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Prevention and Management of Employee Mental Health Issues in Finnish Multinational Corporations

Exploring HRM Approaches

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ABSTRACT:

The significance of mental health in organizations is being increasingly addressed, but there is a lack of depth. Human resource management (HRM) practices related to mental health issues are usually more reactive than proactive. There is a gap in understanding organizational strategies from the experiences of the employees in Finnish multinational corporations.

This thesis examines the role of HRM in addressing mental health issues in Finnish multinational corporations (MNCs) from an employee perspective. The aim of the study is to close the gap by researching how HRM approaches can be adapted to increasingly prevent and manage employee mental health challenges and better employee well-being.

With Job Demand-Resources (JD-R) model and Ability, Motivation, and Opportunity (AMO) model, the research examines employee well-being. To see what effect demands, resources, and opportunities have on employees. Through qualitative research, the thesis provides an employee perspective within Finnish MNCs on the effectiveness of HRM practices. This was done by semi-structured interviews with ten employees of five different Finnish MNCs. The results of the research reveal that there are mental health preventive practices in place, such as flexible working arrangements and wellness programs, but their effectiveness is limited due to barriers such as stigma.

Adapted JD-R and AMO models are used to illustrate the results. They reveal that high job demands with underutilized resources results in employee strain. They also show that providing employees with opportunities such as autonomy and feedback, motivation and engagement are fostered. The results of the study suggest that implementing more proactive approaches in HRM, such as continuous managerial training and regular mental health check-ins, are a necessity for better employee support.

The research contributes to the field by emphasizing the importance of mental health tailored HRM strategies to increase employee well-being. It also provides insight from the employees themselves, on how the state of their mental health and performance can be increased, and by this leading to better organizational results for Finnish MNCs.

KEYWORDS: Multinational corporation, human resource management, employee well-being, mental health

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Abbreviations

HRM: Human resource management

MNC: Multinational Corporation

JD-R Model: Job Demand-Resource model

AMO Model: Ability, motivation and opportunity

EAP: Employee Assistance Programs

1 Introduction

In this chapter, an introduction to the topic of the research is given. The motivation behind the work is explained and the framework for the whole process is explained.

1.1 Background of the study

The topic of mental health has become increasingly important in the workplace as organizations are constantly trying to create better environments, where employees can thrive. According to the World Health Organization (2013, p.9), mental health allows individuals to handle their stress and productivity and contribute meaningfully to their communities. However, when mental health issues such as anxiety, depression, and burnout emerge in workplaces, they can have a significant impact on productivity, increase absenteeism, and reduce overall satisfaction with their job (Harnois & Gabriel, 2000, pp. 3-5). Research by Goetzel et al. (2008, p. 5) shows that significant productivity losses can occur from mental health challenges, when they are not treated accordingly.

The importance of addressing mental health issues in Finnish organizations is urgent. Among European Union member countries, in 2018, Finland had the highest rate of mental health related issues, with twenty percent of individuals affected. The existence of mental health issues is significantly higher among lower income groups, with these individuals being two times as likely to have mental health issues compared to individuals from higher income groups. (OECD, 2018, pp. 21-24.) In 2015, the total cost of mental health related challenges to Finland was estimated to be over 11 billion euros. Of this number, 4.7 billion euros were in indirect costs related to productivity losses in the labor market. (OECD, 2018, pp. 28-29).

In 2021, Finland's labor force in total consisted of slightly over 2.5 million people (European Employment Services, 2023). From these people, approximately three percent received sickness allowance due to current mental health issues. Since 2016, the number of these allowance recipients has risen over 60 percent. This highlights the growing impact of mental health on the workforce in Finland (Kela, 2022). The European Commission (2023) has stated that these costs to society show the need for more proactive measures, which include mental well-being promotion, more effective management strategies, and early identification of mental health symptoms.

HRM has an important role in managing organizational environments in a way that supports its employee's mental health and well-being. HRM has the possibility to shape organizational cultures that values mental health and provides the necessary resources through designated policies, training programs, initiatives and support mechanisms. (Guest, 2017, pp.31-32.) Effectively executed HR practices can create working environments where employees feel engaged and supported. Employee satisfaction is an important part of organizational performance. (Armstrong, 2014, pp.57-58). Additionally, there are barriers that can be harmful for the success of HR initiatives. Examples of such are stigma, insufficient training, and limited availability of resources (Corrigan et al., 2014, pp.37-38). These barriers can prevent individuals from seeking the help they need. Barriers make it important for HR to address such challenges comprehensively.

Multinational corporations can face unique challenges due to their organizational environments. Finnish MNCs, like many other global companies, manage diverse workforces across different cultural and legal landscapes, which makes it difficult to use standardized mental health initiatives (Sparrow et al., 2016, pp. 45-47). There are cultural differences in attitudes towards mental health, as well as different regulatory requirements in each country. Cultural differences add to the complexity of implementing support systems in an effective way (Gopalkrishnan, 2018, p.2). This means that Finnish MNCs have to balance in both global and local environments simultaneously to be able to address employee's mental health and wellbeing efficiently.

It is important to get an understanding about employee perspective for successful HR initiatives. Through employees' experiences and feedback, organizations can receive valuable information between their strategies intentions and the practical outcomes. This can also highlight where these strategies and systems are not sufficient or not enough. (Cascio et al., 2019, pp.242-243.) Employees' opinions are essential for the adaptation of HR strategies, as employee perspective can help make future mental health initiatives more accessible and useful.

This study is relevant in the context of Finnish MNCs, as mental health challenges are compounded by the demands of global operations. The research aims to identify areas of improvement by examining the effectiveness of HR strategies from an employee perspective. Recommendations to benefit employees, their well-being and the organization's overall performance are based on both primary and secondary data collected. Proactive mental health acknowledgement is not only beneficial for the employee's own well-being, but for the well-being of the entire organization, as healthy work forces are directly linked to improved business outcomes and productivity. Outcomes (Harnois & Gabriel, 2000, pp.56-57; Goetzel et al., 2008, p. 3). Therefore, this research has the potential to contribute to the field of HRM and mental health, by providing an insight into employee perceptions for more effective HR practices.

1.2 Research problem and the objectives

Even though the importance of mental health in the workplace has gained significant attention in recent years, there are still challenges in effectively implementing strategies to address these issues. HR creates and adapts policies to foster a positive working environment, but there still remains issues between the intentions and outcome in relation to employee well-being. (Armstrong, 2014, pp. 56-58.) These challenges can be

amplified in MNCs, where a diverse workforce operates in different cultural and legal environments.

Mental health issues have an effect on productivity, absenteeism and both the employees and the organizations' performance (Goetzel et al., 2018, p. 324). HRM tends to respond more reactively than proactively, even when there is a large variety of resources available to employees, such as EAPs. This means that problems are usually handled only after they cause issues. There is less focus on preventive measures, which would help to address issues before they become too much to bear. (Guest, 2017, pp. 31-32). This reactive way decreases the possibility of early interventions, which could improve mental health long-term.

The effectiveness of HR initiatives can be harmed by barriers. Stigma and confidentiality issues can come between the employees and the initiatives (Cascio et al., 2019, p. 266). For example, employees might feel hesitant to seek help due to the negative impact it could have on their professional career. This also undermines the success of available resources (Corrigan et al., 2014, pp. 37-38). There is a need for more tailored strategies for Finnish MNCs to tackle the challenges. This includes developing more understanding of employees' perceptions, as they are the recipients of these initiatives and strategies. This research aims to solve these problems by examining how HRM practices can be adapted to better prevent and manage mental health issues in Finnish MNCs.

The goal of the objectives is to help find the correct answers for the research questions, and to help fulfil the research topic. The objectives will provide a framework for the research, to investigate the current state of HRM practices and implementations, to find out employee's perceptions, and to find opportunities to further prevent and manage mental health issues in Finnish MNCs.

The first objective is to identify the current practices implemented by Finnish MNC HR departments. To do this, research is done to review practices that are currently

implemented related to mental health. The second objective is to assess the employees' perceptions. As the topic of the thesis is focused on employee perspective, it is necessary to first understand how employees see these HR practices and their results. This objective focuses on evaluating how Finnish MNC employees have responded and adapted to current mental health related strategies. The goal is to analyze their attitudes and personal opinions and experiences.

The third objective of the research is to explore opportunities for improvement, based on both primary and secondary data collected through literature review and research through interviews. The goal is to investigate whether some HR practices might lack in depth or where there is a gap for new improvements to prevent and manage mental health issues more successfully. Additionally, this objective aims to identify common challenges that might arise from HR practices. The fourth objective is to propose new preventive approaches. To form recommendations based on the research, for better prevention and management of mental health issues in Finnish MNCs. The goal is to provide research and evidence-based suggestions for HR.

The summarized objectives of the thesis are:

1. To identify current preventive and management practices.
2. To evaluate employee perceptions of HRM practices.
3. To investigate improvement opportunities.
4. To suggest new adaptations or practices

1.3 Research gap and the research question

While a vast amount of literature focused on the role of HRM in promoting mental health at work, there remains a gap in studies centered on the experiences and perceptions of employees in Finnish MNCs. Existing research has focused more on the organizational perspective, on examining policies and practices to manage mental health issues in a

generalized manner (Sparrow et al., 2016, pp. 47-49). The focus on organizational perspective on strategies can overlook the perceptions of employees, and the practical effectiveness.

Finland offers unique cultural, legal and operational characteristics to take into consideration. Additionally, the multinational aspect of the organizations brings into consideration also diverse cultural expectations and management practices (Dunning & Lundan, 2008, pp. 3-4). There is a need for more empirical research, that takes all these variables into consideration to have the ability to create effective strategies for employees in Finnish MNCs. Moreover, research focuses on the barriers employees face in relation to mental health. (Corrigan et al., 2014, pp. 37-38). There is a gap in the research focusing on these barriers with a Finnish multinational context.

The main research question of the thesis is aimed to address the research problem of the study. Given the growing emphasis on mental health in the workplace, it is crucial to research how HRM can develop and implement more effective strategies to support employee well-being. The research aims to investigate current preventive and management strategies implemented in Finnish MNCs, by focusing on one main question, and three sub-questions. The goal of these questions is to provide a comprehensive framework for the analysis. The main research question is:

"How do Finnish multinational corporations' HR departments prevent mental health issues?"

The goal of the main research question is to research the current mental health approaches and practices used by HR in Finnish MNCs. It aims to get a deeper understanding of how HR can create a supportive organizational environment for employees. The focus is on the effectiveness of current preventive and management strategies. For a better in-depth understanding of the topic, the main research question is then divided into three questions focusing on different topics.

The first sub-question is:

"What HRM practices are currently implemented in Finnish multinational companies to address mental health issues?"

The goal of the first sub-question is to examine the current HR practices in Finnish MNCs. To investigate what they are doing to support employee's mental health. This question will be answered by investigating strategies, programs and policies that HR departments have implemented. The research questions is aimed at getting a wider understanding of what has been done, in order to build propositions for future. It will also provide insight into how mental health is perceived in Finnish MNCs.

The second sub-question is:

"How have employees perceived the effectiveness of current human resource management practices in reducing mental health challenges?"

This question focuses on gathering insights into the employee perspective regarding the effectiveness of HRM strategies. It aims to find out if employees feel that the measures support their mental well-being and if these practices have improved their daily work. This question seeks to reveal potential issues between the intended goals of HRM initiatives, and the actual outcomes experienced by the employees. The question will also give insight into experiences regarding the accessibility of the support services, to see if they are actually supportive or not.

The third sub-question is:

"How can HRM practices be changed, adapted, or should new ones be implemented to prevent mental health issues further?"

The last sub-question focuses on the future. It aims to discover potential for future improvements, that Finnish MNCs HR can put into action. The goal is to find out if current

strategies need change, or if there is a need for completely new approaches. The question is also aimed at finding out if HRM practices could be more tailored to the needs of diverse employees of multinational organizations. The goal is to research the needed information to be able to suggest evidence-based recommendations and to enhance the effectiveness of mental health related HRM strategies.

1.4 Definition of key concepts

Human resource management (HRM):

Human resource management can be defined as the management of resources, the employees for example. Employees are seen as a valuable resource, and the task of HRM is to not only act as an administrator, but to manage wholly. The goal of the management is to increase the effectiveness of the workforce, and in this way give the company a competitive advantage. (Beaumont, 1994, pp.10-11.) HRM tasks can be such as recruitment, staffing, employee training and development, compensation and benefits, quality control and innovation. There are both long- and short-term tasks, which all require specific types of management. (Beaumont, 1994, pp. 20-23.)

Multinational corporation (MNC):

A multinational corporation is an organization that participates in business in more than one country. The size of an MNC can depend on their foreign affiliates, number of participation countries, scale of global assets, the level of internationalization and the extent of their high-value activities and responsibilities. (Dunning & Lundan, 2008, p. 3.)

Mental health:

The World Health Organization (WHO) (2013, p. 9) defines mental health as a crucial part of the overall well-being of individuals. Mental health is a state of well-being, which gives

individuals the ability to come to terms with their own abilities, and to handle everyday life, such as work, life and being part of communities. Across the globe, mental health has not been acknowledged to a same degree as physical health and wellbeing. WHO (2013, p. 17) estimates that the number of people suffering from mental health issues can be up to 650 million. Mental health can be affected by, for example, social, physical, cultural, economic or personal factors. Individuals' own resources provide the basis for their mental health. (Cattan & Tilford, 2006, pp. 11-12).

Employee engagement:

The term employee engagement has a large number of different definitions, which can vary based on each researcher's point of view or focus. Schaufeli and Bakker (2010, pp. 10-11) have defined employee engagement as the relationship between an employee and their own work. Besides this relationship, engagement can also describe the relationship between the employee and the organization. It can also be defined as the process where an employee harnesses their personal self for their professional role. Where people express themselves through their work, whether it's physically or emotionally, to execute given tasks. (Kahn, 1990, p. 694.) When employees feel engaged, they are able to perform their work tasks effectively, and thus are able to respond to the specific demands of their job (Schaufeli et al, 2001, p. 73).

Preventive measures:

Preventive measures can be implemented by initiatives and strategies by management, in order to prevent harm to the company and the employees. Preventive measures are aimed at preventing harm, such as stress factors and mental health issues. Their goal is to protect and promote the wellbeing of employees. Also, they increase the effectiveness of employees and their personal engagement. (WHO, 2021, pp. 11-12.)

1.5 Delimitations

The delimitations of the study define the scope and boundaries for the research. The study is geographically limited to Finnish MNCs, which makes the findings specific for Finland's culture and context, where mental health issues are a problem (OECD, 2018, pp. 21-22). While this focus allows for a deeper analysis on Finnish MNCs, it limits its generalizability of the results to other countries or local firms. The study emphasizes the employee perspective on HR mental health related practices, rather than exploring managerial or other points of view. The focus of the research allows for a deeper understanding of employee experience. This is important as employees are the ones affected by the policies. Employee perspective is the key to understanding the effectiveness of current strategies and policies. On the other hand, this means that the research will not focus on the opinions of any other point of view, such as managerial.

The study uses qualitative research method in the form of interviews with Finnish MNC employees. This approach provides the ability to get a deeper understanding about the mental health perceptions of employees. The chosen data collection method limits the ability to generalize the findings to a larger population, as it focuses on a limited number of insights. The collection of data is limited to a specific period of time, which means that the chosen time period for the study can be seen as a delimiting factor. This means that only current practices and perceptions are taken into consideration. This scope means that the study might not fully capture long-term effects or changes in practices. The focus on current data allows for a contemporary understanding of the problem, but it might restrict the ability to analyze how these practices and strategies have evolved over a longer period of time.

1.6 Structure of the study

The introduction chapter set the foundation for the study. It outlined the background for the research, its significance and the context of mental health challenges in Finnish MNCs. It presented the research problem with the research gap and explained the research questions. Additionally, objectives, key concepts and delimitations provided clarity for the study.

After this, the literature review offers a review of existing research on mental health in the workplace and on the role of HR in mental health management. The challenges faced by Finnish MNCs are also researched. The chapter examines relevant theoretical frameworks used in the thesis, which are the JD-R and AMO model, and their relationship with HRM and mental health.

The third chapter, methodology, will introduce the approach of the research and the chosen data collection method. The design of the research is explained, as well as the participant selection and data collection methods. Lastly, the chapter explains how the data will be analyzed. The reliability and validity of the study are also discussed.

The discussion chapter offers an analysis of the research findings in relation to the literature review, connecting it to the research questions and objectives. Adapted JD-R and AMO models are used to get a deeper understanding of the results. After this, recommendations, implications and limitations are discussed.

In the conclusion chapter of the thesis, a conclusion is given on the key findings of the study. After the summary, the contributions of the research are explained and suggestions for future research are provided.

2 Literature review

In this chapter, the theoretical framework for the thesis is presented. The literature review additionally builds the base for the analysis part of the research.

2.1 Finnish MNC practices

Finnish MNCs operate in a distinctive cultural framework, which has an effect on the management practices and the overall operations. The cultural characteristics in Finland create an environment of innovation, equality and employee welfare. These factors are critical for an organization to succeed. A defining feature of Finnish culture is the strong focus on equality and inclusivity. This can be seen in the business world as well. Hofstede's cultural dimensions show that there is more focus on collaborative and egalitarian approaches than on typical hierarchical structures. This shows that by fostering an inclusive work environment where employees are valued and encouraged to participate, both productivity and creativity increase. (Hofstede, 2001.)

Gender equality and work-life balance are an important part of the Finnish business culture. For example, when an employee delivers a baby, extensive parental leave is provided to both parents. This is aimed at strengthening gender equality in the country. (Ministry of Social Affairs and Health, 2024). Policies reinforcing these topics are aimed at improving job satisfaction, as well as encourage employee loyalty and engagement.

In Finnish organizational culture trust and transparency are highly valued. According to Transparency International's (2023) corruption perceptions index, Finland consistently ranks as one of the least corrupted countries in the world. Environment of trust fosters open communication between both employees and management, which helps to build a cohesive working environment (Hakanen & Schaufeli, 2012, p. 422). Finnish MNCs

value transparent interactions with their stakeholders. This helps to strengthen relationships and have a positive impact on the company's reputation. This shows the growing emphasis on corporate social responsibility, which showcases Finnish organizations in a good light for both consumers and possible investors. (Ministry of Economic Affairs and Employment of Finland, 2024.)

Innovation is a deeply integrated part of the Finnish business culture as well. The educational system puts emphasis on creativity and critical thinking, which creates valuable new minds constantly. Additionally, Finland's environmental consciousness can be seen from the strong commitment to the integration of sustainable development goals in business strategies. (Fibs, 2023, pp. 8-10.)

2.2 Mental health and MNCs

The emphasis on employee mental health is increasingly recognized as a priority due to the wide range of effects that poor mental health can have on organizations, such as productivity loss, decreased employee retention, and overall worsening organizational success. Compared to local corporations, MNCs face additional challenges arising from global operations, cultural diversity, and different legal environments. These challenges need tailored mental health strategies that go beyond the more standard practices of local organizations. (Harvey et al., 2014, pp. 12-13.)

2.2.1 The importance of Mental health

Mental health challenges such as stress, depression, and burnout can have severe consequences for MNCs. Unaddressed mental health issues can often lead to increased absenteeism, lower productivity, and increased employee turnover. These types of

problems negatively impact organizational performance (Attridge, 2019, p. 623). In MNCs, mental health issues can have a larger effect, due to the size and operational scale. This means that operational effects and costs can be larger compared to local organizations. With active mental health policies, MNCs can foster a supportive work environment. A supportive working environment enhances employee wellbeing and job satisfaction. Companies that invest in mental health support and resources have a significant reduction in absenteeism and greater employee engagement. Supportive environment also improves business outcomes (Nielsen & Daniels, 2012, p. 1227).

2.2.2 Multinational mental health challenges

Due to the global scale of MNCs, they can have a large number of challenges related to mental health management. Cultural differences have to be taken into consideration, as well as the different levels of mental health awareness and cultural stigma. Mental health is not as openly discussed in each culture, which can make it hard for employees to seek help. These stigmas can affect the implementation and success of mental health policies. Problems can also arise from multinational workforces being spread over different time zones. This can cause stress and pressure to work longer hours or have to work too early or late. This can increase the risk of burnout. (Harvey et al., 2014, pp. 14-15.)

Due to the global operations of MNCs, they have to deal with different legal frameworks presented by each country. For example, some countries have more in-depth mental health policies to guarantee mental health protection. On the other hand, other countries may lack the proper legal structures to support employees facing mental health challenges. MNCs have to find a balance between ensuring compliance with local regulations and promoting a globally consistent mental health policy. (Attridge, 2019, p. 622.) In addition, remote work and frequent travel can lead to isolation, stress, and an imbalance between work and personal life. To overcome these challenges, companies have to implement policies that promote work-life balance and offer flexible working

arrangements to reduce the mental health risks associated with global operations. (Eurofound, 2020.)

2.2.3 Mental health in Finnish MNCs

Some Finnish MNCs have a proactive approach to employee well-being, with mental health being a key area of focus. Companies such as Nokia and Kone have implemented mental health strategies, that include manager training programs, mental health days, and employee assistance programs. The goal of these strategies is to support employees facing mental health challenges. (Nokia, 2021; Kone, 2022.)

In Finland, mental health awareness is reinforced by strong labor laws that prioritize work-life balance. These laws reflect on the HR policies of Finnish MNCs. Nokia, for instance, offers digital tools that help employees monitor their mental well-being and stress levels (Nokia, 2021, p. 81). Kone has introduced, for example, several types of training for both managers and employees to ensure early identification of any health concerns that could have an effect on wellbeing (Kone, 2022, pp. 19-20.)

2.3 Mental health preventive practices

The prevention of employee's wellbeing challenges in the workplace is an important responsibility for HR (Boxall et al., 2007, p. 68-69). Preventive practices aim to decrease risk factors, such as stress and burnout, which are a threat to employee wellbeing (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004, p. 295). This chapter dives into the preventive strategies practiced by HR departments and takes a look at the current practices adopted by Finnish MNCs.

2.3.1 Preventative HR strategies

Work-life balance initiatives goal is to achieve a healthy relationship between work and life. This is important for the prevention of mental health issues. Examples of such initiatives are flexible working hours and remote work. Their goal is to help the employees manage their responsibilities more efficiently. Another goal is to reduce stress and prevent burnout. Studies indicate that flexible work conditions can alleviate stress and enhance mental health by allowing employees to balance both work and life demands (Kossek & Michel, 2011, pp. 543-544). When organizations provide time off for personal matters, it allows employees to recharge and by this enhance their mental health (Finnish Institute of Occupational Health, n.d.).

The goal of employee wellbeing programs is to prevent mental health challenges from arising. Examples of wellbeing programs can be regular mental health checkups with employees, various wellness activities, and workshops. Proactive well-being programs, like for example training and workshops, aim to prevent burnout, as well as mental health issues (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004, pp. 294-295). A study by Hakanen et al. (2006, p.496) states that well-structured well-being programs enhance employees capabilities to manage work related stress. These capabilities also help employees to improve their mental health.

Mental health related education is an important preventive measure. These initiatives train employees to identify early signs of stress and burnout, and to make sure that they seek help before any mental health problems become too much to bear (Alfes et al., 2011, p. 344). Training programs can teach employees coping strategies. The goal is to empower the employees, teach them resilience and reduce absenteeism at work. An emphasis is also on mental health awareness. A more open and positive organizational culture. These educational programs are also aimed at creating a more open and positive organizational culture. Additionally, research shows that addressing mental health

through awareness training can significantly reduce stigma and encourage employees to seek help (Finnish government, 2021)

2.3.2 Current preventive practices in Finnish MNCs

Finnish organizations have started to put more emphasis on employee well-being initiatives that proactively tackle mental health issues. For example, Nokia has introduced the global wellbeing check program, which includes regular mental health evaluations and provides the needed resources. Quarterly discussions with employees called 1 in 90 are implemented to discuss and evaluate. The goal of these programs is to encourage mental wellbeing among employees. Initiatives also try to identify potential issues and facilitate early interventions, to try to stop challenges from becoming too much. (Nokia, 2021, p. 81.)

Similarly, Kone emphasizes employee wellness through a variety of programs. Their initiatives include, for instance, physical fitness activities, stress management workshops, and mental health days. These mental health days are aimed at encouraging employees to take time off to recover from stress. (Kone, 2022; Kone n.d.) The goal of Kone's practices is to create and foster a supportive organizational environment. In an ideal environment employees should feel free to openly discuss topics related to mental health and seek help if they feel the need to. Such wellness programs try to extinguish stigma and fear. By prioritizing mental health, Kone not only addresses employee needs, but also enhances overall productivity.

Flexibility in work arrangements is another mental health prevention practice implemented by various Finnish MNCs. Companies like Stora Enso are focusing more on HR prevention topics, such as employee engagement. Stora Enso provides options for remote working and adjustable hours, allowing employees to better balance both their professional and personal lives. (Stora Enso, 2021, p.26.)

Flexible working conditions can reduce stress levels of employees and improve their mental health outcomes. Flexible working conditions also encourage employees to rest when needed, and thus improve their efficiency (Kossek & Michel, 2010, p. 544). Stora Enso encourages its employees to have a healthy work-life balance. They make sure of this by committing to offering flexibility and other policies related to the topic. These flexible conditions reduce burnout and increase job satisfaction. By answering diverse employee needs, Stora Enso created an environment focused on mental wellbeing. (Stora Enso, 2021, p. 26).

Education provides a foundation for mental health prevention strategies. Many Finnish MNCs implement mental health awareness training to reduce stigma and increase understanding among employees. Valmet has designed programs to raise mental health awareness. Their aim is to provide employees with skills to recognize signs of mental issues. These types of initiatives create a fostering culture, which offers support and understanding. (Valmet, 2021, p. 59.)

2.4 Mental health management practices

In situations where preventive measures are not working sufficiently, it becomes critical to employ effective mental health management strategies within the workplace. HRM in Finnish MNCs plays an important role in addressing mental health challenges through various programs and support systems (Kelloway, 2017, p. 4). This chapter outlines different mental health management practices and highlights current initiatives undertaken by Finnish MNCs to promote employee well-being.

2.4.1 Management of mental health

Employee assistance programs are a way to manage mental health in an organization. Confidential services, such as counseling, helps employees to address their mental health issues such as anxiety, stress and personal difficulties in life. The goal of EAPs is to offer early intervention, to prevent mental health challenges from having too big impact on work performance. EAPs goal is to increase workplace wellbeing by promoting mental health. These programs aim to reduce absenteeism and increase overall job satisfaction. (Attridge, 2019, pp. 626). When EAPs are incorporated into HR strategies, organizations can better support employees' mental health. This can increase productivity and employee engagement.

Training managers to identify and address mental health issues is important for HRM practices. It allows the managers to better foster a supportive and healthy work environment. HR departments play an important role in ensuring that managers are equipped with the skills to recognize early signs of mental stress and offer the support needed. According to Kelloway (2019, pp. 2-4) trained managers have the possibility to significantly reduce workplace stress. With proper training, managers can identify early signs of mental distress and encourage early interventions. Managerial training needs to be done with a core focus on mental health awareness. Proactive approaches can enhance employee wellbeing and promote productivity.

Employee wellbeing can be supported by HRM policies. Policies can provide employees with easy protocols to follow, as well as offer resources on how to guide employees to seek assistance in cases of mental distress. Carefully defined mental health policies can help promote early intervention by fostering a supportive working environment. These policies can also help reduce stigma (Hesketh & Cooper, 2017, pp. 67-68). Well managed policies can help create a culture of transparency and open dialogue. An open organizational culture is essential for maintaining employee's wellbeing and enhancing effectiveness. (Eurofound, 2020).

2.4.2 Current management practices in Finnish MNCs

Finnish MNCs use EAPs to support employees facing mental health challenges. Such programs can be for example confidential counseling and other types of professional help. The goal of these programs is to help employees manage stress and anxiety before any problems become too critical. For instance, Nokia offers an EAP as part of its wider employee well-being strategy, where employees can access professional mental health services and digital tools for managing stress (Nokia, 2021, p. 92). With these programs, companies can create a proactive approach to mental health management and improve employee well-being.

Kone also includes EAPs in their mental health initiatives. The emphasis on their well-being programs is on mental health awareness. EAPs aim to reduce stress related absenteeism, and to increase employee engagement. An example of an EAP are Kone's stress reduction workshops. The goal of the initiative is to provide employees with the necessary skills to assess and improve their own mental health. These steps are being taken to create a balanced working environment for all employees. (Kone, 2022; Kone, n.d.) Neste implements similar types of EAP programs for their employee's mental wellbeing. Initiatives are offered as a part of their ongoing mental health support. Emphasis is on responsive communication and open discussions between all employees and the management. By taking these steps, Neste wants to make sure that employees are supported in balancing their mental health along-side work pressures (Neste, 2022, p. 43).

Well-trained managers are better equipped to identify early signs of mental health issues and provide the necessary support for each specific case. Nokia has invested in training managers to develop their skills in mental health awareness. The goal of the managerial training is to make sure that the managers are able to respond empathetically and

proactively to distressed employees. This approach fosters a culture of openness and support within Nokia. (Nokia, 2021, pp.81-82.)

Outokumpu focuses on mental health training for managers as a part of their broader well-being strategy as well. The aim of their mental health initiatives is to build resilience while still promoting mental wellbeing. The trained managers are responsible for carrying out suitable interventions and providing each specific case with the correct resources. Outokumpu's emphasis on managerial training highlights the importance of leadership in promoting a supportive work environment. (Outokumpu, 2023, pp.75-76).

At Kone, managers receive specialized training to help them understand mental health issues and guide their teams through any stress that might arise. By equipping managers with the tools to support their teams, Kone ensures that mental health challenges are addressed before they escalate (Kone, 2022, pp. 17-18).

Comprehensive mental health policies are put into action in Finnish MNCs to ensure that employees are aware of the available support resources. Nokia has implemented detailed mental health policies, such as routine check-ins with employees to assess their wellbeing. Nokia's policies promote structured approaches, which help to handle mental health issues. The goal of these approaches is to make sure that employees receive the support needed. (Nokia, 2021, p. 92).

Kone has implemented similar mental health policies. One of their policies is to provide employees with mental health days if they feel the need for it. The aim of these mental health days is to allow their employees to recover from stress without having to worry about any stigma. These types of policies also offer clear guidelines for how employees can access mental health services. Such policies contribute to building a work environment where mental health is openly discussed and supported (Kone, 2022, pp. 17-19; Kone, n.d.)

Stora Enso has integrated mental health policies into both their sustainability and HR initiatives. The company emphasizes regular check-ins, stress management workshops, and flexible work arrangements to create a supportive and balanced working environment. Stora Enso's policies are designed to help employees with their mental health, while still meeting the demands and deadlines of the job. (Stora Enso, 2021, p. 26).

The results from all Finnish MNC's preventive and management strategies are not publicly reported, but the few that have, have resulted in success. Nokia, for example, has reported reductions in absenteeism linked to mental health issues, while Kone has observed improvements in employee well-being following the introduction of mental health programs. Employee satisfaction surveys have shown that these programs contribute to a more positive working environment, where employees feeling more supported and valued. (Nokia, 2021; Kone, 2022.)

2.5 JD-R Model

The JD-R model was developed by Demerouti, Bakker, Nachreiner & Schaufeli (2001) to present an alternative employee well-being model aside the previous studies and models regarding the topic. In this model, work-related external factors, such as stress can be divided into two main categories; job demands and job resources (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007, pp. 312-313). These two categories can influence employees' behavior on two ways, either negatively or a positively. The model was designed comprehensively, so it can be applied to various situations and occupational frameworks, no matter what the case or its various factors. The specific demands and resources can vary in each case, but the JD-R model will still be applicable (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007, pp. 312-313.)

The job demand factor can consist of several different factors. In this category, there are the social, organizational, physical and psychological aspects related to a job. These demands require constant effort or skills. The factors can present both psychological and

physiological strain, or just one of the two. Examples of job demand factors are negative working environment or demanding customers, excess pressure for work from any direction, or draining interactions (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007, p. 312.)

The second category of the model is job resources. This section consists of organizational, social, psychological and physical resources of a job. The category can be divided into three possible resources. First, a resource can be practical in accomplishing working goals. In the second, a resource that can decrease the demand of a job, and by this decrease the personal costs. Third, a resource that presents the opportunity for employees' own growth, development and further learning. These resources can be found at any organizational level. Whether it is on a bigger scale such as opportunities, security and pay, or in smaller everyday connections such as relationships between organizational departments, for example between employees and managers. Also, employees' own part in the organization, and the level of autonomy can act as resources. (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007, pp. 312-313.)

Additionally, Bakker & Demerouti (2007, pp. 313-314) present the idea that there are two psychological actions that have an effect on the formation of pressure or motivation of a job. The first refers to processes declining employee's health, due to deficiently organized jobs or demand. These processes can have a negative effect on both the mental and physical resources of an employee, and by this led to decreased health and stress of an individual. The later action relates to motivation. In this action, it is assumed that resources contain the possibility of motivation. Motivational resources present an opportunity for better engagement, increased performance and better work satisfaction. According to the JR-D model, resources can either have a negative or a positive effect on organizational outcomes, as they are the means of achieving goals in the working environment. See figure 1 below illustrating this model.

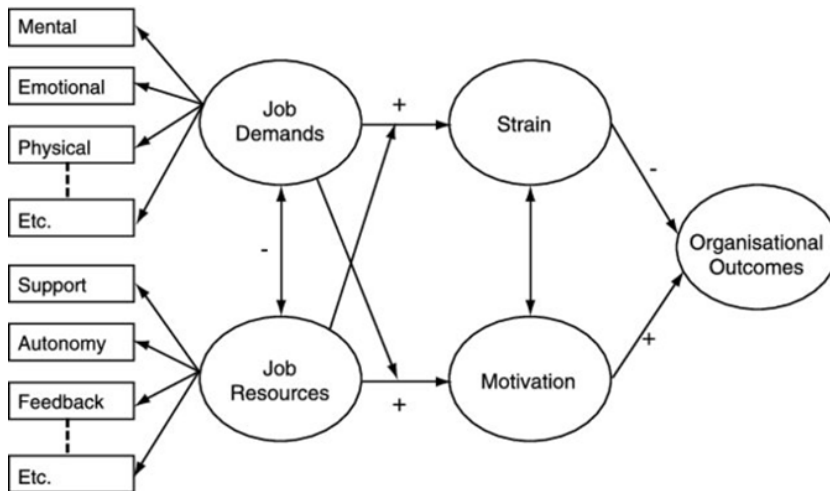


Figure 1. The Job Demand-Resources model (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007, p. 313).

2.5.1 JD-R model and HRM

The JD-R model is a widely used model to help HRM understand employees, their well-being, and performance. It is based on the fact that all jobs create demand, and these demands can turn into strain. But the organization also provide resources to help against these demands and strain factors. In the context of HRM, the JR-D model gives a structured approach on how to balance demand and resources. It can be used to develop strategies to improve employee well-being and their mental health. With these measures, the model can also increase organizational performance. There are several applications for the use of the model in HRM. It can be used to identify and manage job demands, enhance resources, prevent burnout promote engagement, and future applications. (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007, pp. 312-314.)

As discussed, the JD-R model can be used to identify and manage job related demands. The demands of a job are defined as the aspects of work requiring either emotional, cognitive, or physical effort (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007, p. 313). For instance, the level of workload, the number of deadlines, the pressure of the employee's role, and emotional worry over the tasks are all demands. Identification of these demands is an

important task for HRM. The identification of demand can help prevent mental health issues, strain, and burnout. HR can assess demand by, for example, job analysis, surveys, and audits. For HRM to be able to implement the correct actions, firstly the relevant demands have to be identified. Once the identification of demands has been done correctly, the corresponding actions can be taken. For example, if an employee is burdened with too much workload, their work can be decreased to align with the provided resources. Another example, if an employee struggles with their time, time management training could be seen as a needed tool to ease the demands of the job. (Schaufeli & Taris, 2014, pp. 49-50.)

The JD-R model can be used to increase job resources. Job resources can be used to achieve goals, decrease the demand for a job, and better employees' development and growth. As mentioned, these resource aspects can be either social, organizational, physical, or psychological (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007, p. 315.) The JD-R model can be used by HRM as a tool to make sure that the employees have access to the needed resources to respond to the specific demands of each case. For example, HR can offer social support. Examples of social support can be mentorship programs, teamwork, and the promotion of a supportive work environment (Xanthopoulou et al., 2007, p. 125.) If needed, additional autonomy can be offered to employees, to give them more control over their work. The means of this can be for example flexible working hours and other case-related arrangements. HRM can also identify the need for career development as a means of resources. Better opportunities for career development, training, and additional coaching can provide employees with additional motivation and through these better outcomes. (Schaufeli & Taris, 2014, p. 49).

The JD-R model can assess both the negative and positive outcomes when it comes to employees, and their wellbeing (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007, p. 316). This ability can be useful for HRM for preventive operations and engagement promotions. If the demands of a job become greater than the resources, the risk of burnout, exhaustion, cynicism, and decreased efficiency arise. These insights through the model can be used by HRM

to proactively adjust demands and resources. (Bakker, 2011, p. 268.) HRM can foster employee engagement by making sure that recognition, growth opportunities, and feedback are given. Fostering should be done when sufficient resources are available, to engage and encourage employees to better themselves even further (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004, p. 295).

With the JD-R Model, an imbalance between demands and resources can be identified. HRM needs to regularly make sure that the resources of the employees are enough to deal with the demands. By utilizing the JD-R model completely, HRM can implement more thorough and personalized interventions and actions for each case individually, according to the individual needs. For example, if a customer service job presents high demands, HRM can issue emotional intelligence training or the opportunity to speak to counseling services, to increase the availability of resources of the job. (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007, p. 315).

2.5.2 JD-R model and mental health

The JD-R model can be used to define a framework for the relationship between work conditions and employee mental health. An imbalance between demands and resources can affect the mental health of employees at various levels (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007, pp. 310-311). When job demands become too extreme, the imbalance can lead to mental health issues and both short-term and chronic stress. Examples of these include anxiety, depression, and burnout (Schaufeli & Taris, 2014, pp. 48,64). According to Xanthopoulou et al (2007, p.126), research has frequently exhibited that prolonged exposure to demands that are too high without sufficient resources or recovery increases the possibility of decreased wellbeing. These high demands drain both employees' personal and professional resources. (Xanthopoulou et al., 2007, pp. 124-125).

As mentioned before, job resources help battle the demands of jobs, to achieve tasks and goals and they are useful for the overall well-being of an employee (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007, p. 315). Resources help decrease the negative effects of job demand, by this buffer the effect on mental health (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004, p. 297). Resources can enhance employees' well-being by bettering engagement and by resilience promotion against challenges. If employees perceive their resources sufficient against demands, their outlook on mental health is more positive. For instance, their wellbeing can overall be better, their stress levels lower and their satisfaction with the job better. (Bakker, 2011, p. 266).

There are two ways that the JD-R model influences mental health: burnout and engagement. Burnout occurs as the result of high job demands (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007, p. 309). Burnouts, exhaustion, and decreased performance affect the mental health of an employee, as they are linked to several psychological problems, such as depression and anxiety (Schaufeli & Taris, 2014, p. 48,64). On the other end of the scale, when resources are plenty, the employees' well-being increases. Engaged employees are more resilient against negative mental health outcomes, as resources help in the management of stress (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004, p. 298). HRM practices aimed at increasing job resources can act as a promotion of mental well-being and shelter employees from mental health issues.

2.6 AMO Framework

The Ability, Motivation, and Opportunity (AMO) model by Appelbaum et al. (2000) was created to understand employee performance, and how it can be optimized with a focus on three core components: ability, motivation, and opportunity. According to the model, an employee's performance consists of their ability to carry out their job, their engagement in their role, and the organizational opportunities provided. The AMO framework provides a thorough approach to understanding how HRM can enhance employee

performance, increase well-being, decrease stress, and by these measures, prevent mental health issues.

The ability section of the framework consists of the competencies, skills, and knowledge, that help employees perform their tasks and work efficiently. Making sure that employees are equipped with the needed abilities to perform their jobs is important for their stress management and mental health problem prevention. When an employee lacks the needed skills, they can experience increased mental health problems and stress. (Appelbaum et al., 2000.)

The motivation part of the framework is aimed at fostering engagement and the mental well-being of employees. It refers to the employees' own enthusiasm and willingness to engage in their work (Appelbaum et al., 2000). Besides motivation being important for job performance, it also affects the mental health side. Motivated employees are more satisfied with their jobs and are not as likely to suffer from stress or mental health-related issues. On the other hand, when an employee's motivation is lost, it can affect their performance and cause issues such as burnout and anxiety.

The opportunity section of the framework is aimed at creating supportive working environments. It addresses the organizational environment that empowers employees to apply their motivation and abilities to their work. (Appelbaum et al., 2000). The opportunity consists of aspects like access to resources, working as a team, workplace culture, and the working environment. Giving employees the possibility to be a part of decision-making and collaboration, for example, fosters the well-being of the entire workplace.



Figure 2. AMO Framework by Appelbaum et al. (2000).

2.6.1 AMO and HRM

The ability component of the framework highlights how important it is to provide employees with the needed skill set, knowledge, and competencies to be an effective part of the workforce. HR practices can play a vital role in this process. Ways of providing ability to employees can be for example training and development programs, aimed at developing and enhancing employees' abilities. By having continuous learning and development opportunities, HR can decrease job-related stress. In workplaces where employees feel confident in their skills and capabilities, the likelihood of having issues decreases (Jiang et al., 2012, p. 1272). Miscommunication and misunderstanding can be prevented by enforcing clear and open communication about the role and expectations of a role. (Schaufeli & Taris, 2014, p. 59).

Implementing effective and correct recruitment and employee selection processes makes sure that well-suited people are hired. Carefully chosen new employees increase the abilities and productivity of the company. HR needs to make sure that candidates not only meet the required competencies, but also fit into the organizational culture. Additionally, investing in skills development leads to better organizational performance, as employees are trained to be competent. (Combs et al, 2006, p. 502.) Research by Gerhart (2005, pp.179-180) suggests that the long-term success of these HRM practices depends on combining the training programs and initiatives with both the company's and

the employee's goals. These ability-enhancing strategies also contribute to the whole organization's success.

Motivation in terms of HRM refers to the incentives aimed at fostering and increasing the motivation of the employees. These incentives can be, for example, performance management, promotions, recognition programs, and rewards systems (Gerhart, 2005, p. 182). According to Ryan and Deci (2000, pp. 69-70), motivation can be influenced by internal factors like satisfaction with your job, and outside factors such as recognition and reward systems. Providing employees with the means for internal motivation, such as meaning for their work, autonomy to make decisions, and growth opportunities have a positive effect on the mental health of employees. Giving constructive feedback can act as an incentive for improvement. Alfes et al (2011, p. 344) found out that when employees are given constructive and fair appraisals for their performance, they are more motivated and engaged with their work. When employee motivations and organizational goals are aligned, HR can create a working environment where people are more engaged and valued. Additionally, motivation can be strengthened by making sure that employees have sufficient resources to do their jobs well. The Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) model, as previously mentioned, highlights that resources like autonomy, social support, and opportunities for career development are strongly associated with employee engagement and wellbeing (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007, p. 315). As mentioned previously, HRM needs to prioritize fostering a motivational workplace, where the required resources and support are provided for wellbeing of the employees.

The last part of the framework, opportunity, refers to the organizational frameworks and procedures that help employees apply their skills and motivation to contribute effectively to the organization. Appelbaum et al. (2000, p.45) note that having the right skills and motivation is not enough, and employees also need opportunities to engage in decision-making and take on meaningful tasks within their work. Practices that increase opportunities include job design, employee empowerment, and participative decision-making. Employee engagement can be improved by HR operations. For example by

fostering open communication, offering flexible working options and by inclusive decision making. Remote work, and job-sharing are other examples of how HR can provide improved opportunities for employees. The goal of employee engagement is to help reduce stress and promote healthy work-life balance. Providing opportunities is particularly important in multinational organizations where employees face diverse demands (Kossek & Ruderman, 2011, pp. 242). HR practices allow employees to better their skills and actively contribute to the organization's success by offering opportunities like autonomy, rotation and additional involvement. Boxall and Macky (2009, p.17) highlight that high-involvement work systems, which focus on employee participation and decision-making, result in improved job satisfaction and organizational commitment.

2.6.2 AMO and mental health

The AMO framework gives HRM tools in how to manage mental health, and to make sure that the focus is not only on performance enhancement but also on employees' physical and mental well-being. The Ability aspect of the framework, in the context of mental health, emphasizes giving employees the necessary skills and tools to handle job-related pressure. Training programs that cover stress management, resilience, and mental health awareness play a key role in helping employees cope with work demands, without harming their mental health. According to Alfes et al (2011), employees who are well-prepared with coping strategies and support are less likely to express signs of burnout and mental fatigue.

The motivation part of the framework is closely connected to employee mental health. Motivation drives employees towards both personal and organizational goals, and the type of motivation received has a significant effect on mental wellbeing. Working environments that nurture motivation through purpose, recognition, and positive feedback are less likely to face stress or anxiety. Motivated employees are more engaged and experience higher levels of well-being. In contrast, excessive reliance on external rewards

and pressures can increase stress and mental health concerns. (Ryan & Deci, 2000, p. 70.) HRM practices aimed at motivating employees help create an environment of support, which benefits the well-being and mental health of employees (Alfes et al, 2011, pp. 345-346).

As mentioned in the previous chapter, the opportunity part of the framework consists of providing employees with the ability to actively participate in their work. Opportunities allow employees to make decisions and have control over their own tasks. These abilities are important for maintaining mental health and employee wellbeing, as opportunities give employees a sense of control over their work. Giving employees chances to take part in decision-making and engage in meaningful work allows them to fully apply their skills and motivation, which then boosts both their well-being and mental health (Appelbaum et al, 2000, p. 45; Boxall & Macky, 2009, p.13). Therefore, offering employees the chance to actively participate in and shape their work not only benefits their mental health, but also contributes to the overall organizational success.

2.7 Previous studies related to the topic

There is a vast amount of research done on the topic of HR practices aimed at prevention and management of mental health issues. HR plays an integral role in addressing and managing mental health issues in MNCs. Although literature specifically targeting Finnish MNCs is not as researched topic, existing research on workplace mental health provides relevant insights. The field of occupational health has focused on researching prevention of mental health problems at work is a researched topic. LaMontagne et al. (2014) emphasize that mental health prevention strategies, including creating supportive work environments, reducing job stressors, and encouraging work-life balance, are effective in preventing mental health issues.

HRM strategies focused on mental health have been shown to play a significant role in fostering a mentally healthy workplace. Kossek and Michel (2010) state that flexible work arrangements, such as remote work and adjustable schedules, ease the pressures employees face both personally and professionally. The study reveals that burnout can be reduced with flexibility. Additionally, these measures can improve job satisfaction. Similarly, Biron and van Veldhoven (2012) researched that emotional resilience strategies, such as stress management workshops and emotional competency training, have a direct impact on decreasing chronic stress. Resilience strategies also promote mental well-being among employees.

MNCs face unique challenges when addressing mental health due to their global and culturally diverse workforces. Dowling et al. (2013) identify what pressures employees in multinational environments face. Examples of these pressures are difficulties with cross-cultural communication and frequent travel, which can cause stress. MNCs have to implement flexible and localized mental health strategies to address these challenges. Such strategies need to be tailored to each country specifically. Dewe and Cooper (2020) emphasize the importance of offering localized mental health support to global employees, such as region-specific counseling services and well-being initiatives.

Mental health prevention is integrated into wellbeing strategies in Finnish organizations. Hakanen et al, (2006) researched that Finnish companies prioritize work-life balance and regular mental health assessments. These priorities result in lower rates of burnout and higher levels of employee engagement. Finnish corporations place significant emphasis on promoting work-life balance, with Eurofound (2020) reporting that many Finnish companies offer regular mental health check-ins and flexible working conditions as part of their mental health initiatives.

Although research specifically targeting mental health strategies in Finnish MNCs is limited, examples from companies like Nokia and Kone provide valuable insights. Nokia's sustainability report (2021) outlines the company's mental health programs, including

EAPs, stress management workshops, and flexible working policies. Nokia and Kone's initiatives have shown to reduce absenteeism and improve employee satisfaction. Kone additionally (2022; n.d.) emphasizes that managers need to be trained regarding mental health. This training creates a more open and supportive environment for employees. Such efforts have resulted in lower rates of mental health-related absenteeism and increased job satisfaction.

Previous research emphasizes the importance of comprehensive HR strategies, such as, flexible work arrangements, and managerial training, to promote mental health and to prevent issues from escalating too much in the workplace. Finnish MNCs, such as Nokia and Kone, have successfully implemented mental health initiatives, yet further research is necessary to explore the employee perspective more comprehensively. Even though existing research shows that HR strategies contribute to improved satisfaction and reduced stress, more empirical data is needed to better understand HR's impact on Finnish MNCs.

3 Research methodology

The methodology section outlines the processes used to address the research questions and the objectives of the study. It provides the framework to ensure the validity and reliability of the study. This is done by selecting the appropriate methods for the data collection and for the accuracy of the results collected.

3.1 Research approach

Choosing the correct research approach is crucial for successful research. Choosing the correct approach and getting the correct data in regard to the research topic, make sure that the study succeeds. (Baumard & Ibert, 2001, p.83). Firstly, you need to identify what kind of data you need to investigate the research question. (Royer & Zarlowski, 2001, p.121). Qualitative research aims to see the research topic in question from an interviewee's perspective, and to investigate how they have landed in their opinions (King, 2004, p.11). Additionally, qualitative research methods gives the opportunity to alter the questions asked according to the situation, which can result in more accurate and precise data. The method also offers greater flexibility for data collection compared to quantitative methods. (Baumard & Ibert, 2001, pp. 81-82.)

This study will use a qualitative research approach to investigate HRM practices aimed at preventing and managing mental health issues within Finnish MNC's. Qualitative research is well-suited for getting detailed answers and getting a deeper understanding of the personal experiences of individuals (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 35). As the focus is on employee perspectives regarding the effectiveness of HRM practices, this approach allows more flexibility to explore interviewees insights and experiences more thoroughly.

3.2 Research design

A research design outlines the overall strategy for addressing the research questions and the objectives. Saunders, et al. (2007, p. 131) explain that an effective research design should include well-defined objectives based on your research questions, clearly identifying the sources of data collection, and considering the constraints you might face, such as time, budget, data access, and location. It should also address any ethical considerations that may arise during the research process.

The design chosen for this research is a semi-structured interview format, which provides the ability to cover specific themes, while still ensuring that all the essential topics are addressed (Bryman, 2016, pp. 241-242). The chosen research design aligns with the research questions, which focus on how HRM departments respond to mental health challenges. Semi-structured qualitative research allows participants to discuss about their own personal experiences with their own words. With this method, the researcher can get a deeper insight into participants opinions. Additionally, the semi-structured method allows you to explore further and discuss possible additional topics emerging from the questionnaire, to build on the unique responses of each interviewee. (Saunders et al, 2007, p.315). The interview questions of the research were formed around the main topics discussed in the introduction and theoretical portion of the thesis. The framework for the interview can be found in Appendix 1.

3.3 Data collection and sample

According to Royer and Zarlowski (2001, p.121) there are four principles to data collection: the type of data collected, the method used for analysis, the nature of the observation and sample, and the source of the data. All of these elements must be appropriate and coherent for the research at hand. Different company levels provide different types

of data, which could be sufficient depending on the subject researched. The interviewer has to analyze and decide which sample will give the data needed (Royer & Zarlowski, 2001, p.122).

For this research, primary data is collected in the form of interviews to gather precise information useful for the case. Data collection is conducted through semi-structured interviews with employees from Finnish MNCs. A purposive sampling strategy will apply to select participants who possess relevant experiences concerning HRM practices and mental health initiatives (Patton, 2015, p. 243). For this case, there were 10 participants chosen from five different Finnish MNC's, to gain a deeper understanding from more than one organization's ways. The sample size was collected through the interviewee's personal connections, and from their suggested connections. The participants do not represent any specific age, gender, culture or religion. What connects them, is being part of Finnish multinational corporations' workforces. An overview of the participants and the interviews can be found below in table 1.

Table 1. Overview of the interviews.

Participant	Interview day	Duration (min)	Finnish MNC
1	6 th of June	56	Company A
2	21 st of June	62	Company A
3	8 th of June	49	Company B
4	22 nd of August	55	Company B
5	18 th of July	58	Company C
6	22 nd of August	47	Company C
7	19 th of July	56	Company D
8	1 st of August	50	Company D
9	4 th of September	51	Company E
10	12 th of September	40	Company E

Each interview lasted approximately 45-60 minutes and was conducted either in-person or virtually, depending on participants' personal preference. Before starting the question portion of the interviews, the participants were shortly introduced to the topic of thesis, and the main theories and terms related to the questions were explained. All of the participants wished to answer anonymously, so this was promised before their consent was received. The interviews were recorded for the data analysis portion of the thesis. After they were written down to help the analysis, their recordings were deleted. The collection of data took place between June and September of 2024. Due to the interviewers' work schedule, and participants work and holiday schedules, the data was collected over many months. The interviews were held either in English or Finnish, depending on the preference of the participant. As some were more comfortable discussing the topic in their mother language, the interview guidelines and questions were translated into Finnish to accommodate these interviewees.

3.4 Data analysis

Qualitative data analysis is done with the help of thematic analysis. In thematic analysis, the researcher identifies, analyzed and interpret patterns and themes from the collected data (Braun & Clarke, 2005, p. 15). The analysis process will include stages such as familiarizing oneself with the data and developing themes that emerge from the participants' narratives (Fereday & Muir-Cochrane, 2006, p. 83). This method allows for a detailed understanding of HRM practices and their impact on mental health from an employee perspective, as well as the unique cultural context present in Finnish organizations. Data analysis is a continuous process moving back and forth between theory and the research data collected (Baumard & Ibert, 2001, p.71). The data collected through the analysis is categorized according to the topics most relevant for the research.

3.5 Reliability and Validity

When research findings are stable and consistent, they can be called reliable. This means that the same results are accessible with the same data collection method and techniques on multiple occasions. Reliability is used to assess the quality of a study, by ensuring that the results are repeatable under similar conditions again. The reliability of research can be strengthened by choosing the correct research approach and methods. The correct data collection methods also makes sure that findings are not due to random factors or errors but are trustworthy and replicable. (Saunders et al., 2009, p. 150). Reliability issues can arise from biases when conducting qualitative research. There can be biases from the interviewer's perspective, or from the interviewees. For example, the tone of a voice or a person's behavior can create biases, which can affect the received data. Also, pre-existing perceptions could cause a bias towards the interview. (Saunders et al, 2007, p.318). The interviewer has to make sure that no internal biases or opinions are shown, so they cannot have an influence on the validity of the results. As semi-structured interviews do not follow standardization, this can cause lack of reliability. (Saunders et al, 2007, p.318) To overcome the issues arising from reliability in data quality, Saunders et al. (2007, p.319) consider complexity and dynamics of the research type. Non-standard interviews reflect the situation and reality at hand and offer flexibility for the exploration of the topic. Even though the results might not be repeatable, it does not mean that they are not reliable. (Saunders et al, 2007, p.319).

Validity, on the other hand, concerns the accuracy of the research and whether the methods used truly measure what they were meant to measure. Validity ensures that the study captures the right data and leads to the required results. There are different types of validity, including internal validity, which assesses whether the study design correctly addresses the research questions, and external validity, which looks at whether the findings can be generalized beyond the study context (Bryman & Bell, 2015, p. 49; Saunders et al., 2007, pp. 136-137). The chosen data collection method could argue against the validity of the results, as qualitative data is built on personal experiences,

which can vary depending on the specific data chosen (Baumard & Ibert, 2001, p.70; Royer & Zarlowski, 2001, p.121.) Quantitative research gives more internal validity than qualitative, as the method gives more precise data (Baumard & Ibert, 2001, p. 80). But for this case, which is based on personal experiences, more case in hand accurate data comes through qualitative data collection. The external validity of the study can be increased by getting more data (Baumard & Ibert, 2001, p. 80). Both reliability and validity are essential for ensuring the quality and trustworthiness of research findings.

4 Research results

This chapter presents the findings gathered from the interview conducted with employees from five Finnish MNCs. The goal was to explore each individuals' perceptions of HR practices related to prevention and management of mental health related challenges. The interview framework was built around four different parts. To begin, the participants were asked to introduce themselves, how long they have worked at the company and what their role there is. In the second part, the participants were interviewed on their general understanding of mental health and HR in their companies. Once the base was established, the second part focused on HR mental health issue prevention in their companies. Section three aimed to collect information on current HRM practices dealing with mental health management in their organizations. In the last part, participants got to give their own opinions on how mental health issue prevention and management in companies could be improved. Several core themes emerged from the interviews. The interview results showcase both the positive and negative aspects of current prevention and management strategies. The employee feedback offers insight into the impact of mental health strategies.

4.1 Mental health awareness and culture

Many participants mentioned that they had noticed their company addressing mental health and raising awareness of it. Especially since the COVID-19 pandemic hit globally. For example, Participant 4 stated that "They have been focusing a lot on mental health in the past years. I think it is due to the whole pandemic and people feeling more alone. We sometimes get emails about mental health related things like new supports systems or such. It feels like they actually care about the employees." The increase in mental health discussion is seen as a positive thing from employees' perspective. A couple

interviewees mentioned that the companies have started to pay attention to previously overlooked things.

However, even though mental health awareness has increased, support systems are not completely infused into companies' cultures. Participant 2 mentioned that "Mental health is definitely more talked about these days, but it still feels a bit odd and new. It feels like everyone doesn't take the topic seriously." There is a common theme arising from the interviews that the integration of mental health discussion and initiatives in daily working life is inconsistent.

"I think mental health is seen as important topic in the company, and there's definitely more discussion about now than there was before. The company has introduced resources like counseling services and wellness programs over the years. For example, they have sent out reminders to remember to take care of yourself. However, I feel like mental health is not fully integrated into our daily work culture. The resources often feel like optional extras rather than core support, for the company to showcase on the outside that they care. It feels a bit silly that HR encourages us to take care of our mental health but there is unspoken pressure to keep up with your work. The pressure to do better constantly makes it hard for people to take care of themselves. The company offers support, but it feels like it's up to you to seek it out. "(Participant 9)

This points to a gap between HR's mental health intentions and the actual implementation. Employees are aware of the current offered resources, but they feel that the current mental health support is not fully integrated into the organization's cultures. A few of the participants mentioned that the taboo topic of mental health needs to be more normalized in their everyday interactions.

4.2 Current HRM approaches

A recurring theme amongst the interviews was that HR departments tend to act in a more reactive way, rather than proactive when it comes to mental health management.

It was perceived that the focus is mainly in dealing with the issues, rather than proactively prevent them. Participants thought positively about HR offering support, but there were mentions about the wishes for more proactive strategies.

“They have rolled out some initiatives, like occasional wellness programs and mental health awareness sessions, but it doesn’t feel like they truly understand what we need. It feels like they try to care, but there is a gap between what HR thinks is helpful for us and what actually supports us in the day-to-day work. It’s like they want to help, but they’re not really listening to what we’re saying about the pressure and stress we face constantly. There are some resources available to us, but in my opinion, they don’t address the actual challenges we encounter daily and need help in.” (Participant 3)

“HR has been introducing more wellness initiatives lately, like stress management tools and access to counseling, but it often feels like they’re reacting to problems after they’ve already come up rather than trying to prevent them in the first place. I have noticed that when employees start feeling burnt out, that’s when the support appears. Instead of having access at all times to help to keep stress levels in check. The initiatives are a step in the right direction for sure, but they lack the means to offer help before any mental health related issues become bigger problems.” (Participant 7)

These types of responses show that while HR is committed to supporting employees, their strategies are to respond after the issues become visible. Another participant mentioned that only after employees start to show symptoms of burnout or stress-related absences, does HR step in with resources like counseling. There is a lack of ongoing preventive measures.

4.3 Communication and awareness of available resources

Effective communication related to mental health resources arised as a significant challenge from the interviews. While companies are making efforts to share information about their offered services, employees often feel that this communication is not engaging enough to gain much participation. Participant 5 mentioned that occasionally they

have meetings where HR brings up mental health initiatives, and that there are posters in the office. Mental health related topics are talked about, but people don't always end up engaging with the available resources.

“We get emails, and some occasional presentations during events, that inform us about the resources available. They have mentioned counseling and stress management at least. To be honest, it often feels like these types of things are one-time reminders rather than proper engagement and care. It’s easy for those emails to get lost among other messages, and after the events, there never is any follow-up. I think HR could do more to actively engage with us, like having more direct conversations or like regular check-ins. I think check-ins would remind people of the resources, and this would maybe ensure that it is okay to get help if you need it. Like more consistent presence might encourage more employees to actually use the support that’s available.” (Participant 8)

The interviews show that many employees are aware of the support services offered, but there is a gap between awareness and actual usage of the support services. Participant 6 pointed out that they raise awareness through emails and the occasional workshop. In their opinion communication from HR is decent, but employees do not use the services, as they are not seen as enough.

These types of answers show that current initiatives and the communication related are not enough to get employees to utilize the services properly. It was also mentioned that the mental health resources and communication felt passive. That it is entirely up to the employee to seek out the support needed. There is a lack of engagement between employees and HR to communicate.

4.4 Effectiveness of current initiatives

The effectiveness of current mental health initiatives divided the participants’ opinions, as some initiatives were seen as a waste of resources, when others were highly praised. For example, flexible working arrangements, such as the possibility to work remotely,

were seen as a plus. According to a couple of interviewees, flexible arrangements help them to manage stress, and in their opinion, to perform better. Participant 7 stated that having flexible working hours and the opportunity to work from home has helped to manage their time better and have a positive effect on their mental health.

“Policies like flexible working hours have definitely been beneficial to me. Being able to adjust my schedule or work from home when needed has helped reduce some of the everyday stress I face. But I feel like when it comes to mental health, it seems like the focus is more on addressing issues after they’ve already caused damage to the company rather than preventing them in the first place. Like the company is more concerned about their money than of the people working hard to achieve those results. There is a need for some sort of measures recognizing when workloads are getting too heavy or when stress levels are rising before they become major problems.” (Participant 10)

While programs like EAPs and counseling services were seen in a positive light, many participants pointed out that the prevention measures did not go far enough to address the cause behind the issues. Participant 6 mentioned that even though they have access to wellness apps and gym discounts, mental health needs more than surface-level perks. This was further emphasized by Participant 3, who remarked, “The well-being days we get occasionally have helped to ease stress, but they don’t really help take care of where the stress is coming from.”

These responses indicate that while support programs are available, they often focus on treating symptoms rather than addressing the sources of workplace stress. Many of the participants mentioned the importance of initiatives that directly tackle factors like workload and time pressures. A couple suggested that a more balanced approach is needed, such as approaches offering immediate support while also working to reduce the main causes behind the struggles.

4.5 Barriers to access mental health resources

The interview results show that even though there are available resources for the participants to use, they feel hesitant to take full advantage of them. Several barriers prevent employees from accessing these services. A common challenge highlighted by many participants is the stigma associated with seeking help.

"I think that stigma is a huge barrier when it comes to accessing mental health resources in our company. Even though the company has made support services like counseling and wellness programs available, many employees in the company have hesitated to use them. Me and many of my colleagues feel that by reaching out for help, we might be perceived negatively by managers or peers. Like it was a sign that we can't handle the pressures of the job. I worry that seeking help could affect my reputation or career progression within the organization. It's not just about the availability of services, it's also about how comfortable we feel getting help without facing judgment or bias. These issues make it difficult for people to take advantage of the services. I know of a few people who have refused to get help because they feel like they would be labeled in a bad light of anybody found out." (Participant 1)

Participant 9 shared similar concerns about confidentiality, stating their concern about privacy. Some of their colleagues have also worried that using these services might be seen negatively during performance reviews or that it could affect their career development. Logistical challenges were also mentioned to have an effect on the insufficient use of mental health resources.

"There are logistical challenges, such as finding time for appointments during working hours. This makes accessing mental health resources difficult for me at least. Many of us have busy schedules, and it's tough to carve out time for a counseling session or a workshop without it interfering with workload. Even though we are offered support, the reality of trying to attend sessions during the day often means sacrificing productivity or falling behind on tasks. This becomes a significant barrier, as it can feel like you have to choose between taking care of your mental health and keeping up with work demands. The lack of flexibility in scheduling makes it harder for employees to engage with these services when they need them the most." (Participant 4)

Participant 8 also mentioned that the counseling sessions offered are usually only available during standard working hours, which would mean that they have to take time away from the job if they want to be present. This means that he cannot utilize the services offered without the work demands increasing in response. These answers show that practical barriers, alongside cultural concerns, can limit employees' willingness and ability to use the support services provided.

4.6 Challenges and work-life balance

Work-life balance is promoted in several of the interviewees companies through policies such as remote work and flexible hours, but many found maintaining the balance hard due to both ongoing and changing work demands.

"Yes, work-life balance is definitely a topic that comes up sometimes. The company offers us flexible hours, and that's been a big help for me personally. It allows some room to adjust my schedule according to the situation at hand. It makes a real difference in managing daily life, like allowing me to pick up the kids from daycare. But sometimes even with this flexibility, the workload can become overwhelming or I am not able to finish assignments on time. I often feel like the demand keeps piling up on me and the pressure to meet deadlines remains too high. It just isn't realistic. These kinds of situations make it difficult to successfully switch off after work and find time to rest properly." (Participant 2)

"The company makes an effort to promote work-life balance, with policies like remote working. I think this is a step in the right direction. These initiative give more control over our time and schedules. But despite them, the culture still tends to encourage long hours, especially during peak periods. It's like the flexibility is there in theory, but in practice, the expectation to stay on top of everything doesn't really change, making it truly hard to find the balance between work and life." (Participant 9)

These types of responses indicate that while the intention to support work-life balance exists, the reality of high workloads can undermine these efforts. Several participants mentioned that they wish for HR approaches to be more comprehensive, that they are

realistic and have manageable expectations. It was pointed out that the demands and resources were imbalanced. That for example too unrealistic deadlines counterbalanced the benefits they have. Participant 3 also mentioned, that the possibility to work remotely can sometimes blur the boundaries between their work and personal time. According to them, remote work has on some occasions caused them to work longer hours in order to keep up with the workload. These examples create a situation, where policies that are intended to improve work-life balance, are not always effective in practice.

4.7 Improvement suggestions and new ideas

The participants shared a range of suggestions for improving HRM practices related to mental health issues. An ongoing opinion through the interviews was the need for ongoing and more personalized support. Participant 5 suggested that HR should implement a mental health ambassador initiative, where every department would have an ambassador, someone who's approachable and trained to provide initial support and guidance when needed. The ambassador would offer confidentiality, so the employees could engage with ease not worrying about any barriers. Another recommendation from Participant 3 was the introduction of mental health days where employees can take a day off specifically to rest and recover without needing to justify it as sick leave or lose any of their pay. Additionally, there was an emphasis on the need of more manager involvement in mental health conversations.

"I believe HR should take a more proactive approach in the company by offering targeted training to managers. They should get training on how to recognize the early signs of stress or burnout in team members, and how to approach each case with the needed tools. Currently in the company, people get help only after the issue has become pretty serious. This kind of training could create a more supportive environment where employees feel seen and heard. It could also allow for earlier intervention, so nothing got too serious. I think that a lot of sick leaves could be prevented or shortened at least with proper prevention." (Participant 4)

It was also suggested by another participant that regular mental health check-ins and enhanced training for managers could improve HR's ability to identify early signs of stress. These steps would enable HR to intervene before challenges become severe. There was a wish for a more proactive approach, such as offering wellness workshops throughout the year rather than just during crises.

Participants had a lot of ideas about how HR could be improved. Participant 6 suggested that instead of just promoting stress-relief activities, HR should work with managers to balance workloads better. Additionally, according to participant 6, management should make sure that the workload is divided equally and realistically among all employees.

The interview results show that there is a desire for more proactive approaches when it comes to the prevention and management of mental health. According to the interviews, an ideal approach would include both policy adjustments as well as cultural shift. Policies should be changed to be more realistic, and the culture of the workplace should be taken into consideration more. By implementing these changes, HR departments could enhance their ability to support employees more effectively and create a healthier working environment with better employee well-being.

5 Discussion

This chapter incorporates the findings of the study and addresses how they relate to the research questions and objectives. The research results are incorporated into the theoretical frameworks of the JD-R and AMO models. The discussion chapter discusses the results and links them with the existing literature.

The research problem of the thesis focuses on the challenges Finnish MNCs face to effectively implement HRM strategies that address mental health in the workplace. Although HRM plays a vital role in fostering a positive working environment, a gap exists between the intent of these policies and the practical impact on employee well-being. The aim of the study is to close this gap by examining how HRM practices in Finnish MNCs could be better adapted, to prevent mental health issues and support employee well-being. The research questions were developed to help the research.

The primary research question is:

"How do Finnish multinational firms' HRM departments prevent mental health issues?"

The research question is further explored through three sub-questions:

"What HRM practices are currently implemented in Finnish multinational companies to address employee-related mental health issues?"

"How are employees perceiving the effectiveness of current HRM practices in reducing mental health challenges?"

"How can HRM practices be changed, adapted, or should new ones be implemented to actively prevent mental health issues further?"

The study's objectives were to identify current HRM practices, assess employee perceptions, explore opportunities for improvement, and propose new preventive approaches to better manage mental health in Finnish MNCs.

The literature review and the interviews identified several HR practices that Finnish MNCs have implemented to support their employee's mental health. Examples of these are EAPs, flexible working arrangements, and wellbeing initiatives. The goal of these strategies is to create an environment of support. The employees are provided with resources to manage stress and balance their work with personal life. Several interviewees appraised flexible working hours and remote work options to help manage personal and professional responsibilities.

The findings of the interviews revealed that many of these practices tend to be more reactive rather than proactive. Reactive practices focus on addressing issues after they emerge. This does not help with the prevention of mental health issues. Despite employee assistance programs and initiatives, logistical challenges often affect the effectiveness of the initiatives negatively. These findings align with previous literature on the topic of different HRM approaches. Literature emphasizes the need for a more anticipatory approach for HRM strategies (Goetzel et al., 2018, p. 325).

There was a consistent theme of dissatisfaction with the accessibility of mental health resources, as well as on the theme of visibility in the interviews. Employees mentioned that the stigma associated with seeking mental health support, prevents the usage. Confidentiality concerns also acted as a preventive barrier. These findings suggest that there is a misalignment between the intended goals of HRM initiatives and their practical implications. Although resources exist, their underutilization due to cultural barriers indicates a need for HRM to address the underlying issues of stigma and the need to create a more open environment for discussing mental health.

5.1 Adapted JD-R model

The findings of the study interpreted through the JD-R model, provide an understanding of how Finnish MNCs' HRM practices impact employee mental health from an employee

point of view. The JD-R model, offers insights into how the organization's support structures can either ease or worsen mental health challenges for employees (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007, p. 312). Through the analysis of employee interviews, several key elements—job demands, resources, strain, and engagement, emerged, offering a comprehensive view of the workplace environment from an employee perspective. An adapted JD-R model for this research can be found below.

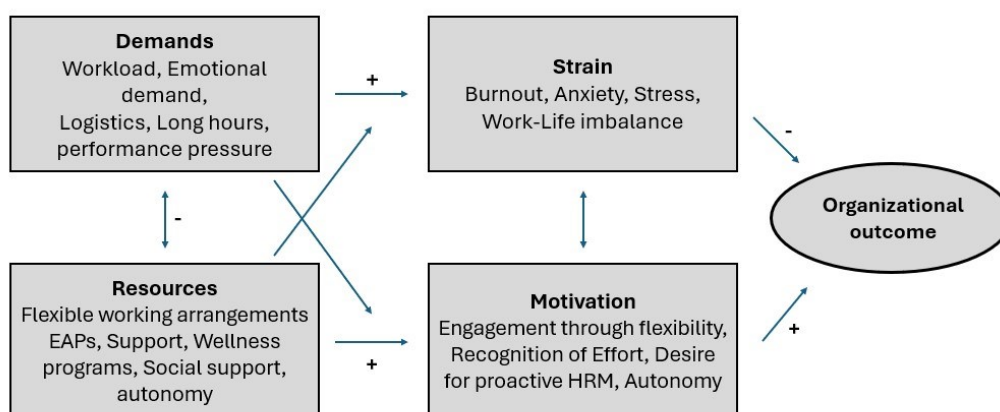


Figure 3. Adapted JD-R model.

An important finding from the interviews are the significant job demands faced by employees in Finnish MNCs, which aligns with the JD-R model's concept of job demands as factors contributing to employee strain. High workloads, tight deadlines, and pressure to keep up productivity were common themes. These also fit in with the JD-R model's classification of job demands, including the psychological, cognitive, and physical efforts required from employees (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007, pp. 312-313).

For instance, participants like participant 3 emphasized that, despite having flexible work options, the pressure to meet deadlines often resulted in extended working hours. This suggests that while flexibility is offered, the heavy workload often cancel out these benefits, leading to work-life imbalance and elevated emotional strain. According to the JD-

R framework, continuous exposure to intense job demands without proper opportunity for rest can contribute to burnout (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007, p. 311).

Emotional toll was mentioned as an issue by several interview participants. Mental health stigma is one of the biggest problems when it comes to the effectiveness of preventive measures. Even though HR departments have enhanced their focus on mental health support, cultural factors and stereotypes prevent many from seeking help due to concerns over judgment or negative career impacts. These emotional challenges contribute to an increased psychological burden, consistent with the JD-R model's view that negative job aspects can significantly contribute to stress (Schaufeli & Taris, 2014, p. 51).

In the JD-R model, job resources play an important role in decreasing the harmful effects of job demands by offering support and growth opportunities. The study showed what resources Finnish MNCs provide, like for example wellness initiatives and supportive management. However, the success of the provided resources depends heavily on the employee perceptions and the employees willingness to use them.

Many participants, like Participant 10, appreciated the flexibility to adjust their work schedules, which helped manage stress daily. This aligns with the JD-R model where job resources can enhance autonomy and give control over work, and by this, improving employee engagement (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007, p. 315). Flexible work options allow employees to balance their work and personal commitments, serving as a motivational factor.

Even though counseling services and wellness programs are available, many employees mentioned that they are difficult to access. For example, logistical issues like scheduling counseling sessions during working hours often made it challenging to participate in these services without disrupting productivity. There is a gap between the provided resources and their practical application. This shows an area for improvement, such as offering a variety of available times for counselling sessions or integrating mental health

support into regular everyday working life. According to the JD-R model, such modifications could strengthen the supportive role of resources, decreasing the negative impact of job demands on mental health (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007, p. 315).

The strain reported by employees aligns with the burnout process described in the JD-R model. As highlighted by participants like participant 7, HR interventions often seem more reactive than preventive, with support offered mainly after stress levels or mental health issues became too problematic. This shows that employees face the risk of burnout if the demand becomes too much without sufficient resources. Additionally, strain can emerge from both emotional and logistical barriers of a job. For instance, emotional burden is created from the stigma attached to seeking professional help to mental health issues. This increases their stress levels and decreases their wellbeing. The JD-R model suggests that when resources are not perceived as accessible or when obstacles limit their use, the protective effects of these resources are reduced, resulting in heightened strain (Schaufeli & Taris, 2014, p. 52).

Excessive demands drain employees mental and psychical energy, which can lead to a diverse range of negative health outcomes (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007, pp. 313). This could be observed from the interviews when burnout and anxiety were discussed, as too excessive demand from the organization was mentioned having negative effects on the participants wellbeing. The findings indicate that, even with available job resources, the risk of burnout remains significant if the resources are not effectively aligned with the employees' needs. According to the interview data, support systems often fail to intervene early enough to prevent issues like anxiety from escalating into bigger problems causing absenteeism. These opinions show the importance of proactive HR measures. How they are better than reactive HRM strategies in easing the strain caused by high job demands.

Motivation emerged as one of the key themes from the interview results. Resources like autonomy can lead to higher levels of employee engagement, and by this, to better

motivation. Many of the interviewees wanted to see more proactive measures in the future. These measures would help address issues before they escalate. This reflects the motivational aspect of the JD-R model, which points out that sufficient resources can enhance engagement, and with this, improve job satisfaction and overall well-being (Bakker, 2011, p. 267). Participants also noted that having control over their schedules allowed them to manage their stress more effectively, leading to better job engagement and satisfaction. According to the JD-R model, this sense of autonomy is closely linked to intrinsic motivation, contributing to higher performance and reduced stress at the same time (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007, pp. 313-314).

5.2 Adapted AMO model

The adapted AMO model examines how abilities, motivation, and opportunities influence employee performance and well-being within Finnish MNCs. By analyzing how each element of the AMO model impacts discretionary efforts and mental health, this chapter highlights the strengths and the areas needing improvement. An adapted AMO-framework for this research can be found below.

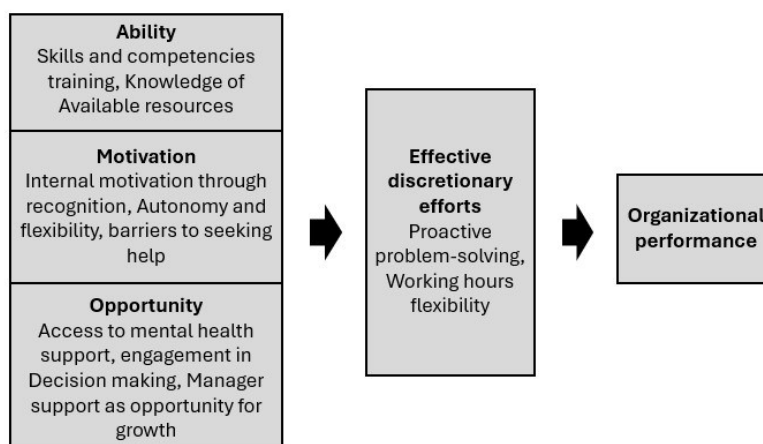


Figure 4. Adapted AMO model.

The interview results emphasize the importance of equipping employees with the right skills and knowledge to perform their roles effectively. The interviews revealed that even though Finnish MNCs provide skills development opportunities, there are still gaps. The most notable gaps being in stress management and mental health training. Having the necessary abilities is crucial for employees to achieve their job tasks (Appelbaum et al., 2000). Participant 6 pointed out that while technical training is available for all, the training to enhance stress management skills is lacking. This reflects where HR practices fail to meet the needs of the employees, where skills that directly contribute to mental well-being are not sufficiently addressed and taught. The AMO model suggests that providing such training would not only improve job performance but also help prevent stress-related issues (Jiang et al., 2012, p. 1270). Addressing this gap by offering more comprehensive training on resilience could enable employees to cope better with job pressures.

Role clarity also emerged as a dividing factor in the ability section of the framework. Clear communication about the expectations of a position helps employees understand their responsibilities. This reduces uncertainty and stress. Participant 9 mentioned that they are sometimes unclear about their role, and this can increase their stress levels. This indicates a need for better role definition. This aligns with the AMO model's focus that employees need to understand their roles clearly to perform their job successfully (Appelbaum et al., 2000). Motivation is a central component of the AMO model. Motivation influences employees' engagement with their work and their willingness to put out any extra effort. The interviews shows that recognition, autonomy, and a sense of purpose have an effect on employee's motivation. Participants, such as participant 4, mentioned that autonomy over their own work has a positive influence on the daily work, by boosting their personal motivation. Additionally, participant 4 mentioned that they are able to balance their work-life relationship with flexible work opportunities. This observation aligns with the AMO model's assertion that autonomy can drive intrinsic motivation, leading to higher levels of engagement and satisfaction (Ryan & Deci, 2000, p. 71). When employees are provided with the flexibility to manage their work according to their own liking, they tend to be more committed to their roles.

Several participants, including participant 5, mentioned that recognition from managers is often inconsistent. This can reduce the motivational impact of recognition initiatives. The AMO model suggests that recognition is critical in maintaining high motivation levels, and without regular and specific feedback, employees may be less inclined to go above and beyond (Alfes et al., 2011, p. 344). Opportunity refers to opportunities that allow employees to effectively apply their own skills and motivation (Appelbaum et al., 2000). The interview findings show that while opportunities like flexible work arrangements and wellness programs are provided, making these opportunities fully accessible is challenging. Many participants valued flexible working arrangements, such as remote work and adjustable hours, including participant 10, who noted that such arrangements helped them manage stress in their life. These opportunities align with the AMO model, where supportive conditions can enhance overall job satisfaction. By offering these options, MNCs offer employees the possibility to manage their work and personal responsibilities more effectively.

The practical implementation of opportunities often falls short. As mentioned by participant 4, challenges such as the difficulty of scheduling mental health support sessions outside of working hours can limit the use of available resources. This shows the gap between the presence of opportunities and their accessibility. There is an area for improvement for HRM practices. Opportunities should align with employees' needs to maximize their benefits (Boxall & Macky, 2009, p. 17). Addressing barriers, such as by offering more flexible times for counseling, could ease the use.

In addition, some participants mentioned that they feel like they have limited involvement in decisions affecting their workload. For instance, participant 8 suggested that being included in discussions about workload management could help mitigate stress before it gets worse. This is consistent with the AMO model's emphasis on empowering employees through involvement in decision-making, which can boost their sense of control and motivation (Appelbaum et al., 2000, p. 45).

The interview results suggest that employees are often willing to put in some level of extra effort, such as working additional hours to meet deadlines occasionally. According to the AMO model, effective discretionary effort happens when employees apply their skills and motivation in response to available opportunities (Appelbaum et al., 2000). The effectiveness of the efforts is mixed, as they can sometimes lead to increased stress instead of improved outcomes.

Participant 7 mentioned that while they are willing to go the extra mile, the lack of proactive support from HR often makes this effort unbearable. For example, employees may extend their work hours during peak periods, but this could contribute to burnout without the adequate support from management. This suggests that while discretionary efforts are present, they need to be better supported by HRM practices. To ensure it contributes positively to individual and organizational goals. The AMO model highlights that discretionary effort can enhance productivity and well-being when abilities, motivation, and opportunities are well-integrated. The interview findings indicate that while support structures exist, there is room for improvement to ensure that discretionary efforts do not negatively impact employee health.

5.3 Recommendations

By adapting existing practices to make resources more accessible, introducing new initiatives such as mental health ambassadors and regular check-ins, and developing long-term strategies like digital tools and comprehensive well-being plans, organizations can better meet the mental health needs of their employees.

5.3.1 Adapting current HR practices

There is a gap between the availability of mental health resources and the accessibility of those resources. Despite the availability of resources, challenges prevent employees from using them sufficiently. Addressing this issue requires adapting current HRM practices to make these resources more accessible. For example, offering counseling sessions and wellness workshops outside standard work hours or allowing virtual options can make it easier for employees to participate without it impacting productivity. Or on the other hand, if sessions are only offered during working hours, the employees' workload or schedules should be eased or moved further in the future. This approach would align with the JD-R model's emphasis on ensuring that resources effectively counterbalance job demands (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007, p. 314).

Participants highlighted the need for managers to be better equipped to recognize and address early signs of stress among their team members. Managerial support needs to be more proactive. More proactive support could be achieved by implementing training programs focused on mental health awareness and communication skills. This would help to create a workplace culture, where mental health is openly discussed and normalized. By these measures, the stigma that currently prevents some employees from seeking help could be eased. Training managers to recognize early indicators of burnout or anxiety aligns with both the JD-R and AMO models. The training would maintain a balance between demands and resources. It would also foster a more supportive environment focused on enhancing employee motivation.

5.3.2 Proposing new practices

An approach suggested by Participant 5 is the introduction of mental health ambassadors within each department. These ambassadors, volunteers trained in mental health

aid and peer support, would be approachable contacts for employees dealing with stress or other challenges. This initiative would complement existing HR resources by providing a more personalized and informal layer of support. This would also make it easier for employees to seek help without the formalities or managerial involvement. Additionally, the presence of ambassadors could improve the visibility and perceived availability of mental health resources. This could encourage employees to take advantage of the support offered even more.

Another recommendation is to integrate regular mental health check-ins as a standard HRM practice for all organizational employees in all Finnish MNCs. These check-ins would be conducted confidentially by HR professionals or trained individuals. These check-ins would allow employees to discuss their well-being and bring to light any challenges they might face regularly. This proactive measure could help identify employees arising issues before they get to escalate into severe mental health problems.

The interviews revealed a need for consistent recognition and feedback, as employees felt that their efforts often went unnoticed. Finnish MNCs need to implement more structured recognition programs, where achievements of any level are regularly acknowledged. This can boost morale and motivation, which can lead to better organizational outcomes. This aligns with the AMO model's motivational component, which suggests regular feedback and appreciation contribute to higher engagement and job satisfaction (Alfes et al., 2013, p. 344). Contributions could be recognized through initiatives like a monthly appreciation meetings or some type of a digital recognition platform. These would allow both peers and managers to celebrate achievements.

5.3.3 Long-term implementations

To ensure a long-lasting impact of mental health awareness within organizations, mental health training should be included in the training process of all new employees, and

old ones in the beginning. This training would introduce new hires to the company's mental health resources and emphasize the importance of well-being. The training would also cover strategies for managing stress and maintaining work-life balance. With this training, organizations have the opportunity to showcase how they prioritize mental health.

Finnish MNCs need to construct a comprehensive wellbeing strategy, which would outline long-term goals. This strategy needs to have repeating reviews, which ensure that the focus is always on current topics related to mental health and wellbeing. This strategy should be built around continuous improvement. It should include regular surveys to assess employee needs and satisfaction with existing mental health initiatives. Data received from these surveys could help HR departments to adjust their strategies in case of any new emerging topics. Establishing a long-term approach ensures that mental health remains a priority. It allows for adaptation of practices as the workforce and their needs evolve.

Digital solutions have an increasing role in the organizational world. HR should invest in a digital platform, where mental health support would be easily accessible. This would be a strategic long-term investment. The platform could offer self-assessment tools, exercise instructions and access to short therapy sessions. Digital tools provide a flexible way for employees to access support at their own convenience. This would address accessibility challenges mentioned in the interviews. This approach also aligns with the JD-R and AMO models, by allowing employees to manage their well-being autonomously. This could enhance their motivation and engagement.

5.4 Limitations

A limitation of the study arises from its small sample size, which may limit the generalizability of the findings. Choosing a quantitative research method could have gathered a

larger sample size, which could have provided a broader range of perspectives. This would have offered a, even more comprehensive view of employee experience. The focus of the study limits the applicability of the findings to other cultural and organizational contexts, as it only consisted of data from Finnish MNCs. While the research provides insights and experiences specifically from the Finnish work culture, further studies could explore how these organizational dynamics play out in different cultural settings. Even though the study provides a deeper analysis with personal data, the chosen qualitative approach limits the ability to quantify the impact of HRM practices. Future research could incorporate quantitative measures, such as surveys or psychological assessments, to provide a more balanced view from several points of view.

6 Conclusion

The key findings of the study reveal that while many Finnish MNCs have implemented several types of support mechanisms such as flexible work arrangements, EAPs, and wellness initiatives, the effectiveness of these programs is often limited by different challenges, such as accessibility and awareness. The flexibility offered contributed positively to employee's work-life balance. But on the other hand, high workloads and deadlines can have a negative effect on benefits. This can cause increased stress levels. It can be seen from the research analysis that even though companies have increased focus on mental health support, there are still barriers such as stigma preventing employees from seeking help.

The JD-R model based analysis highlighted the imbalance between demands and strain to the available resources. There are not enough resources provided to ease the pressures. With the AMO framework, the study revealed gaps in employee training, motivation, and opportunities. They emphasized the need for better integration of HR strategies. Future strategies should enhance stress management skills of the employees, provide consistent recognition regarding their work, and improve the access to support services.

6.1 Contribution

This study contributes to the existing body of knowledge on HR practices related to mental health management in Finnish MNCs, offering further theoretical and practical insights. The JD-R and AMO models provided a structured analysis of interactions between job demands, resources, employee abilities, motivation, and opportunities, offering an understanding of the challenges and opportunities in promoting mental well-being in Finnish MNCs from an employee perspective.

Finnish MNCs need to adopt more tailored HR strategies. These strategies should take into consideration culture and the operational context. This study highlights how important proactive mental health support is. A supportive organizational environment should be created by regular engagement and training. The study provides practical recommendations for improvement based on the research gap identified.

6.2 Future research

For future research, a managerial perspective could be added to gain a more comprehensive understanding of how mental health related strategies are developed and implemented. This would offer more perspective on the challenges faced and what strategies would be successful from a manager's point of view. Additionally, repeating the same research at several different times could track whether HR practices have evolved and whether their effect on mental health and productivity has changed. By this method, it could be possible to assess the long-term impacts of the changed policies or the effectiveness of completely new ones. It could also present long-term data on employee mental health as well.

Conducting a further comparative study between Finnish and other countries MNCs could provide more insight about what influence culture has on the effectiveness of HR practices. This could help identify the optimal practices that could be adapted further. Future studies could also focus on the topic with quantitative research methods to measure the direct impact of job demands and resources on employee mental health with primary data collected. Such research could provide statistical evidence to support the qualitative findings, offering a more nuanced understanding of HRM's impact on employee wellbeing.

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Appendices

Appendix 1. Interview guidelines

Welcome and thank the participants for their time. A brief explanation about the topic of the thesis is given. Assure the participant of confidentiality and anonymity. Explain the type of interview and what is to come. Confirm the duration of the interview (45 minutes to an hour). Obtain consent to record the interview for the duration of the research.

Section 1: General understanding of mental health and HRM.

- Could you describe your role in the company and how long you've been working here?
- How would you describe the organizational culture regarding mental health awareness and support? How is mental health perceived?

Section 2: HRM Practices for preventing mental health issues.

- What actions or policies does the HR department have to prevent mental health challenges among employees?
- How are these practices communicated to employees, how well-informed do you feel employees are about them?
- In your opinion, are the HR department's current initiatives effective in preventing mental health issues? Why or why not? Can you share any examples of initiatives that you think have worked?
- Does the company promote work-life balance (such as flexible working arrangements, workload management, and stress reduction)?
- What are the most significant job demands you experience in your role (such as workload, time pressures, or emotional demands) How do these demands affect your mental well-being?"

Section 3: Current HRM Practices for mental health management.

- What types of mental health resources (counseling, wellness programs, Employee Assistance Programs etc.) are currently available through HR?

- How accessible are these services, and how likely are employees to use them?
- How do you think HRM responds if an employee struggles with mental health? Is there an established protocol?
- Have you or someone you know ever used these services? If yes, how would you assess the support?
- Are there any barriers or challenges employees face in accessing mental health resources (e.g. stigma, confidentiality concerns, or logistical issues)?
- How could HR address these barriers to make mental health support more accessible and approachable?

Section 4: Recommendations for Improvement.

- Are there HR practices that have worked in your opinion?
- Are there any existing HRM practices that should be adapted or changed? If so, how?
- Can you think of any new practices, policies, or programs that HRM should implement to further prevent or manage mental health challenges?
- What would an ideal mental health support program look like in this organization from an employee perspective?
- How could employees be more involved in shaping the company's mental health policies and practices?
- Do you believe employee feedback is adequately considered when HR designs mental health-related initiatives?

- Is there anything else you would like to add?

Thank the participants for their participation and provide your contact information if they feel the need to contact you in any way.