haar verantwoordelijkheden valt, dan kan Ivy de stress redelijk makkelijk van zich af zetten. Daarnaast geeft Ivy aan dat ze een goede planner is. Ze denkt dat een belangrijk deel van de ervaren werkstress voorkomen kan worden door goed te plannen.

“Als je het goed gepland hebt, dan zorg je dat je niet meer hoeft te plannen in die periode dat je geen tijd hebt om te plannen. Dat klinkt heel simpel, maar zo doe ik het wel.”

Ivy geeft aan dat ze goed weet wat ze door het jaar heen kan verwachten. Dat is een belangrijk onderdeel van het plannen. Op dit moment is er een vernieuwing van het curriculum gaande. Ivy vertelt dat er dan meer last minute geregeld moet worden. Ze is dan vaker op het laatste moment nog afhankelijk van anderen en daar kan ze wel onrustig van worden. Toch lijkt Ivy ook hierin goed te kunnen relativiseren:

“Dat is ook wel een deel wat je moet accepteren denk ik, want niet iedereen werkt op dezelfde manier als jij. Ik ben niet van de last minute. Maar ja, dat is soms wel eens zo. Dat kan dan wel eens wat druk opleveren, niet dat ik daar zwaar onder leid. Ik weet van mezelf dat als het moet, dan werk ik een hele nacht door, zodat ik daar wel goed beslagen ten ijs kom. Ik zal nooit halve bak aan één of andere les beginnen, dan ga ik wel stress krijgen.”

Ivy werkt in drukke perioden ook 's avonds en in de weekenden. Zo staat ze in nauw contact met de studenten van het leerbedrijf. Dat hoort bij haar baan en bij het werkveld waar ze de studenten op voorbereidt. Daar kun je volgens Ivy niet zeggen; morgen om 9 uur ben je de eerste.

“Ik verwacht ook dat ze zo flexibel zijn dat ze het oppakken als er iets urgents is, dat doe ik zelf ook. Als in het weekend een van de studenten appt, van ja, ik zit hier en hier mee, dan bel ik ze ook gewoon op. Dat maakt me niet zoveel uit. Dus, ik ben ook wel iemand die altijd de hele tijd z'n mail checkt en zo. Dat zou ik misschien anders moeten doen, om daar wat afstand van te kunnen nemen, maar ik heb er niet echt last van.”

Omgaan met werkstress

Ivy geeft aan dat ze op vakantie gaan erg belangrijk vindt om te ontspannen en om op te laden. Ze gaat eigenlijk iedere vakantie wel weg. Dat zijn voornamelijk relax-vakanties. Toch heeft ze op vakantie ook nog wel eens contact met haar werk.

“De vakanties dan laad ik echt op. Hoewel het leerbedrijf dan gewoon open is, dus ook dan de appjes door gaan. Maar ja, dat proberen we wel een beetje te reguleren. Want je vermeld studenten natuurlijk wel, dat als je altijd maar acuut antwoord op een vraag, dan komen er soms ook in vakantie vragen waarvan ik denk, dat is totaál niet urgent. Dat kan ook volgende week maandag.”

Ivy probeert wel met haar collega af te spreken dat ze niet altijd bereikbaar hoeft te zijn voor het leerbedrijf. Ze heeft goed contact met collega's en haar manager, als het niet lekker loopt kan ze daar goed over praten. Ivy schuwt het ook niet om collega's aan te spreken op hun verantwoordelijkheden, wat wel eens tot een conflictsituatie kan leiden. Ze zegt daarover het volgende:

“Ik zie dat als een zakelijk iets. Ja, weet je, het maakt me niet uit, dat klinkt een beetje ijskoningin-achtig. Natuurlijk, ik baal er wel van als iets niet loopt, dat is gewoon niet prettig werken. Dat is alleen maar negatieve energie, maar het maakt mij niet uit om tegen iemand te zeggen, joh, jij komt je afspraken niet na, wat is dat? Wanneer ga je het wel doen? Eh, ja, dat zeg ik wel. Maar, dat is maar incidenteel. Over het algemeen werk ik wel prettig samen met mensen, tenminste zo ervaar ik dat.”

Buiten de vakanties ontspant Ivy ook door te sporten, te lezen, de stad in te gaan en af te spreken met vrienden. Ivy sport niet meer zoveel als ze heeft gedaan. Ze geeft aan dat ze een spelsporter is, hockey was echt haar sport, maar door een blessure lukt dat niet meer. Ivy vindt dat ze fysiek actief moet blijven en is daarom gaan hardlopen.

“Ik, eh, sport niet meer zo heel veel als dat ik heb gedaan. Maar ik loop nog een beetje hard af en toe. Daar vind ik geen fluit aan... daar vind ik geen fluit aan, dus dat kost me heel veel moeite om me daarvoor te motiveren, omdat ik er gewoon écht niks aan vind. Je moet iets hè, want anders groei je dicht. Dus ik probeer twee keer in de week hard te lopen. (...) Maar als ik morgen weer zou kunnen hockeyen dan zou ik me meteen weer gaan aanmelden en drie keer in de week hockeyen.”

Ivy vertelt dat ze tijdens het hardlopen niet aan haar werk denkt. Ondanks dat ze het hardlopen niet leuk vindt probeert ze streng voor zichzelf te zijn en twee keer per week te gaan.

“Het enige waar ik aan denk tijdens het hardlopen is; hoe lang moet ik nog? Dus dat betekent tegelijkertijd ook dat ik niet aan het werk denk. Dat is wel goed haha.”

Daarnaast heeft Ivy een tijdje geleden een app gebruikt om in slaap te komen, Headspace. Dit is was een soort mindfulness app, waarbij het eigenlijk niet de bedoeling was om in slaap te vallen, maar dit is wel waar Ivy het voor gebruikte. Ivy heeft samen met een vriendin wel eens een proefles yoga gedaan, maar daar heeft ze alleen maar om moeten lachen.

“Ik weet niet of dat iets voor mij is of zou zijn, mediteren. Ik denk wel dat het goed zou zijn, vooral in periodes dat mijn hoofd ontploft omdat ik veel aan het werken ben. Ik weet niet. (...) Ik sta er een beetje, eh, puberaal tegenover eigenlijk. Het hangt er vanaf hoe zweverig, ik ben gewoon anti-zweef.”

Ivy denkt dat als meditatie niet zweverig is, dat het dan wel iets voor haar zou kunnen zijn. Toch heeft ze het idee dat ontspanning door inspanning beter bij haar zou passen.

“Ik denk dat het heel goed is als je jezelf zo kunt beheersen en je gedachten kunt reguleren. Je gedachten aan werk bijvoorbeeld of andere stressoren. Dat je die door middel van meditatie in ieder geval tijdelijk kunt elimineren. Ik denk dat dat wel heel goed is als je dat kunt. Of ik daar de geschikte figuur voor ben, dat weet ik niet. Ik denk dat ik dan meer los zou kunnen komen van stresserende gedachten door een enorme fysieke inspanning. Dan wel fysiek met iets wat ik leuk vind.”

Sport op de werkvloer ziet Ivy op zich wel als iets positiefs, maar ze heeft toch haar twijfels of ze dat zou doen. Het zou haar kunnen motiveren om met collega's te sporten, maar sporten tussen studenten ziet ze zichzelf niet zo snel doen.

“Dan denk ik, oh leuk! Makkelijker, misschien dat je dan met collega's gaat. Dat motiverende, dat je dan dat meer krijgt als je dat met collega's doet. Aan de andere kant denk ik, ik zie mezelf hier niet tussen die duizenden studenten die hier rondlopen zo eens even tussendoor een uurtje hardlopen op de campus. Dat zie ik mezelf niet doen.”

Ivy geeft aan dat ze het ook belangrijk vindt om de vrijheid te hebben om zelf te beslissen wanneer ze gaat sporten. Toch staat ze niet negatief tegenover sport met collega's. Zo heeft ze zelf tijdens een uitje ervaren dat sport de samenwerking met collega's kan bevorderen. Dit was dan wel incidenteel en buiten de werksetting.

Cirkels

Aan het eind van het gesprek blikken we terug met behulp van de cirkels. Ivy vindt het lastig om het visueel te maken, maar gaat tijdens het neerleggen van de cirkels nog wat dieper in op wat eerder besproken is. Zo geeft ze aan dat ze in een drukke periode wat minder doet met sport en bewegen. Haar vakanties blijven heel belangrijk, of ze het nu druk heeft of niet. Ze geeft daarbij aan wat vakantie voor haar betekent:

“Dan moet ik wel even zeggen wat ik zie als vakantie: relaxen, lezen, niks doen, dat is voor mij vakantie. Niet allemaal moeilijk met een rugzak ergens doorheen gaan lopen.”

Daarnaast geeft Ivy aan dat in een drukkere periode als eerste het afspreken met vrienden wegvalt.

“Als ik het veel te druk heb dan heb ik ook geen zin om 's avonds nog, eh, dan wil ik gewoon naar huis en niks doen. Gewoon zitten of, nou ja, ik doe eigenlijk nooit niks, eh, dat is het grappige, op vakantie doe ik heel veel niks. Dan doe ik eigenlijk echt niks, maar thuis doe ik bijna nooit niks. Omdat ik een soort neurotische neiging heb om, eh, haha, om steeds iets nuttigs te doen.”

In rustigere tijden spreekt Ivy meer af met vrienden, doet ze klusjes of huishoudelijke taken.

“Het komt zelden dat ik een avond, in een periode dat ik het niet druk heb, dat ik lekker zit te zitten. Dat kan ook niet, daar heb ik de rust niet voor. Ik ben best wel een bezig type.”



Figuur 1. Drukkere periode



Figuur 2. Rustigere periode

Appendix F: Léon's narrative

Het verhaal van Léon

Mei 2017

Door: Coen van Bendegom

Léon is een docent in het HBO onderwijs. Hij geeft met name les in financieel economische vakken. Léon vertelt over zijn ervaringen met werkstress.

Ervaring met werkstress

In het gesprek geeft Léon aan dat hij met name afgelopen academisch jaar te maken heeft gehad met werkstress. Door de roostering en zijn takenpakket heeft hij het erg druk in het eerste blok, in september, en in het laatste blok. Hij zegt daarover het volgende:

“Druk blok, heel erg druk, verschillende vakken, nieuwe studenten. We zijn ook bezig met de ontwikkeling binnen de [naam opleiding]. Die wijziging, de vakken zijn nieuw, een nieuwe structuur. Dan moet ik ook heel veel doen qua voorbereiding. Dat kost heel veel energie, want alles is nieuw bijna. Daardoor kom je wel onder stress. Het viel mee, ik bedoel, ik kon gewoon, maar ik voelde het relatief gezien, in vergelijking met al die jaren, wel als druk.”

Léon geeft hier aan dat hij meer dan in andere jaren druk ervaarde. Dit is met name toe te schrijven aan een onderwijsvernieuwing van de opleiding waar Léon werkt. Daarnaast benoemt hij ook dat de vakken die hij geeft niet zo geliefd zijn bij studenten. Studenten vinden financiële en economische vakken vaak moeilijk en daardoor kost het Léon veel energie om studenten te motiveren en te betrekken. Hij geeft aan dat de docenten van die vakken in zijn beleving onder meer stress komen te staan. Daarnaast kan de omgang met de studenten voor stress zorgen. Léon benoemt dat de verwachtingen tussen de docent en student soms scheef zijn. Studenten die de les verstoren door te laat te zijn of vroegtijdig te vertrekken zijn daar een voorbeeld van.

“De studenten... zij denken.. Ik bedoel, dat kost ons ook energie, snap je wat ik bedoel? Ik wil alleen maar lekker met mijn les bezig zijn, maar dat... dat zorgt ook voor een beetje stress.”

“Kijk, als de les begint om tien uur bijvoorbeeld, dan moet je er om tien uur zijn. Vijf over tien, oké, maar niet tien over, dat is gewoon, dat gaat om het principe. Maar de student zegt dan dat je geen goede docent bent. Of ja, dan ben je gewoon iemand die heel streng is, terwijl jij gewoon de regels gaat uitleggen. Voor mij zorgen dat soort dingen voor stress.”

Léon legt daarbij wel uit dat het met name om eerstejaars studenten gaat. Hij geeft aan dat hij snapt dat studenten moeten wennen als ze van de middelbare school komen en dat het later vaak wel goed komt. Léon geeft ook aan dat hij niet zo snel met zijn manager praat over werkstress. Hij komt uit een cultuur waar je niet zo snel gaat klagen, maar het zelf probeert op te lossen. Met collega's kan hij beter praten over stress en hij ziet ook dat andere collega's werkstress ervaren. Er zijn een paar collega's die hij kent die een burn-out hebben (gehad).

“Ik voel het vooral met de veranderingen binnen [naam opleiding] dat ze het druk hebben. Heel erg druk, stress, druk, kijk in mijn beleving is druk en stress anders. Het kan zijn dat je heel weinig hebt, maar heel hoge stress met dat. Stress is vooral de laatste jaren bij ons, met die veranderingen.”

Volgens Léon luistert het management wel naar collega's met werkstress, maar wordt er niet heel veel aan gedaan. Hij geeft aan dat het misschien komt omdat het management de middelen niet heeft.

“Die stress, het wordt wel gezien, maar kijk, vaak raak je onder stress, niet omdat het te veel is, maar omdat je ook soms zorgen maakt over de kwaliteit is mijn gevoel soms. De veranderingen, ik denk dan, het kan beter. Het management ziet dat niet. Dat zorgt voor een beetje spanning.”

Léon heeft wel besproken met zijn manager dat hij wat minder moeilijke vakken gaat geven. Hij beheerst de inhoud zelf goed, maar de verwachtingen en het contact met de studenten zorgt soms voor stress. Daarom probeert Léon ook andere dingen te doen naast het lesgeven. Hij wil graag variëteit en gaat bijvoorbeeld meer doen met onderzoek en is lid van de medezeggenschapsraad.

Omgaan met werkstress

Als Léon wordt gevraagd naar wat hij doet om zijn werkstress te verminderen benoemt hij sport. Hij vindt zichzelf een beetje lui, hij neemt eigenlijk altijd de auto. Toch gaat hij meestal twee keer per week naar de fitness. Daarnaast speelt hij in het weekend volleybal. Hij vindt het soms wel moeilijk om de tijd te vinden voor het sporten.

“Elke zaterdag ga ik wel naar sporten, maar doordeweeks bijvoorbeeld, als ik tijd heb ga ik wel, anders niet. En elke zondag volleyballen. Daar kijk ik altijd naar uit. Ik bedoel, dat is ook om stress een beetje te verminderen. Dat is mijn perceptie. Dat het helpt. Of dat echt helpt, daar heb ik niet, hoe noem je dat, dat heb ik niet gemeten. Voor mijn gevoel werkt het.”

Op de vraag hoe het komt dat zijn sportactiviteiten afhankelijk zijn van tijd geeft Léon aan dat hij veel werk mee naar huis neemt. Léon werkt niet van negen tot vijf en kan flexibel- en thuiswerken. Eigenlijk is hij alleen op zijn werkplek als hij afspraken of lessen heeft, de rest doet hij met name thuis om zich beter te kunnen concentreren.

Als we het hebben over sporten op de werkvloer geeft Léon aan dat hij voorheen met collega's naar een sportschool en de volleybal ging. Dat werd eerst vergoed door de HBO instelling, maar later niet meer. Toen zijn Léon en zijn collega's gestopt. Toch sport Léon nu ook met een collega, maar sport op de werkvloer ziet Léon niet zo zitten.

“Nu sport ik ook met een collega. Als ik alleen was dan weet ik zeker dat ik na een maand stop. Ook omdat er iemand anders is dan ga ik. Hier op [naam HBO-instelling], ik zou liever... ergens anders willen dan hier samen met collega's. Wel met bepaalde collega's, maar niet dat als ik sport dat ik alle collega's zie.”

Léon geeft wel aan dat hij het fijn zou vinden als zijn HBO instelling meer zou ondersteunen bij sport en bewegen. Volgens hem deed de instelling dat voorheen wel, maar nu niet meer. Buiten het sporten gaat Léon leuke dingen doen met zijn vrouw en vier kinderen. Zijn vrouw is huisvrouw en zijn kinderen

zijn al wat ouder. Als we de cirkels erbij pakken om op een andere manier naar het verhaal te kijken komt ook naar voren dat Léon zijn gezin erg belangrijk vindt. Zij helpen hem ook om even niet aan werk te denken of juist te praten over stress. Niet alleen zelf sporten, maar ook sport kijken zorgt voor ontspanning en het verminderen van stress. Daarnaast vindt hij sociale contacten belangrijk en spreekt hij graag af met vrienden om te ontspannen. Dit blijft hetzelfde en net zo belangrijk in een periode met meer of minder werkstress. Er verandert met name iets in de tijd die hij heeft voor zijn hobby's en sport. Toch wil Léon liever eerst zijn werk af hebben en dan pas ontspannen.



Figuur 1. Cirkels met ten opzichte van elkaar in een drukke, stressvolle periode

Gedurende het gesprek met Léon over de cirkels komen we terug op de drukke periode die hij in september ervaarde.

“Ja die september periode was heel druk, zo druk, dat ik zelf ook bijna een burn out kreeg. Bijna zeg ik. Het ging goed, maar toch, te druk.”



Figuur 2. Cirkels ten opzichte van elkaar in een rustigere periode.

Appendix G: Anna's narrative

“Er is eigenlijk niemand die je helpt grenzen te bewaken”

Het verhaal van Anna

Periode: Mei 2017

Onderzoeker: Coen van Bendegom

Anna is docente en studiebegeleider in het hoger onderwijs. Voorheen werkte ze in de horeca, maar inmiddels meer dan 10 jaar in het HBO. Ze vertelt hier over haar ervaring met werkstress.

Ervaringen met werkstress

Anna geeft aan dat ze een ander soort werkstress ervaart in het onderwijs dan in de horeca. Daar heeft ze mee om moeten leren gaan. Anna heeft een burn-out gehad toen ze nog maar kort bij de HBO-instelling werkte. Ze zegt hierover het volgende:

“In de horeca heb je veel stress op het werk, maar dat is meer omdat je werkt onder een grote tijdsdruk. In een korte tijd moeten er heel veel prestaties geleverd worden. Bij [naam onderwijsinstelling] is het een ander soort werkstress. Dat is meer omdat er eigenlijk niemand is die je helpt grenzen te bewaken. Dat is iets wat je moet leren. Ik heb dat zeg maar wel de harde weg geleerd. Ik heb na twee jaar bij [naam onderwijsinstelling] een burn-out gehad.”

Ze vervolgt met een lach dat ze ook wel in een risicogroep zat; jonge vrouw, jong gezin en fulltime baan. Na haar burn-out heeft ze het ‘Hollandse model’ geprobeerd, drie dagen werken. Dit is volgens Anna wat vaak wordt verwacht en zelfs wordt opgelegd als je een gezin start, door zowel de omgeving als de werkgever.

“Dat vind ik heel raar. Dat vragen ze nooit aan een man. Doordat je op een bepaald niveau gewend bent te werken en dan ga je parttime werken, dan wil je eigenlijk toch hetzelfde blijven doen, maar dat doe je dan in drie dagen. Er is dan ook niemand die zegt van, dat hoeft helemaal niet, want je werkt nu maar drie dagen, dus je hoeft ook minder te doen. Want vanuit de werkgever gezien is het natuurlijk wel heel makkelijk. Als je al je werk wat je eerst deed in vijf dagen, dat je dat in drie dagen gaat doen.”

Het valt Anna op dat vrouwen in haar omgeving die wel drie dagen werken eigenlijk heel de week met hun werk bezig zijn. Anna geeft aan dat zij werkt op haar werk en niet of nauwelijks thuis. Ze heeft door haar burn-out en de intensieve therapie die daarop volgde geleerd om haar grenzen aan te geven. Wat ook heeft geholpen is dat ze zag dat het werk door ging, of ze er nu wel of niet was. Daardoor kan ze nu beter relativieren.

“Dat is denk ik wel de grootste les geweest. Dat wil niet zeggen dat ik nu nooit werkstress heb. Alleen laat ik het, zal ik het nooit meer zo ver laten komen. Dat je zelf helemaal omvalt.”

Ondanks dat ze zichzelf ten tijde van de burn-out onder een risicogroep schaarde werd daar niet op geanticipeerd door het management. In het traject daarna is ze wel veel gesteund. Ze merkt ook op dat collega's niet altijd genoeg steun krijgen:

“We hebben op dit moment twee hele jonge collega's, echt midden 20, dus echt startende docenten, die na een jaar helemaal uitvallen met zware burn-outs. Dat heb ik wel zien gebeuren en dat heb ik ook wel aangegeven, van hè dat gaat daar niet goed, let op die en die. Maar weet je, het is ook moeilijk voor degene die het betreft. Het is ook moeilijk als iemand tegen jou zegt; volgens mij gaat het niet zo goed. Ga eens kijken naar je takenpakket, en, zal ik eens even helpen en weet je wel. Het is ook moeilijk om dat te accepteren denk ik. Je wil dat ook niet, want je denkt dat je dan niet goed genoeg bent.”

Anna geeft daarbij aan dat beginnende docenten vaak uit het werkveld komen en super enthousiast en gemotiveerd zijn. Echter werkt het onderwijs niet zo snel als het bedrijfsleven, een aanpassing kun je pas in het jaar daarna toepassen.

Omgaan met werkstress

Doordat Anna al wat langer in het onderwijs werkt, herkent ze het ritme. Ze weet wanneer de piekbelasting komt en hoe ze zich daar op moet voorbereiden. Het is moeilijk om de pieken te verleggen of te veranderen. Anna bezuinigt het eerst op sociale contacten als ze het druk heeft. Een graadmeter voor Anna is het contact met haar zus. Als ze haar zus meer dan twee of drie dagen niet heeft gesproken dan weet ze dat het druk is. Als Anna een piek herkent in haar werk slaat ze bewust geen pauzes over en gaat ze altijd even naar buiten. Dat helpt haar ook om met een frisse blik verder te werken. Daarnaast is ze actief met hardlopen:

“Ik ben daarna natuurlijk wel gaan hardlopen. Dat helpt mij nu heel erg ook natuurlijk. Dat zijn ook dingen die ik wel blijf doen, ook al heb ik het druk, dan blijf ik dat wel doen. Dat is echt iets wat wel moet van mezelf. Ik moet wel die drie keer in de week gaan hardlopen.”

Anna had zelf niet verwacht dat ze ooit zou gaan hardlopen, het hardlopen was een advies na haar burn-out. Ontspanning door inspanning werkt goed voor Anna. Ze loopt met een hardlooptroep wat ze ervaart als een mooie combinatie van sociale contacten en bewegen. Als Anna wordt gevraagd naar haar ervaringen met meditatie geeft ze aan dat ze het niet voor zichzelf doet, maar wel met haar dochter van 11:

“Ik heb nogal een stressgevoelig kind en dan denk ik van; ze moet ook wel leren om te ontspannen. Dat vond ze heel moeilijk. Je hebt zo'n boek, mindfulness voor kinderen met één of andere kabouter en dat is een heel verhaal. Dat heb ik wel heel veel met haar gedaan. Dan stond ze helemaal over de rooie te gaan en dan zei ik; je bent de berg, je bent de berg, denk aan de berg! Haha. Dus zulke dingen, inademen met de golven van de zee. Op die manier ben ik wel bezig met mindfulness. Dat doe ik natuurlijk samen met haar, maar niet dat ik zeg; zo ik ga even wat oefeningen doen voor mezelf, dat niet.”

Anna merkt daarnaast op dat ze echt van dag tot dag leeft. Ze laat het gewoon gebeuren en dat kan ze goed toepassen in het onderwijs. In haar vak, personal professional management, kan ze zich aanpassen aan wat de groep nodig heeft. Anna ervaart veel autonomie in haar werk, dat geeft haar de mogelijkheid en vrijheid iets nieuws te doen als ze dat wil. Als ze afhankelijk is van anderen ervaart Anna echter wel werkstress, ze heeft dan geen controle.

Als Anna wordt gevraagd of ze het fijn zou vinden om te kunnen sporten, bewegen of mediteren op de werkvloer heeft ze daar niet meteen een antwoord op. Voor haarzelf ziet ze het als niet noodzakelijk omdat ze al veel ruimte voor sport in haar leven heeft ingebouwd. Ze zou het wel fijn om meer groen om zich heen te hebben als ze gaat wandelen in de pauze:

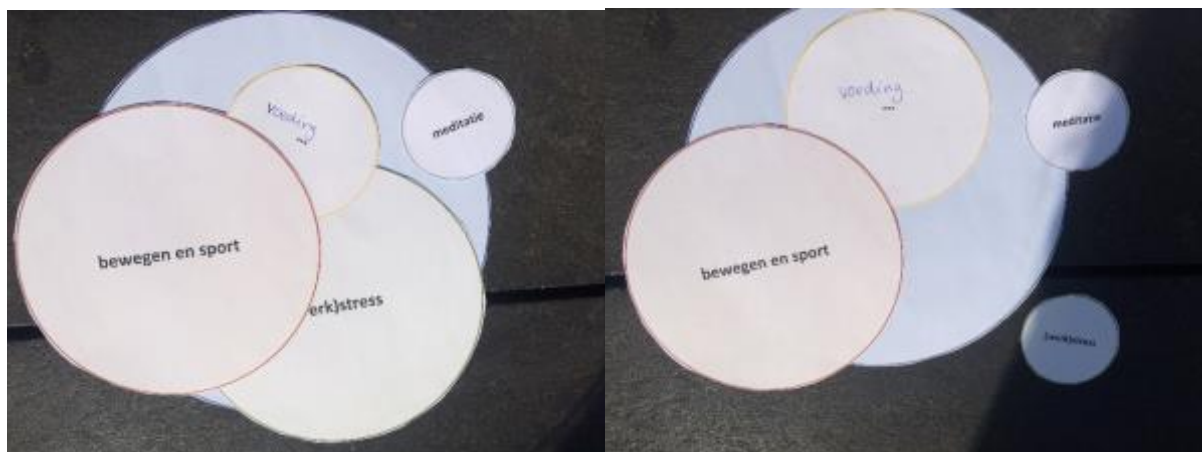
“Wat ik wel fijn vind is als er bijvoorbeeld heel veel groen is. Dat je dan even lekker tussen het groen kunt gaan zitten. Want, ja, die parkeerplaats is niet echt inspirerend. Dat lijkt me wel heel fijn als de omgeving wat groener is. Dat je dus daar tijdens de lunch even naar buiten kunt.”

Cirkels

Aan het eind van het gesprek blikken we terug met behulp van de cirkels. Bij de cirkel met meditatie merkt Anna op dat ze bewust bezig is met reflectie en dat ze dat ziet als een vorm van meditatie door in het hier en nu zijn, door even stil te staan. Daarnaast komt het belang van gezonde voeding naar voren in het gesprek met de cirkels.

“Als ik werkstress heb, ik bedoel ik eet altijd wel goed en gezond, maar als je werkstress hebt of een periode met stressvolle situaties. Dan zijn er ook wel dingen waar ik op ga bezuinigen zeg maar, dan eet ik even snel. Even makkelijk en dat is niet altijd even gezond. Ik ga ook wel vergeten te eten.”

Anna geeft aan dat ze in minder stressvolle perioden meer tijd heeft om op haar gezondheid te letten.



1: stressvolle situatie

2. Minder stressvolle situatie

Appendix H: Jack's narrative

“Sport, dat is echt 100% ontspanning”

Het verhaal van Jack

Periode: Mei 2017

Onderzoeker: Coen van Bendegom

Jack is een jongere docent in het hoger onderwijs. Hij geeft les op een middelgrootte HBO-instelling in de economische en financiële vakken. Jack vertelt over zijn ervaringen met werkstress.

Ervaringen met werkstress

Op het moment van het gesprek ervaart Jack geen werkstress. Hij ervaart sowieso niet zo veel werkstress. Het zegt daarover het volgende:

“Ik ervaar het, eh..., wel eens. Maar ik denk, als ik kijk, van de 365 dagen, dan zou ik zeggen in 90% van de gevallen ervaar ik zeker geen stress. Dus echt de drukke tijden, dan heb ik wel een stress, dat denk ik wel.”

Jack vertelt dat hij bepaalde periodes in het jaar heeft waar hij werkstress ervaart. Dat is vaak in de overgang van het trimester of bimester. Hij moet dan de ene periode afronden en de andere opstarten. Jack is dan verantwoordelijk voor drie vakken, waarvan eentje voor vierdejaars studenten.

“Dan is bij mij echt zo'n knalpunt. Dan zit ik misschien op een workload van 50 uur per week. 50 misschien ook wel 55, toch wel aardig wat meer dan de 40 uur die er eigenlijk zou moeten staan.”

Jack geeft aan dat de workload vooral invloed heeft op de balans tussen zijn werk en privé. Dat schuift dan volledig op richting zijn werk, waardoor het ook zijn privéleven beïnvloedt. Jack werkt zeven dagen in de week, dat is voor hem heel normaal. Hij komt uit een ondernemersfamilie en werkt graag hard. Dat doet hij al van jongs af aan, in zijn studententijd werkte hij ook op de avonden en in het weekend hard aan zijn studie. Dat had hij er voor over. Jack geeft aan dat in drukke perioden zeven dagen, zeven dagen blijven, maar dan met meer uren.

“Dat hou je denk ik persoonlijk als mens ook niet lang vol op een gegeven moment. Dat kan je twee, drie, vier weken maar daarna ervaar je denk ik automatisch ook wel stress.”

Jack doelt hier niet alleen op stress in het werk. Hij kan zich goed voorstellen dat als mensen ook privéproblemen hebben dat dit veel impact op hen heeft. Bij Jack gaat het privé goed, hij heeft een lieve vrouw en er is een kindje op komst. Op zijn werk heeft hij het gevoel dat hij wel met zijn manager zou kunnen praten over werkstress. Hij heeft nog dit niet gedaan ondanks dat hij op dit moment wel het urenbudget uit zijn jaarwerkplan overschrijd. Zijn directe collega's ondersteunen elkaar onderling als daarom gevraagd wordt, dit kan Jack erg waarderen. Het onderwerp werkdruk of werkstress wordt onderling niet zo besproken. Als Jack een piek met werkdruk ervaart, maakt hij een planning om het urgente van het niet urgente te onderscheiden. Hij maakt dan een figuurtje om onderscheid te maken:

“Zo van, wat vind ik nou belangrijk en urgent? En wat vind ik niet belangrijk? Dus op die manier. Wat ik al zei, omdat ik zeven dagen in de week toch wel werk, of in ieder geval die mentaliteit heb, schroom ik niet om dan op zondag drie uur door te gaan, dan worden het maar zes uur. Het klopt wel natuurlijk dat je leven dan voornamelijk op een gegeven moment gaat bestaan uit werken. Daarom dat ik net helemaal aan het begin zei, ik weet niet of dat het goed is. Ook voor mijn toekomst.”

Omgaan met werkstress

Jack vindt het dus niet erg om in het weekend door te werken. Soms moeten zijn hobby's dan plaatsmaken voor zijn werk. Naast zijn werk vindt Jack het heel belangrijk om aandacht te besteden aan zijn vrouw en zijn gezin, zijn ouders, broertje en zusjes:

“Eén van mijn hobby's is aandacht voor mijn vrouwtje. Winkelen, samen winkelen, samen dingen doen, zowel met mijn vrouw als mijn familieleden als mijn vrienden. Wat bij mij centraal staat, wat belangrijk is, familie staat bij mij op nummer 1. Niet mijn vrienden, echt mijn familie. Dan bedoel ik het gezin, mijn ouders, broertje en zusjes.”

Sport is voor Jack ook een belangrijke factor om te ontspannen. Voetbal is altijd al zijn sport geweest. Hij neemt deel aan een voetbalteam dat bestaat uit docenten, daarmee voetballen ze tegen studententeams van de hogeschool. Jack vindt het combineren van werk, gezin en sport wel lastig:

“Die combinatie is voor mij echt wel lastig te maken. Met name als je kijkt, ik heb het over zeven dagen per week werken en daarnaast nog even voetballen, tijd voor het gezinnetje, aan mijn ouders en broertje, zusjes en aan mijn vrouw. Daarnaast sporten, die combinatie is soms wel lastig. Ik denk dat we ook in een maatschappij zitten waar je echt moet presenteren.”

Het voetballen met collega's bevalt Jack erg goed. Op die manier leert hij zijn collega's ook op een andere manier kennen. De mogelijkheid om zijn favoriete sport uit te oefenen op zijn werk vindt Jack geweldig. Naast het voetbal en zeker in de rustigere periodes doet Jack ook nog aan andere sporten. Hij loopt hard en hij zwemt graag. Daarbij is hij sinds kort gaan fitnessen met collega's. Sport is voor Jack echt een afleiding.

“Op het moment dat je aan het sporten bent, ik weet niet wat jouw eigen ervaring is, maar ik denk op dat moment echt even aan niks. Gewoon, dan kijk ik een beetje om me heen, je praat over andere, leuke dingen. Of ja, je kan natuurlijk vaker over leuke dingen praten, maar je praat in ieder geval niet inhoudelijk over de vakken die ik hier verzorg of over het curriculum of over weet ik veel wat. Echt met je gedachten even ergens anders, dat vind ik het belangrijkste. Dat doet sport ook met mij. Het brengt mijn gedachten op iets anders. Ik probeer zo sportief mogelijk bezig te zijn natuurlijk. Ik wil ook graag winnen. Als ik verlies dan ja, dat moet je ook leren om daar mee om te gaan. Ik denk dat je ook niet alleen je, eh, dat je ook je EQ ontwikkelt met sport. Niet alleen vermindering van stress wellicht maar ook je EQ.”

Jack doet naar eigen zeggen niets met meditatie. Hij luistert soms wel rustige muziek om in slaap te komen:

“Ik luister soms wel eens voor het slapen gaan, misschien ken je dat. Een soort slaapliedjes in een soort zen-vorm. Dan hoor je vogeltjes op de achtergrond. Ken je dat? Dat doe ik wel eens. Dat vind ik ook fijn. Ik merk wel dat het ontspant. Bij mij, ik weet niet of dat voor iedereen geldt. Maar voor de rest niet nee.”

Cirkels

Aan het eind van het gesprek blikken we terug door middel van de cirkels. Hierbij probeert Jack visueel weer te geven hoeveel invloed de cirkels hebben op zijn leven in een drukkere, stressvolle periode en in een rustigere, minder stressvolle periode. In dit deel van het gesprek komt het belang van zijn gezin en vrouw in zijn leven sterk naar voren.

“Je kan mij honderden miljoenen geven aan vermogen, maar ik denk niet dat dat mij belangrijk maakt. Je kan mij de mooiste baan geven van de wereld, weet ik veel, minister-president van Amerika. Dat is volgens mij wel, daar hebben volgens mij heel veel mensen wel aanzien voor. Nee, als dat mijn familie relaties beïnvloedt dan nee. Dat heb ik er echt niet voor over.”

Daarnaast onderstreept Jack nogmaals het belang van sport voor zijn ontspanning, maar hij geeft ook aan dat hij het moeilijk vindt om er de tijd voor te vinden. Het zou voor hem een uitkomst zijn als er meer sportmogelijkheden op zijn werk zouden zijn.

“Dat is echt 100% ontspanning. Want ik denk, ik heb bijvoorbeeld nooit tijdens een sportactiviteit gedacht aan; nou, hoe zou mijn college er morgen uitzien? Of, wat ga ik morgen vertellen? Of, welke powerpoint slides ga ik nog toevoegen? Totaal niet. In die zin zowel werkstress verminderd als heel erg belangrijk is in mijn leven. Alleen ik heb er niet zoveel tijd voor. Als het in combinatie gaat met mijn werk. Stel je voor dat er een mogelijkheid was tot fitnessapparatuur hier op school, dat was natuurlijk fantastisch geweest. Dat is toch geweldig? Ik weet dat er een aantal bedrijven zijn die dat doen, ik denk alleen maar dat het heel erg goed is.”



Figuur 1. Situatie veel werkstress



Figuur 2a. Situatie weinig werkstress



Figuur 2b. Bovenliggende laag weinig werkstress

Appendix I: Floor's narrative

“Wanneer ik buiten ga lopen of wandelen dan hoef ik niet te presteren.”

Het verhaal van Floor

Periode: Juni 2017

Onderzoeker: Coen van Bendegom

Floor is een 25-jarige eerstejaars docente bij een HBO-instelling. Ze geeft les in verschillende vakken, begeleidt afstudeerders en is studietoelichtster. Ik spreek met Floor over haar ervaringen met werkstress.

Ervaring met werkstress

Floor begint te vertellen dat ze zelf twee jaar geleden heeft gestudeerd bij de onderwijsinstelling waar ze nu werkzaam is. In de tussentijd heeft ze twee masters afgerond, de een gefocust op duurzame inzetbaarheid van werknemers en de ander op organisatiepsychologie. Ze zegt daarover het volgende:

“Twee jaar lang buffelen als een malle, niet normaal. Echt eventjes goed doorploeteren. Nou ja, toen was ik eigenlijk te jong om het werkveld in te gaan van lifestyle coaching of mentale coaching, die kant op te gaan, burn-out coaching. Toen dacht ik, leuk om hier te beginnen als coach van studenten”

Floor werd aangenomen als studietoelichtster en docente. Dit heeft ze vanaf het begin af aan ervaren als veel, verschillende (kleine) verantwoordelijkheden. Floor geeft aan dat ze erg toegewijd is en graag hard werkt. Haar valkuil is dat ze moeilijk haar grenzen kan aangeven. Ze wil de dingen die ze doet graag goed doen, dat werd haar echter bemoeilijkt door de veelvoud aan verantwoordelijkheden. Floor zag door de bomen het bos niet meer en begon kleine dingen te vergeten. Ze wist haar rol en verantwoordelijkheden niet meer goed, omdat ze op zoveel verschillende taken was ingedeeld.

“Ik had het idee dat ik verdwaald was in mijn eigen doolhof. Ik heb dat doolhof zelf opgezet, ik heb er zelf ook voor gekozen. Altijd ging dat goed, tijdens mijn masters is dat ook allemaal goed gegaan, en toen ging het in een keer niet zo goed meer. Toen heb ik echt stress ervaren voor het eerst in mijn leven. Dat was heftig.”

Floor was even helemaal op. Ze is een paar dagen thuis gebleven om bij te komen. Ineens lukte Floor niet meer wat haar daarvoor prima afging.

“Het was hier op mijn werk dat ik echt in een keer... ik zat een report na te kijken, waar ik normaal nog geen half uur over doe, en ik heb vier uur lang naar mijn scherm lopen kijken en er komt niks uit. Dan word ik gewoon boos op mezelf, dit gaat nergens over. Toen merkte ik, ik ben gewoon op. Echt stom, maar goed.”

Op dat dieptepunt lukte even niets meer, sporten niet, haar huis schoonmaken niet, Floor was echt even helemaal op.

Omgaan met werkstress

“Met mijn achtergrond weet ik gewoon allemaal wat er gebeurt, maar als je dan in één keer zelf fysiek en mentaal die symptomen begint te merken dat is gewoon gek.”

Dankzij haar achtergrond in organisatiepsychologie en duurzame inzetbaarheid wist Floor dat ze hulp moest vragen. Floor zocht contact met een coach om hulp en advies te vragen. Haar coach gaf haar de tools om met haar werkstress om te gaan. Een belangrijk advies was om ontspanning te zoeken in wandelen:

“Ik wandel heel erg veel, gewoon strolling, lekker buiten zijn. Geen telefoon mee, geen muziek mee, gewoon echt lopen. Dat is voor mij dan eventjes mijn rust weer pakken. Ik merk echt, ik denk dat ik het nu een maand geleden heb meegemaakt, en ik zit weer knettervol energie, het gaat echt heel goed.”

Floor wandelt zo’n drie a vier keer in de week. Daarnaast sport ze graag, dat kan een goede uitlaatklep zijn. Floor heeft gemerkt dat het sporten ook als een verplichting kan voelen in plaats van als een uitlaatklep:

“Weet je wat het is, wanneer ik de sportschool in stap, dan heb ik weer die prestatiedruk of dat competitiegevoel. Wanneer ik buiten ga lopen of wandelen dan hoef ik niet te presteren zeg maar. (...) Ik denk dat het heel relevant is dat als je met stress zit, is dat je je accuutje weer op laadt in plaats van er druk op te leggen.”

Floor weet niet zo goed of ze ook op de werkvloer zou willen sporten met collega’s.

“Ik sta er deels wel positief in. Bijvoorbeeld dat wandelen of zo, dat zou ik eigenlijk wel relaxt vinden. Ik zou hier niet intens te hoeven sporten, want ik heb gewoon mijn eigen ding met sporten. Dat vind ik juist heel fijn om dat gewoon voor mezelf te doen.”

Naast bewegen heeft Floor een aantal social media apps zoals Facebook van haar telefoon verwijderd. Ze geeft aan dat ze denkt dat dit een groot verschil kan maken in de (sociale) druk die ze ervaart:

“Als ik dan een hele dag had gewerkt en in colleges en gesprekken had gezeten, dan heb je een WhatsApp lijst van 20 open gesprekken, dan krijg ik daar echt meteen zo’n verstikkend gevoel van. Het waren echt mooie tijden toen je alleen nog maar sms’jes kon ontvangen, dan kreeg je er drie op één dag en dan was je daar gelukkig mee. Nu heb je 400 berichten op een dag, dat gaat echt nergens over.”

Invloed op rol als professional

In haar rol als studiecoach ziet Floor een immense uitdaging voor de jongere generatie studenten. In de afgelopen twee weken heeft ze vier verschillende studenten gesproken met burn-out verschijnselen of depressieklachten.

“Eigenlijk de gesprekken die ik met mijn coach heb gehad, die heb ik ook weer op hen toegepast min of meer. Ik ben met hen gaan lopen in het bos om ook hun verhaal aan te horen om te kijken, wat speelt er dan. Ik denk dat het een combinatie is van prestatiedruk op school en sociale druk. Het bereiken van, eh, wat doe je

academisch, want HBO is vaak al niet goed genoeg meer. Sociale druk, sociale media, dat hele health en well-being, inderdaad ook met sporten. Er komt alleen maar druk op je af. Als je dan kijkt hoeveel mensen van mijn leeftijd er nu al met burn-out klachten en depressieklachten kampen, dat wordt echt een grap over 20 jaar denk ik.”

Floor geeft aan dat ze zich oprecht zorgen maakt over studenten die nu al een burn-out hebben. Ze vraagt zich hardop af hoe deze studenten daar mee moeten leven als ze er straks een baan en familieleden bij hebben. Floor denkt dat werkgevers een groot verschil kunnen maken door handvaten of tools aan te bieden aan werknemers met werkstress. Ze geeft aan dat ze te weinig steun heeft ervaren van haar manager.

“Ik heb gewoon knetterveel energie en ik vind het leuk om heel veel energie te geven, maar je moet er ook voor zorgen dat die energie weer terugkomt. Wanneer je het idee hebt dat het niet terugkomt, zowel qua inderdaad jezelf opladen door je rust te pakken, maar ook energie terugkrijgen vanuit de leidinggevende, vanuit collega’s, vanuit studenten dat ze waardering tonen bijvoorbeeld op het werk. Daar krijg je ook weer energie van. Het is een beetje een tweedeling, wat kun je zelf doen en wat kan je omgeving doen.”

Cirkels

Aan het eind van het gesprek blikken we terug met behulp van de cirkels. Floor geeft een stressvolle en een minder stressvolle situatie weer. Floor vertelt dat als ze veel stress heeft, ze obsessiever met sport en bewegen bezig is. Als ze merkt dat ze ergens controle verliest wil ze ergens anders controle uitoefenen.

“Dan ga ik heel obsessief bezig zijn met bewegen en sport. Dan wordt dit (wandelen) in een keer veel minder belangrijk, omdat ik denk dat ik daar geen tijd voor heb. Dan ben ik veel obsessiever bezig om ander dingen te controleren. Als ik hier de controle verlies, dan ga ik ergens anders controle proberen te krijgen.”



Figuur 1a. Weergave veel stress



Figuur 1b. Weergave beetje stress

Als Floor minder stress ervaart dan kan ze beter de balans en het plezier in sport en bewegen vinden. Ze wandelt dan wat vaker. Meditatie daar doet ze niets mee. Het wandelen zou een soort van meditatie voor haar kunnen zijn. In een periode zonder of met weinig stress is wandelen en sporten even belangrijk voor haar. Ze gaat dan ook vaker met vrienden iets leuks doen.



Figuur 2. Weergave weinig/geen stress