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**Enhancing employees' sense of accomplishment  
through social cohesion**

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**ABSTRACT:**

Amid intensifying competition for talent, many organizations struggle to sustain motivation and engagement, suggesting that employees' sense of success—the felt experience of effective progress toward valued work goals—has become a strategic concern. Prior research links social cohesion to team performance, but the mechanism connecting cohesion to experienced accomplishment at the individual level remains under-specified. This study addresses that gap by asking: How does social cohesion enhance employees' sense of accomplishment in everyday work?

Theoretically, the study integrates Self-Determination Theory (basic psychological needs of autonomy, competence, relatedness), self-efficacy (mastery, modelling, persuasion, affective cues), and job crafting (task and cognitive adjustments that increase meaningfulness). Empirically, the research employed a qualitative, inductive design using the Gioia methodology. Data comprise eight semi-structured interviews from a Finnish industrial organization (multiple departments and roles). Analysis progressed from 1st-order informant terms to 2nd-order themes and aggregate dimensions, yielding a transparent data structure.

Findings show a relational pathway from cohesion to accomplishment: collaboration and communication foster social cohesion, which enables frequent, proximal feedback and recognition. Feedback, in turn, both builds self-efficacy and legitimizes job crafting (task and cognitive), thereby increasing the meaningfulness of work. Sense of success arises through two complementary routes: a visibility/validation route (feedback to accomplishment) and a significance route (job crafting converting to accomplishment via meaningfulness). Job demands and workload operate as boundary conditions—compressing interaction and weakening links—yet cohesive teams buffer these effects by tightening coordination cycles, routing help efficiently, and pruning low-value tasks.

The study contributes theoretically by (1) specifying how meso-level cohesion becomes person-level experienced accomplishment via need-supportive feedback and efficacy-building processes, (2) identifying job crafting as the micro-foundation that converts social resources into meaningfulness, and (3) clarifying workload as a moderator of these pathways. Practically, the results translate into a concise playbook: institutionalize brief informational feedback rituals, engineer peer modelling and approachable ties, and legitimize continuous micro-crafting—especially under high demand—to sustain employees' everyday sense of accomplishment.

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**KEYWORDS:** Social cohesion, Sense of accomplishment, Self-Determination Theory, Job crafting, Self-efficacy

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# 1 Introduction

Competition for talent has intensified (ManpowerGroup, 2025), while employee commitment and work engagement remain stubbornly low in many regions (Gallup, 2024). In practical terms, this makes the everyday sense of success a strategic issue for both productivity and employer reputation (Harter et al., 2020; Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004). If organizations fail to understand and manage this experience, the result is weak feedback cycles, uneven workload distribution, and social friction (Kluger & DeNisi, 1996; Bakker & Demerouti, 2007; Harter et al., 2020). Conversely, deeper understanding translates into better performance, retention, and well-being (Harter et al., 2020; Bakker & Demerouti, 2007).

## 1.1 Research gap

This thesis examines how social cohesion (e.g. shared norms, trust, and a sense of belonging) relates to employees' sense of accomplishment in everyday work. Although links between team cohesion and performance are well established (e.g., Beal et al., 2003; Gully et al., 1995; see also Castaño et al., 2021), the mechanism by which social cohesion strengthens an individual's felt accomplishment has received less attention, especially under fluctuating job demands. Here lies the research gap: we need an empirically grounded explanation of how social factors (social cohesion as a chosen foundation) is transformed into felt success (not only into outcomes) and under what conditions this link holds when workload is high.

The study's theoretical lens integrates three frameworks. First, Self-Determination Theory (SDT) explains how satisfaction (or frustration) of the basic psychological needs—autonomy, competence, relatedness—shapes intrinsic motivation and well-being, and thereby the felt attainment of valued goals (Ryan & Deci, 2000). Second, self-efficacy research shows that beliefs about capability predict persistence and performance (Stajkovic & Luthans, 1998) and are built from four sources—mastery experiences, vicarious

models, social persuasion, and physiological/affective cues—of which the first three are inherently social (Bandura, 1997; Artino, 2012). Third, job crafting provides a bottom-up mechanism (from employee to employer) through which employees reshape tasks, relationships, and interpretations of work to enhance meaningfulness and make progress more visible (Wrzesniewski & Dutton, 2001; Berg, Grant, & Johnson, 2013). Together, these yield the study's key constructs: social cohesion, sense of success, SDT, self-efficacy, and job crafting.

The thesis offers two contributions. Theoretically, it develops and evidences a pathway from social cohesion to sense of success through multiple dimensions (feedback, job crafting, self-efficacy, meaningfulness), using qualitative data analyzed via Gioia et al. (2012) methodology. Practically, it outlines a need-supportive management and team-practice framework—strengthening interaction quality, feedback cadence and visibility and everyday job crafting—so that employees' sense of success is tangible and sustained even during high-demand periods (cf. Hackman & Oldham, 1980; Rosso et al., 2010).

## **1.2 The value of social cohesion**

The COVID-19 pandemic has significantly reshaped work environments, placing increasing pressure on teams. While teamwork has become more essential than ever, it has simultaneously become more difficult to carry out under these altered conditions (Tanenbaum et al., 2020, p. 59). Research indicates that many employees are struggling to perform and advance due to the intensified pace and workload (Neirotti, 2020). Furthermore, team diversity and the tendency toward social categorization have been shown to negatively impact organizational performance (Knippenberg et al., 2004).

From a broader societal perspective, social cohesion is under threat. Individuals are increasingly disconnected from one another, leading to a growing sense of disorientation within society (Michalis, 2013). Leaders around the world are searching for new ways to maintain a sense of belonging and trust among citizens, as these fundamental

components of social integration appear to be fading (Michalis, 2013). Additionally, globalization and large-scale migration are challenging both immigrants (Verkuyten et al., 2019) and host societies to re-evaluate and redefine their national identities (Michalis, 2013).

Social cohesion is essential for fostering diversity acceptance and facilitating effective interaction among individuals and groups (Schiefer & Van Der Noll, 2017, p. 590; Council of Europe, 2005; see also Jeannotte et al., 2002; Spoonley et al., 2005). As the importance of teamwork continues to grow, more people are coming together to collectively address shared challenges (Tannenbaum et al., 2020, p. 60). There is wide consensus that some form of cohesion is necessary for any society to function and remain stable over generations (Healy, 2013). Furthermore, social cohesion has been linked to national cultural continuity, reduced health inequalities, and enhanced well-being (Fone et al., 2007; Chuang et al., 2013).

Often referred to as “social glue” (Öhman et al., 2017), social cohesion manifests in individuals' willingness to remain part of a group (Festinger et al., 1952), their actions toward collective goals, shared altruism (Lockwood, 1999), and the influence of shared group norms and attitudes on behavior (Chan et al., 2006). Despite clear evidence of its impact on team performance (Sumanski et al., 2007; Choi et al., 2020; Josse et al., 2022), the concept of social cohesion remains ambiguous. This vagueness limits the generalizability of findings and the development of unified theories (Fonseca et al., 2018; Friedkin, 2004), thus underlining the need for continued research on the topic.

Social cohesion operates across three levels. On the micro level, it is grounded in individual norms and values (Chan et al., 2006), which, through social interaction, evolve into shared values (Fonseca et al., 2018). These, in turn, foster a sense of belonging and increase one's motivation to stay affiliated with the group (Beauchamp, 2019). On the meso level, this manifests in interpersonal relationships and group dynamics. At the macro level, institutions play a critical role in enabling social cohesion through legislation,

fairness, and equal opportunities—particularly considering income disparities, which have a major influence on societal cohesion (Schiefer & Van Der Noll, 2017; Healy, 2013).

Social cohesion is frequently studied through the lens of Self-categorization theory, which explains how individuals perceive themselves as group members (Beauchamp, 2019). According to the theory, individuals evaluate visible attributes (e.g., age, gender, ethnicity) of other group members and compare them to their own characteristics. This cognitive process influences whether a person identifies as a part of the group or not, which directly affects their sense of belonging (Beauchamp, 2019) and consequently the degree of social cohesion experienced (Fonseca et al., 2018).

In this light, the present thesis explores the concept of social cohesion and its relationship to employees' sense of success at work. This study aims to provide practical recommendations (Chapter 5.7) for strengthening social cohesion within organizations. Suggestions for future research and organizational development are presented later (Chapter 5.6) in the thesis.

### **1.3 Objectives of the thesis and research questions**

Although employees' self-perceived accomplishment is well theorized at the individual level of SDT and self-efficacy, the specific role of social cohesion in producing this experience remains under-specified (Ryan & Deci, 2000; Rosso et al., 2010; Stajkovic & Luthans, 1998). Prior work largely links team-level cohesion to performance rather than to person-level appraisals of accomplishment, and adjacent literatures (affective tone; feedback), thus falling short of detailing a cross-level pathway from micro-level social encounters to meso-level cohesion to felt accomplishment (Beal, Cohen, Burke, & McLendon, 2003; Gully, Devine, & Whitney, 1995; Castaño, Watts, & Tekleab, 2021; Barsade & Knight, 2015; Kluger & DeNisi, 1996; Chan et al., 2006; Friedkin, 2004), where lies the research gap this thesis seeks to address.

This thesis seeks to address the core question: How does social cohesion enhance employees' sense of accomplishment in the workplace? Supporting the objective are following research questions:

1. How do employees describe and define their own sense of accomplishment at work?
2. How do the different aspects of social cohesion contribute to employees' sense of accomplishment?
3. How do micro-, meso-, and macro-level factors of social cohesion interact in shaping employees' experience of accomplishment?

This study is delimited to a qualitative analysis based on eight semi-structured interviews with employees. It focuses on individuals' subjective experiences of success in the workplace and how social cohesion at micro, meso, and macro levels supports these experiences. The study utilizes Self-determination Theory (Ryan & Deci, 2000) and a Grounded theory model (inspired by Gioia et al., 2012) as a theoretical framework and examines a specific organizational context in Finland. The results are not intended for statistical generalization but aim to provide in-depth insights into the role of social dynamics in fostering a sense of accomplishment at work.

#### **1.4 Structure of the Thesis**

This thesis is structured into five main chapters. The first chapter introduces the background and relevance of the research topic, presenting the research problem, research questions, and the objective of the study. The second chapter presents the theoretical framework, focusing on the key concepts of sense of accomplishment, Self-Determination Theory, and the three levels of Social cohesion. This chapter draws from relevant academic literature to build the conceptual foundation for the study. The third chapter outlines the methodology, including the research approach, data collection methods, the participants and their selection, interview structure, target organization and the process

of qualitative content analysis. The fourth chapter presents the research findings, organized in the Data structure, thematically based on the interview data later in the text section. Finally, the fifth chapter discusses the results from chapter four; reflecting to the theoretical framework, presents the Grounded theory model, evaluates the implications of the findings, reflects on the limitations of the study, and provides suggestions for further research and practical organizational development.

### **1.5 Key Concepts of the Study**

This thesis employs a coherent set of concepts to explain how social cohesion shapes employees' experienced accomplishment. At the individual level, we draw on Self-Determination Theory and self-efficacy to capture the motivational appraisal through which progress becomes felt as success (Ryan & Deci, 2000; Bandura, 1997; Stajkovic & Luthans, 1998). At the task and job level, classic work-design and job crafting perspectives specify how autonomy, feedback, task significance, and bottom-up adjustments render work meaningful and make progress visible (Hackman & Oldham, 1980; Wrzesniewski & Dutton, 2001; Rosso et al., 2010). At the social/collective level, social cohesion—operating across micro, meso, and macro layers—structures everyday collaboration and communication, sets a shared affective tone, and thereby enables timely feedback and recognition (Chan et al., 2006; Friedkin, 2004; Barsade & Knight, 2015; Kluger & DeNisi, 1996).

The JD–R tradition complements these lenses by clarifying how job demands and workload can dampen otherwise positive pathways unless buffered by adequate social and structural resources (Demerouti et al., 2001; Bakker & Demerouti, 2007). Methodologically, the study operationalizes these constructs through the Gioia methodology, preserving informant terms, elevating them into second-order themes, and integrating them as aggregate dimensions to build a transparent inductive explanation (Gioia et al., 2012; Gunther & Hasanen, 2021). Together, these concepts provide the vocabulary and analytical foundation for the results that follow and seek to ensure terminological consistency across levels of analysis.

### **Sense of accomplishment/success**

The felt experience of having effectively progressed toward or attained valued work goals; it is based on appraisal and strengthened when progress is visible, recognized, and meaningful. (Hackman & Oldham, 1980; Rosso et al., 2010) In this thesis, despite the slight difference of the words in question, "sense of success" is used synonymously with "sense of accomplishment", depending on the matter in question. Rationale for the decision is to maintain the precision of the language, choosing the most suitable language possible in every context.

### **Social cohesion**

A multi-level construct spanning the micro level (individual perceptions of belonging and trust in everyday exchanges), the meso level (team-level shared norms and cooperative ties that structure interaction), and the macro level (organizational arrangements and wider societal conditions that enable or constrain cohesion) (Chan et al., 2006; Friedkin, 2004; see also Barsade & Knight, 2015 on affective tone). In combination, these layers shape coordinated behavior and commitment across the system.

### **Collaboration & communication**

Everyday interaction episodes (coordination, help-seeking, information sharing) that, when repeated with quality, accumulate into social cohesion and enable timely feedback (Chan et al., 2006; Barsade & Knight, 2015).

### **Feedback & recognition**

Informational cues and social validation about task progress; when specific and non-controlling, feedback supports competence and motivates adaptive effort (Ryan & Deci, 2000; Kluger & DeNisi, 1996).

**Self-efficacy**

Task-specific beliefs about one's capability to execute required actions, shaped by mastery experiences, credible models, social persuasion, and affective cues; higher efficacy predicts persistence and performance (Bandura, 1997; Stajkovic & Luthans, 1998).

**Basic psychological needs / need-supportive context (SDT)**

Conditions that satisfy autonomy, competence, and relatedness foster intrinsic motivation and well-being; controlling contexts undermine these processes (Ryan & Deci, 2000).

**Meaningfulness of work**

The perceived significance and purposefulness of one's job; it increases with task significance, coherent sense-making, and contributions recognised by others (Hackman & Oldham, 1980; Rosso et al., 2010).

**Job crafting (task & cognitive)**

Bottom-up adjustments in tasks, relationships, or framing that employees initiate to align work with strengths and purpose, thereby enhancing meaningfulness (Wrzesniewski & Dutton, 2001; Rosso et al., 2010).

**Job demands & workload (JD-R)**

Physical, psychological, social, or organizational aspects of work that require sustained effort and are associated with physiological/psychological costs; they can attenuate otherwise positive pathways if unbuffered (Demerouti et al., 2001; Bakker & Demerouti, 2007).

**Group affect / affective tone**

The shared emotional climate of a team that shapes how members appraise events, influencing help-seeking, feedback exchange, and the experience of success (Barsade & Knight, 2015).

**Gioia methodology**

An inductive, rigor-oriented approach that preserves informant voice via 1st-order terms, elevates patterns into author-based 2nd-order themes, and integrates them as aggregate dimensions to build transparent theory (Gioia et al., 2012; Gunther & Hasanen, 2021).

## 2 Literature review

### 2.1 Conceptualizing Social cohesion

Social cohesion, often described as “social glue” (Öhman et al., 2017), has become an increasingly discussed concept in contemporary research. Despite its importance, there is no universally accepted definition of social cohesion, largely due to the difficulty of measuring it reliably (Fonseca et al., 2018). Friedkin (2004) supports this view, emphasizing that academic literature tends to approach the topic from narrow angles, focusing on specific dimensions or types of groups, which complicates the development of a unifying theory.

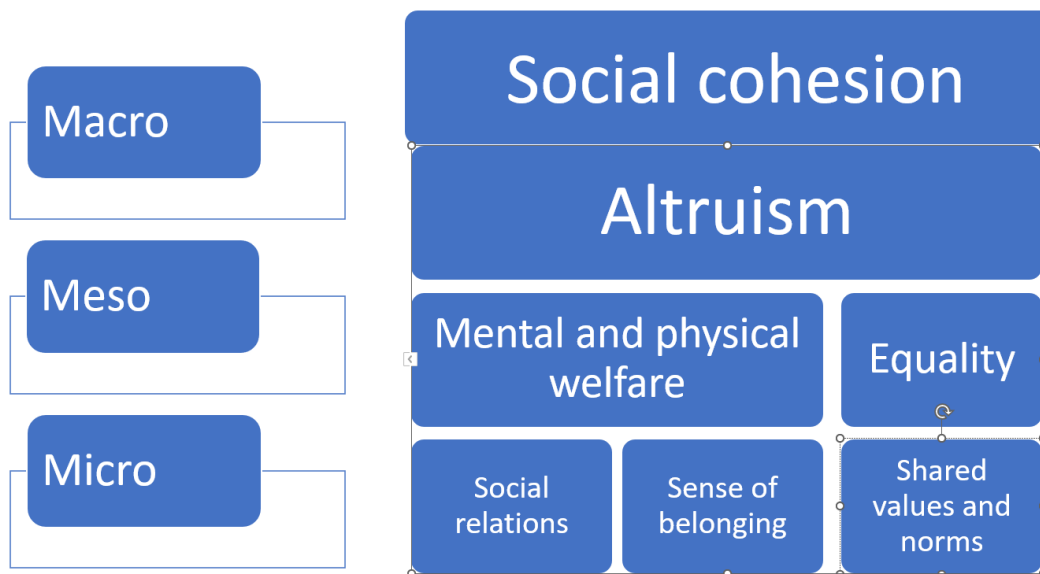
One of the earliest foundational definitions of group cohesion was introduced by Festinger et al. (1952), who proposed that cohesion is the willingness of individuals to remain in a group. They argued that this can be assessed through members’ inclination to act toward shared goals and the quality of interpersonal relationships within the group. This framework has since served as a conceptual base for many subsequent studies (Fonseca et al., 2018).

Lockwood (1999) offered a more altruistic definition of social cohesion, referring to it as a general tendency toward kindness and humanitarianism within a community. This perspective emphasizes the readiness to support others—even those with whom one has no prior connection—highlighting the moral and emotional dimensions of cohesion (as cited in Chan et al., 2006).

Expanding on these ideas, Chan et al. (2006) defined social cohesion as a set of shared attitudes and norms, including mutual trust and a sense of togetherness, which influence both group-level interactions and individual behavior. Across the varying definitions, certain elements consistently appear, such as feelings of belonging, collective attitudes, cooperative behavior, and commitment to shared goals (Öhman et al., 2017).

Further refinement of the concept has been proposed by Fonseca et al. (2018), who framed social cohesion as rooted in a shared sense of belonging to a community united by common values and collective challenges. Barsade (2002), however, introduces an affective dimension to this perspective through the concept of “group emotion” or “group affective tone.” This emotional quality is seen as what transforms a collection of individuals into a cohesive unit. These communities of shared interpretation strive not only for mutual understanding but also for concrete societal improvements, such as reducing inequality and pursuing common goals (Fonseca et al., 2018).

## 2.2 Three levels of social cohesion



**Figure 1.** Three levels of Social cohesion

Figure 1 above (Three levels of Social cohesion) illustrates the elements of social cohesion, simplified into six “building blocks” under the three levels (micro, meso and macro). At the micro level, cohesion is visible in social relations, trust, and a sense of belonging that emerge from everyday exchanges (help-seeking, small acts of support). These

perceptions reflect shared attitudes that orient individuals toward the group (Chan et al., 2006) and are shaped by the team's affective tone—the emotional climate that makes encounters feel welcoming or cold (Barsade & Knight, 2015). Micro-level belonging and supportive interactions also relate to mental and physical welfare, because positive social ties function as resources that buffer strain and sustain motivation at work (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007).

At the meso-level, cohesion becomes a group property: stable shared values and norms, mutual trust, and coordinated behavior that make people willing to remain in the group, acting towards the common goal (Festinger et al., 1952; Friedkin, 2004; Chan et al., 2006). The blocks “shared values and norms” and “equality” capture how teams institutionalize expectations of fair treatment and reciprocal contribution, which, in turn, promote pro-social altruism as an everyday helping norm. This prosocial strand reflects Lockwood's (1999) humanitarian reading of cohesion (as cited in Chan et al., 2006) and supports members' welfare by reducing social frictions and enabling dependable co-operation (Barsade & Knight, 2015).

At the macro level, cohesion is anchored in formal arrangements and wider contexts—policies, reward systems, structural interdependencies, and broader societal conditions—that enable or constrain the lower-level dynamics (Chan et al., 2006; Friedkin, 2004). Macro choices that foreground equality and collectively endorsed values (e.g. fair procedures, inclusive practices) reinforce the shared identity and common purpose (Fonseca, Lukosch & Brazier, 2018). In combination, these layers construct social cohesion; micro ties feed meso norms and affect, macro arrangements stabilize and erode both—together shaping the degree of altruism, well-being, and belonging that sustain coordinated action towards the common goal (Chan et al., 2006; Friedkin, 2004; Barsade & Knight, 2015; Festinger et al., 1952; Fonseca et al., 2018).

## 2.3 The Multidimensional Framework of Social Cohesion

Social cohesion is a multidimensional concept that has been categorized into three overarching domains: ideational, relational, and distributive (Schiefer & Van Der Noll, 2017). These categories encompass six commonly referenced dimensions, which together form a framework for analyzing how individuals relate to each other and to their communities. The ideational dimension refers to shared norms, values, and identification, the relational dimension includes interpersonal connections and participation, while the distributive dimension concerns the structural factors such as access to physical, economic, social, and cultural resources (Schiefer & Van Der Noll, 2017).

The first of these dimensions—social relations—is foundational to individuals' attraction and commitment to a group, and is closely associated with the second dimension, participation (Schiefer & Van Der Noll, 2017). In this view, cohesive societies are those in which individuals feel actively engaged and valued within their communities. Supporting this notion, the French Commissariat général du Plan defines social cohesion as “a set of social processes that help instill in individuals the sense of belonging to the same community and the feeling that they are recognized as members of that community” (as cited in Jenson, 2010, p. 6).

A further critical aspect of cohesion is orientation toward the common good. According to the European Committee for Social Cohesion (2004), general altruism, confidence in authorities, and a willingness to act for collective benefit are all essential for building cohesion within communities. These qualities create a sense of mutual responsibility and trust that supports social integration and unity.

The role of shared values, however, presents a conceptual challenge. While some researchers argue that common values facilitate smoother interaction and foster a stronger sense of belonging, others highlight the importance of diversity acceptance and the capacity to collaborate despite value differences (Schiefer & Van Der Noll, 2017, p. 590; Council of Europe, 2005; see also Jeannotte et al., 2002; Spoonley et al., 2005). In

this light, cohesion is not about uniformity but rather about bridging differences in ways that allow cooperation and respect to flourish.

Among the more complex dimensions are those related to quality of life. Schiefer and Van Der Noll (2017, p. 591–592) divide this into subjective and objective well-being, which include factors such as mental and physical health, and the broader living conditions individuals experience. These aspects are bidirectionally linked to social cohesion: they are both influenced by and have an influence on cohesion. As such, they pose methodological difficulties for empirical research.

The sixth and final dimension—inequality in the distribution of resources—underscores a critical limitation in analyzing social cohesion. Variations in wealth, opportunity, and access to services among groups make it challenging to apply general conclusions across societies (Schiefer & Van Der Noll, 2017, p. 592; see also Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, 2005; Berger-Schmitt & Noll, 2000; KfW Bankengruppe, 2010). These disparities can hinder individuals' perceptions of fairness and inclusion, which are essential to fostering a cohesive social fabric.

## **2.4 Sense of Success**

In this thesis, sense of accomplishment refers to the *felt experience of having effectively progressed toward or attained personally valued work goals (social, mental, career-related or concrete)*. Basically, it is the subjective counterpart of performance: not merely what is achieved, but how achievement is experienced. Three pieces of literature ground this construct. First, Self-Determination Theory (SDT) presents that the satisfaction of basic psychological needs—autonomy, competence, and relatedness—nurtures intrinsic motivation and well-being, making goal pursuit feel self-endorsed and effective (Ryan & Deci, 2000). Second, self-efficacy research shows that beliefs about one's capability to execute required actions predict effort, persistence, and adaptive strategy use; these beliefs are built through mastery experiences, credible models, constructive persuasion,

and affective steadiness (Bandura, 1997; Artino, 2012). Third, work design research indicates that job characteristics such as feedback and task significance amplify the meaningfulness and visibility of progress, which in turn supports the experience of success (Hackman & Oldham, 1980; Rosso et al., 2010).

Operationally, the sense of success emerges when employees perceive competence and efficacy in their tasks, goals are clear and appropriately challenging and feedback makes progress visible, and achievements are embedded in meaningful work and relationships that validate and recognize contribution (Artino, 2012; Hackman & Oldham, 1980; Rosso et al., 2010). Crucially, this construct is distinct from general positive affect: it is episodic and based on appraisal, sensitive to contextual factors, such as need-supportive leadership, peer modelling and workload, which either enhance or dampen the felt attainment of individual and common goals, thus sense of accomplishment (Bandura, 1997; Ryan & Deci, 2000).

### **2.4.1 Self-Determination Theory (SDT)**

SDT posits that people oscillate between agentic engagement and passivity depending on whether their context supports the basic needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness (Ryan & Deci, 2000). In organizational terms, social cohesion is precisely the relational substrate through which these needs are—or are not—met.

Self-Determination Theory (SDT) argues that whether people are energetic, agentic, and engaged—or, by contrast, passive and alienated—depends largely on the social conditions in which they live and work. SDT directs attention to contextual factors that support or inhibit self-motivation and healthy psychological development, with negative effects on intrinsic motivation, self-regulation, and well-being. At the heart of the framework is the claim that humans possess three basic psychological needs—competence (a sense of effectiveness), autonomy (volitional self-endorsement), and relatedness (feeling connected and cared for). When these needs are satisfied, individuals tend to be more motivated, integrated and well, then again when they are frustrated, motivation and well-

being typically deteriorate. SDT thus treats humans as possessing innate growth tendencies, while recognizing that environments catalyze variation within and between people: some settings reliably elicit curiosity, persistence, and responsibility, whereas others dampen them. The theory has been applied across multiple domains including work, education, health care, sport, religion, and psychotherapy, both to explain behavior and to design contexts that optimize development, performance, and well-being. (Ryan & Deci, 2000)

Long-standing debates about whether people are naturally active and responsible or passive and indifferent can be reconciled by assuming that humans possess both a tendency toward agency and integration and a vulnerability to passivity. Self-Determination Theory (SDT) explains variation between these states by specifying the social conditions that either support or undermine motivation: when contexts nurture autonomy and competence, intrinsic motivation—curiosity and self-initiated activity—flourishes; controlling practices and impeded effectance suppress it (Ryan & Deci, 2000).

In social-cognitive theory, self-efficacy—built via mastery, modelling (observational learning), and persuasion—predicts effort, persistence, and performance, clarifying how supportive contexts translate into agentic regulation (Bandura, 1997; Stajkovic & Luthans, 1998). Goal-setting theory similarly shows that clear, challenging goals coupled with feedback enhance commitment and quality of effort (Locke & Latham, 2002), while job characteristics research demonstrates that autonomy, feedback, and task significance raise inner motivation and experienced meaningfulness (Hackman & Oldham, 1980; Humphrey, Nahrgang & Morgeson, 2007). SDT's need for relatedness also converges with the belongingness hypothesis, wherein durable, positive ties are fundamental to well-being and engagement (Baumeister & Leary, 1995), and with group-level work on affective tone shaping collective appraisal and action readiness (Barsade & Knight, 2015).

Extending beyond intrinsic tasks, later SDT work shows that environments satisfying autonomy, competence, and relatedness foster internalization of norms and values,

producing stronger commitment and higher-quality effort; frustration of these needs weakens regulation (Gagné & Deci, 2005; Deci, Olafsen, & Ryan, 2017). Complementarily, the JD–R framework indicates that high job demands without adequate resources (autonomy, feedback, social support) erode motivation and health, whereas resource-rich contexts buffer strain and sustain engagement (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007).

Across domains—education, work, health care, and sport—attending to these conditions helps practitioners diagnose alienation versus engagement and design settings that enhance both performance and well-being; critically, a good challenge–skill fit also facilitates energized absorption rather than distress (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990). Taken together, these literatures triangulate SDT’s central claim: need-supportive social contexts are the developmental scaffold for active, assimilative functioning, whereas excessive control, misfit between challenge and skill, and lack of connection precipitate passivity and strain (Ryan & Deci, 2000; Bakker & Demerouti, 2007; Demerouti et al., 2001).

### **2.4.2 Self-efficacy**

Self-efficacy refers to individuals’ beliefs about their capability to organize and carry out the actions needed to achieve specific performances. It is typically task-specific, and it features prominently in motivation and learning theories across domains, where it helps account for variation in outcomes from academic achievement to athletic skill. Rather than reviewing the full empirical literature, the core idea for educators is that instruction can be improved by explicitly attending to students’ efficacy beliefs, because these beliefs shape engagement, persistence, and strategy use. (Artino, 2012)

According to self-efficacy theory, people gauge their capability using four primary information sources: mastery experiences (one’s own prior performances), vicarious experiences (observing others), social persuasion (verbal and other forms of encouragement or discouragement), and physiological/affective cues (arousal, fatigue, mood as signals of strength or vulnerability). Among these, mastery experiences are the most powerful,

because they provide direct evidence of competence. Successes generally strengthen efficacy beliefs, whereas repeated failures erode them; however, the impact of setbacks depends on the existing strength of efficacy beliefs and their timing within a person's performance history—occasional failures tend to have diminished effects once robust efficacy has been built through repeated success. (Artino, 2012)

### **2.4.3 Job crafting as a tool for social cohesion and sense of success**

Classic job design work argues that the configuration of tasks and interdependencies shapes how meaningful work feels (Hackman & Oldham, 1980; Grant, 2007). Another scholarship reframes job design as a foundation on which employees can proactively reshape their circumstances by job crafting—altering tasks, relationships, or interpretations of the job to make work feel personally significant (Wrzesniewski & Dutton, 2001; Rosso, Dekas, & Wrzesniewski, 2010). This perspective helps to clarify the mechanisms presented in this thesis: cohesive interaction patterns enable the micro-changes through which effort becomes visible, recognized, and meaningful, culminating in a stronger sense of accomplishment (Chan et al., 2006; Wrzesniewski & Dutton, 2001; Rosso et al., 2010; Hackman & Oldham, 1980).

First, relational crafting provides a direct link between the second-order theme Collaboration & Communication and the aggregate dimension Social Cohesion. When employees expand and deepen ties—for example building cross-functional touchpoints, pairing up for problem-solving, or ritualizing brief check-ins—they reduce the threshold to initiate interaction and increase opportunities for real-time help and information flow. Cohesion, in other words, is not only an emergent property of good relations; it is also a resource employees can actively develop by crafting who they work with, how often, and for what purposes (Wrzesniewski & Dutton, 2001). These cohesive ties enable feedback and recognition to occur regularly “in the flow of work” rather than episodically.

Second, task and cognitive crafting clarify how cohesion translates into motivation and sense of accomplishment. Task crafting (adding or dropping tasks, reallocating attention) can increase the suitability between daily activities and one's strengths or values, making progress more legible and therefore easier to acknowledge (Wrzesniewski & Dutton, 2001; Hackman & Oldham, 1980). Cognitive crafting (reframing the purpose of tasks) supports sense-making about why the work matters, which can sustain meaningfulness even when outcomes are delayed or ambiguous (Rosso et al., 2010; Wrzesniewski & Dutton, 2001). In cohesive teams, these forms of crafting are also socially reinforced: shared norms and relational ties make reframings more acceptable, while peer modelling and a supportive affective tone help share "success stories" and normalize small redesigns, amplifying recognition of contributions and the felt accomplishment that follows (Chan et al., 2006; Barsade & Knight, 2015; Bandura, 1997; Ryan & Deci, 2000).

Third, job demands and workload conditions these mechanisms, affecting them negatively when not properly managed. High demands compress interaction time and crowd out reflective exchanges, thereby weakening the social cohesion to feedback to sense of accomplishment chain mentioned above, yet job crafting also offers buffers under load (Demerouti et al., 2001; Bakker & Demerouti, 2007; Chan et al., 2006). Relational crafting redistributes expertise and creates faster support routes; task crafting prunes low-value work; cognitive crafting preserves meaning when stress is high (Frese & Fay, 2001; Grant & Ashford, 2008). Cohesive teams, therefore, are not only more pleasant; they are more capable of crafting their work in ways that maintain accomplishment during busy periods.

In sum, job crafting provides micro-level mechanisms through which everyday collaboration and communication can build social cohesion, which in turn enables feedback and recognition to occur more frequently and proximally; task and cognitive crafting then help translate recognized effort into experienced accomplishment (Chan et al., 2006; Ryan & Deci, 2000; Rosso et al., 2010). Under high workload, these effects are more likely to persist when cohesive teams maintain supportive interaction routines and proactively adjust tasks and priorities to preserve feedback and meaning despite time pressure

(Demerouti et al., 2001; Bakker & Demerouti, 2007; Frese & Fay, 2001). Framed this way, cohesion is both an outcome of repeated interaction and an input that empowers employees to reshape work so that accomplishment can be realized and felt (Friedkin, 2004; Grant & Ashford, 2008).

## **2.5 Social cohesion, meaningfulness of work and sense of success**

This thesis proposes that social cohesion—shared norms, mutual trust, and a sense of belonging—provides the relational infrastructure through which the mechanisms above operate in everyday work. Cohesive interaction patterns lower the threshold to initiate contact in social interactions and create routine opportunities for help, coordination, and informational feedback (Chan et al., 2006; Friedkin, 2004). In SDT terms, such contexts satisfy relatedness, and coupled with informational rather than controlling feedback, also strengthen competence and autonomy, thereby strengthening intrinsic motivation and the likelihood that progress feels self-endorsed and effective (Ryan & Deci, 2000). Cohesion also shapes the team’s affective tone, which stabilizes arousal and supports efficacy judgements during demanding periods (Barsade & Knight, 2015).

Two additional pathways link cohesion to felt success. First, cohesive ties enrich self-efficacy by supplying credible vicarious models (cross-team visibility), social persuasion (timely recognition and coaching), and multiple opportunities for mastery (fast access to help and practice), which together translate into higher effort and performance (Bandura, 1997; Stajkovic & Luthans, 1998). Second, cohesion enables job crafting—small, employee-initiated adjustments to tasks, relationships, and sense-making—that reinforce the meaningfulness of work and makes progress more visible (Wrzesniewski & Dutton, 2001; Rosso et al., 2010). Under high job demands, these pathways are conditional: time pressure compresses interaction and can weaken feedback quality, yet cohesive teams are better positioned to maintain crafting behaviors and preserve felt success by trimming low-value work, sharing load, and sustaining shared purpose (Frese & Fay, 2001; Grant & Ashford, 2008).

### 3 Research methods

This chapter describes and justifies the methodology, outlines the participant cohort and sampling rationale, and details the procedures for data collection and analysis. The study adopts a qualitative, inductive design to understand how different aspects of social cohesion shape employees' sense of success at work—an approach well suited to questions where mechanisms are insufficiently specified, and situated meaning is required (Charmaz, 2014; Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Gunther & Hasanen, 2021). A semi-structured interview approach was selected to elicit rich, situated accounts while retaining enough structure to keep the conversation aligned with the research aim (Kallio, Pietilä, Johnson, & Kangasniemi, 2016). Purposeful sampling was justified as means to secure information-rich cases rather than statistical representativeness (Patton, 2015; Yin, 2018). Methodologically, the design complements the research problem—*How does social cohesion enhance employees' sense of accomplishment in the workplace?*—by privileging informants' own meanings and preserving first-order language that can be systematically elevated into second-order themes and aggregate dimensions using the Gioia methodology (Gioia et al., 2012). In grounded theory terms, the goal is to build practice-relevant explanation from empirical material by means of constant comparison and iterative theorizing (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Charmaz, 2014; Gunther & Hasanen, 2021).

#### 3.1 Research organization

The case company in this study is a Finnish technology firm specializing in hydraulic-powered solutions for mobile machinery. Founded in the 1980s, the company has grown from a small-scale technical innovation project into a globally operating manufacturer with exports to over 80 countries. The company employs slightly over 100 professionals at its headquarters and production facility in western Finland.

Its core business focuses on compact, machine-integrated devices that convert hydraulic or electric power from mobile equipment into various functions, including electricity,

high-pressure water, compressed air, magnetic power, vibration, and vacuum. The product portfolio includes more than 40 different products across categories such as generators, power units, pumps, compressors, vibration systems, and multifunctional solutions for specialized applications.

The company's operations are guided by certified quality, environmental, and occupational health and safety standards (ISO 9001, 14001, and 45001). All products are manufactured domestically to ensure strict quality control. The company's mission is to enhance the productivity and versatility of its customers' machinery by integrating additional functions through hydraulic power. Furthermore, in line with its commitment to sustainability, the company has also developed dust suppression systems and other environmentally conscious technologies to improve safety and reduce environmental impact in demanding industrial settings.

### **3.2 Research target group**

The target group comprised employees from the case organization. Eight informants were purposefully sampled to maximize conceptual variation around social cohesion and felt success (Patton, 2015). Three criteria guided the selection:

1. Organizational breadth: participants represented different departments/roles, with two interviewees from each production section, to elicit contrasting viewpoints.
2. Relevance of interaction: all informants engaged in day-to-day teamwork and interpersonal coordination so that micro-, meso- and macro-level aspects of cohesion could surface empirically.

3. Demographic fit: participants approximated the organization's demographic profile to increase the plausibility and variety of accounts while avoiding an idiosyncratic subsample.

Participant letter	Sex	Job title
A	Female	Logistics Employee
B	Male	Assembly Technician
C	Male	Assembly Technician
D	Male	Installation Technician
E	Male	Logistics Employee
F	Male	Assembly Technician
G	Male	Installation Technician
H	Male	Assembly Technician

**Table 1.** Table of participants

The production facilities of the target organization consists of four departments, which are divided by specialization in different skillsets, products and operational aspects. The table above demonstrates the participants "Letter", which is used to anonymously track the empirical data given in Chapter 4. Participants' sex is provided to ensure the transparency of the purposeful sampling, closely matching the average demographic factors of the said production facility. Four of the participants share the same job title due to organization's preferences, yet work in two different departments. Participants H and F work in the same department, as well as participants B and C work in their respective department.

The sample of the study (N=8) consists of both male (N=7), and female (N=1) employees based on the average demographics of the organization at the time of the study. Participants' individual ages are not revealed due to the side of the organization possibly compromising the anonymity promised to the participants. However, the purposeful sample

consists of participants aged between 24 to 50 years old, to ensure different points of view to the matter discussed. The average age of the participants interviewed is 35, which proves that the purposeful sampling consists of participants from both ends of the age range. However, the focus is analytical generalization, refining understanding of mechanisms—rather than statistical representativeness (Yin, 2018). Sampling was determined so that informational sufficiency was reached for second-order themes in the Gioia analysis (Gioia et al., 2012; Saunders & Townsend, 2016).

### **3.3 Collection of data**

The data was collected during the spring of 2025 in Finnish and are therefore translated in English in this thesis. Participants are coded in letters from A to H for purposes of anonymity, yet maintaining objectivity and allowing the readers of this thesis to be the judge of any patterns or phenomena that might emerge from the data. All the direct quotes provided from the interviewees will be presented as a separate text chapter to improve clarity.

Method chosen was a qualitative, semi-structured interview, intended to give the interviewee authority and space to treat them as “knowledgeable agents”, as Gioia et al. (2012) suggest, yet maintaining the relevancy of the data with a light structure. Interviews lasted approximately 60 to 90 minutes and were conducted on-site at the workplace. The interview questions were designed based on the groundwork as presented by Gioia et al. (2012, p. 19-20) theoretical framework, as flexible and interviewee guided as possible. The interviews explored themes such as interpersonal communication, the sense of belonging, feedback processes, and the influence of organizational structures and practices.

The scope of the research is limited to a single organizational context, and the study does not aim to produce generalizable findings beyond this setting. Rather, the objective is to generate in-depth understanding of employees’ subjective experiences and to illustrate

how social factors related to the concept of social cohesion contribute to their sense of success. Additionally, the study focuses exclusively on self-perceived success and does not attempt to assess performance through objective metrics. Because interviews were in Finnish and selected quotations appear in English, translation followed a meaning-preserving approach: idiomatic expressions were rendered into target-language equivalents while retaining the speaker's intent, and ambiguous terms were checked against context (Temple & Young, 2004).

### **3.4 Analysis of data: Gioia methodology and grounded-theory logic**

The analysis followed the Gioia methodology (Gioia et al., 2012), which is well-suited for inductive theory building in organizational research and complements grounded-theory traditions (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Charmaz, 2014; Gunther & Hasanen, 2021). The following table aims to clarify the process of analysis, inspired by Gioia et al. (2012) model:

Step	Purpose	Key actions	References
First-order coding (informant terms)	Preserve participants' voice and incident-level meaning without imposing theory prematurely (Gioia, Corley, & Hamilton, 2013; Charmaz, 2014).	Line-by-line coding of transcripts; capture in vivo phrases and concrete episodes.	(Gioia et al., 2013; Charmaz, 2014)
Second-order coding (researcher themes)	Build explanatory patterns from first-order material while remaining open to novelty.	Cluster first-order codes into themes guided by sensitising concepts from social cohesion, SDT, self-efficacy, work design/crafting, and feedback	(Gioia et al., 2013; Charmaz, 2014; Chan et al., 2006; Friedkin, 2004; Ryan & Deci, 2000; Bandura, 1997; Hackman & Oldham, 1980)
Aggregate dimensions & data structure	Make the inductive logic transparent from raw data to constructs.	Integrate second-order themes into higher-order aggregate dimensions and present the full data structure (Gioia et al., 2013; Gunther & Hasanen, 2021).	(Gioia et al., 2013; Gunther & Hasanen, 2021)
Constant comparison & memoing	Strengthen credibility and refine category boundaries.	Compare incidents within and across interviews; write analytic memos on boundaries, recurring phenomena, and deviant cases (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Charmaz, 2014).	(Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Charmaz, 2014)

**Table 2.** Gioia analysis step by step

The Gioia methodology was followed throughout the analysis to maintain a transparent link from data to theory. In the first-order stage, transcripts were coded line-by-line to retain in vivo expressions and incident-level meaning, deliberately postponing theoretical overlay (Gioia et al., 2012; Charmaz, 2014). In the second-order stage, first-order codes were clustered into themes using sensitizing concepts from the literatures on social cohesion (Chan et al., 2006; Friedkin, 2004), SDT (Ryan & Deci, 2000), self-efficacy (Bandura, 1997), work design and job crafting (Hackman & Oldham, 1980; Wrzesniewski

& Dutton, 2001; Rosso et al., 2010), and feedback (Kluger & DeNisi, 1996), while staying open to any arising patterns. These themes were then integrated into aggregate dimensions and displayed in a data structure to evidence the inductive logic (Gioia et al., 2012; Gunther & Hasanen, 2021). Throughout, interpretations were refined via constant comparison and memoing—comparing incidents within and across interviews, recording category boundaries, recurrent phenomena, and negative cases—consistent with grounded-theory logic (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Charmaz, 2014).

This approach aligns with grounded-theory aspect of “rigor”—representing abductive reasoning: cycling between data and literature to develop the most plausible mechanism while keeping the inferential trail explicit (Charmaz, 2014; Gioia et al., 2012; Gunther & Hasanen, 2021).

Grounded theory is an approach designed to build practice-relevant theory from empirical data. Originating in the 1960s, it has developed into a family of related traditions rather than a single uniform method. It can be adopted broadly as a methodological stance guiding an entire study, or more narrowly as a systematic set of procedures for collecting and analyzing qualitative data. The approach is particularly well suited to topics with limited prior research or to contexts in which a novel perspective is sought. It is also effective for studying work and interaction in emergent or uncertain situations, where unanticipated factors play a significant role. (Gunther & Hasanen, 2021)

Due to social cohesion being somewhat vague regarding definitions and theories (Fonseca et al., 2018; Friedkin, 2004), and due to the participants being uneducated on the subject of the interview, the unanticipated factors mentioned seemed imminent. Thus, it seemed logical to use Gioia et al. (2012) style inductive analysis and grounded theory model to ensure the variety and depth of data provided by participants that are purposely uneducated on the specifics and theoretical framework of the thesis.

The findings seek to provide practical insights for organizations seeking to enhance social cohesion as a means of promoting employees' sense of success, thus increasing well-being, engagement and motivation. The aim is to produce mechanism-oriented explanation rather than generalizable estimates. In the next chapter "4. Analysis of Research Data" are presented the different perspectives of empirical data, answering the first two research questions. The third research question: "How do micro-, meso-, and macro-level factors of social cohesion interact in shaping employees' experience of accomplishment?" is presented in chapter "5. Conclusions", because it does not include direct evidence from the empirical data, but is rather the authors interpretation of the evidence; reflected in theoretical framework.

### **3.5 Trustworthiness, reflexivity, and ethics**

Following established qualitative quality criteria (e.g., Lincoln & Guba, 1985), several procedures were implemented to strengthen the trustworthiness of the study. Credibility was supported by grounding each second-order theme in multiple representative quotations, actively seeking negative cases to challenge early interpretations, e.g. participant A's negative case on the benefit of working in an environment with several connections to family and friends: "I think other people see me as a privileged employee, having a family member as a supervisor. I personally feel like that puts additional pressure on me, and gives me tasks that I might not have to do otherwise.", which introduces an opposite point of view to the majority of the empirical data. Furthermore, to reduce the possibility of misunderstanding participants' ideas or idioms, limited member-style sense-checking was applied during interviews (e.g., probing "did I get this right?"). Transferability was addressed by providing a description of the organizational context, enabling readers to assess the plausibility of transferring the findings to comparable settings, such as industrial manufacturing teams characterized by interdependent work. Finally, ethical integrity was ensured through informed consent, systematic removal of identifying information, and secure storage of recordings and transcripts in accordance with institutional guidelines.

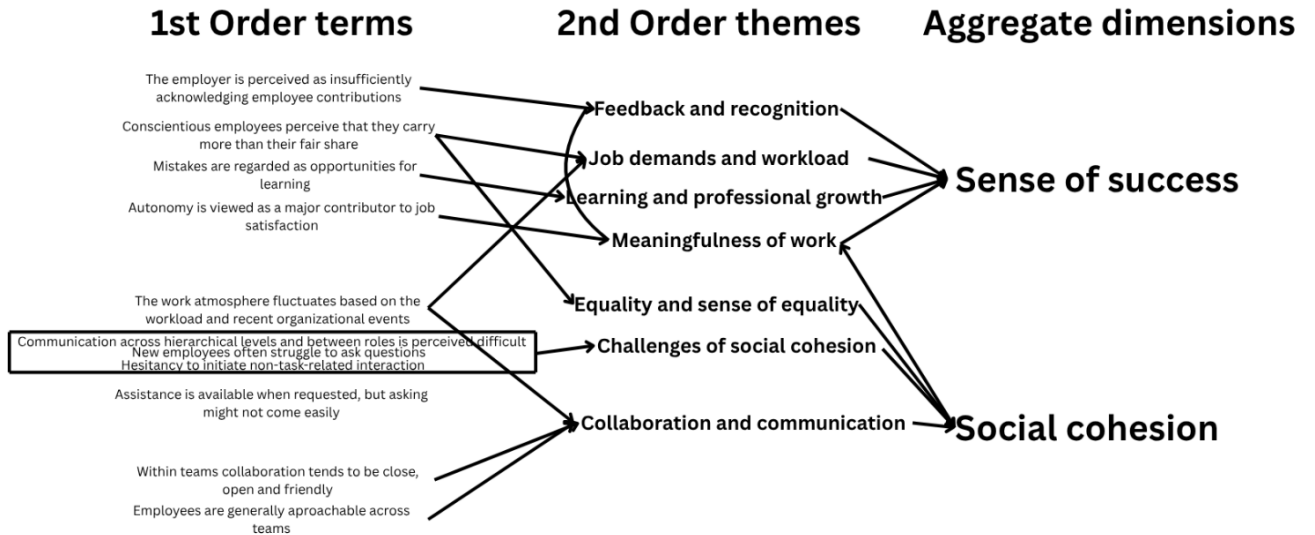
## 4 Analysis of Research Data

1st Order Terms	2nd Order Themes	Aggregate Dimensions
The employer is perceived as insufficiently acknowledging employee contributions	Feedback and recognition	Sense of success
Mistakes are regarded as opportunities for learning	Learning and professional growth	Sense of success
Autonomy is viewed as a major contributor to job satisfaction	Meaningfulness of work	Sense of success
Conscientious employees perceive that they carry more than their fair share	Equality and sense of equality	Social cohesion
Communication across hierarchical levels and between roles is perceived difficult	Challenges of social cohesion	Social cohesion
The work atmosphere fluctuates, based on the workload and recent organizational events; thus affecting the co-operation and coordination between, and within teams	Collaboration and communication	Social cohesion

**Figure 2.** Data structure: Key terms and themes of the Gioia-analysis

Figure 2 demonstrates the simplified version of the empirical data. The first-order terms function as concrete, experience-near observations that indicate what employees notice in everyday work, whether contributions are acknowledged, whether mistakes are treated as learning opportunities, how autonomy shapes satisfaction, how workload feels distributed, and how difficult cross-level communication can be. These informant-level statements are then consolidated into second-order themes that capture the underlying mechanisms implied by the accounts—such as Feedback and recognition (visibility and validation of performance), Learning and professional growth (developmental framing of errors and reasonable challenge), Meaningfulness of work (autonomy and purpose as interpretive lenses for progress), Equality and sense of equality (fairness in social interaction, salary and task and burden allocation), Challenges of social cohesion (friction and thresholds in interaction), and Collaboration and communication (coordination and social interaction between, and within teams and individuals). At the most abstract level, these themes converge into two aggregate dimensions that represent the study's core outcomes and conditions: Sense of success is built through pathways that make progress observable, developmental, and personally meaningful, whereas Social cohesion is shaped through relational infrastructure—fairness perceptions, interactional

ease, and the quality of communication—that enables or constrains those success-producing experiences.



**Figure 3.** Illustrating the complexity of social cohesion enhancing sense of success

However, as the empirical data presents, the subject of this thesis is vast and more complex than the data structure indicates. To ensure the demonstration of the multidimensionality of the matter, Figure 3 presents a larger, more complex interpretation of the empirical data. Compared with the earlier, simplified table—where each first-order term was effectively “anchored” to a single second-order theme and then to one aggregate dimension—this figure makes the structure more realistic (however harder to follow) by visualizing overlap, and asymmetries in how the data clusters within itself. Several first-order terms here connect to multiple second-order themes, indicating that the same incident can simultaneously signal different underlying mechanisms. For example, participant F’s perception of an uneven burden (“conscientious employees carry more than their fair share”) is not only a matter of Equality and sense of equality but also plausibly intersect with Job demands and workload, since workload distribution is both a fairness issue and a demand related strain. Likewise, fluctuating atmosphere under pressure is shown as feeding into Collaboration and communication while also relating to Job

demands and workload, capturing how time pressure reshapes interaction quality rather than remaining a purely individual experience. The figure 3 also adds missing contextual constraints by highlighting interaction thresholds and frictions (set of statements in a box, about difficult cross-level communication, new employees' hesitancy to ask questions, and reluctance to initiate non-task interaction), which collectively illustrate how Challenges of social cohesion can limit the very exchanges through which support, feedback, and learning would otherwise occur. In short, the key difference is that this diagram does not treat the data structure as a clean one-to-one mapping; instead, it portrays the phenomenon as a network in which cohesion-related conditions (communication quality, help-seeking thresholds, fairness perceptions) can enable or constrain success-related pathways (feedback, learning, meaningfulness), thereby filling in the missing links needed to interpret the system as a complex, interdependent set of phenomena.

## **4.1 How do employees describe and define their own sense of accomplishment at work?**

### **4.1.1 Feedback and recognition**

In the workplace context, discussions of success, development, and particularly the sense of accomplishment invariably invoke the role of feedback. In our interviews, several participants brought up the significance of feedback spontaneously, prior to the point in the interview protocol at which the topic was scheduled, underscoring its perceived salience. The triggers varied: for some, talking about supervisors prompted reflections on feedback; for others, a specific performance episode—or simply a self-assessment of how they were faring at work—naturally led the conversation toward feedback.

“The best feedback I can get is to see the work finished, knowing I did it well. Although, getting positive feedback from customers gives me the sense of accomplishment.” (G)

“My perspective on feedback is that both positive and negative feedback should be given honestly and openly. Employees have to be able to take criticism and evolve when needed.” (D)

“I personally prefer constructive criticism over patting on my back and casual “good job” comments. Furthermore, it is hard to say whether or not the person giving me feedback actually knows what I have accomplished. Yet I would like to get more feedback, no matter the nature of the feedback.” (F)

The participants were asked whether external feedback reflects actual performance or whether it is often given because a particular action happened to be noticed or because the feedback provider had a personal interest in that outcome. Most interviewees stated that they generally perform quite well, which led them to conclude that feedback expertise is often limited. The employer tends to provide feedback at a high level of abstraction (e.g., on delivery metrics or larger projects) aimed at the organization or departments. Supervisors are typically busy and do not examine individual employees’ work closely enough to give specific feedback on day-to-day performance or professional development. Consequently, most personal feedback is experienced as brief, only loosely expert, albeit positive, remarks such as “Good job,” “Thanks for getting this done in time,” or “Thanks for your help.”

#### **4.1.2 Job demands and workload**

Job demands and workload are the aspects of a job (physical, cognitive, emotional, social, or organizational) that require sustained effort and are therefore associated with physical or psychological costs (fatigue, strain, stress) (Demerouti et al., 2001). Demands are a natural aspect of a job in return for the salary, but when high and prolonged, they increase exhaustion and reduce well-being and performance. In context of this thesis job demands and workload are closely aligned with equality and sense of equality, which is

one of the key factors of social cohesion. Job demands and workload was not intended to be one of the themes of the interview, but it came up in every interview, and pointed out to be a theme worth exploring.

“We have committed and talented people working here, who deserve more recognition and salary than they are getting right now. However, if they are treated similarly, I guess that is equal.” (H)

“I feel like I have to do more than my colleagues, because I am conscientious, and I do not say no” (F)

Irrespective of department, the data underlines the salience of time pressure and stress for the social climate. Some interviewees described the atmosphere as “tense” others as “open and positive,” and still others as good overall but tense during busy periods. Even respondents who initially gave a purely positive or negative assessment noted, upon follow-up, that the atmosphere becomes strained under time pressure, while a subset reported ongoing irritability even in the absence of workload peaks. According to the interviewees, this is because problematic issues are not actively addressed by the employees; it is easier to complain than to intervene. Some also linked the irritability to a felt sense of being stuck in one’s role without opportunities for advancement or influence.

The fact that problems are not being addressed is sort of conflicting with the statement that mistakes are an opportunity to learn in the organization. These two matters can be seen as closely related, however one significant difference is that the mistakes speak for themselves, yet problems might stay quiet if not spoken about. So it seems as if the community is lacking similar initiative to fix the problems than collaborating in non-task related social interactions. Task-oriented day-to-day work life could refer to poor social cohesion or busy work schedules, which correlate with each other.

Furthermore, as important and problems are to address, problem is a slightly more complicated as a concept than a mistake. Mistake, once discovered or revealed, refers usually to an everyday task failure, due to an employee's or team's carelessness or incompetence. Mistakes are easy to forget, when claimed upon carelessness: "Mistakes happen", however not caring enough could refer to lack of motivation, which can quickly be categorized as a problem. Problems, such as lack of motivation are usually harder to solve, and might bring up new problems when discovered. For example, the lack of motivation could be seen as incompetence by the managers, which could lead to managers not trusting their employees, thus limiting their employees' autonomy and reducing the motivation further. All in all, as hard as the problems are to address, it is important to neglect these kinds of misunderstandings that could cause invisible harm in a long run, due to not communicating openly.

"Every morning I hear people complaining about things rather than trying to fix them. That kind of negativity is contagious and a waste of energy. I personally tend to seek to solve problems as soon as possible." (B)

Another challenging thing with problems is that they can be time consuming, and they tend to emerge when there is no time to spare. Participants reported on the social climate being good at other times, and tense when busy, which can be seen as normal. When the organization is busy and a problem comes up, it is hard to take the time to deal with the problem, since every employee must deal with what is on the table at the moment, to normalize the schedule. Thus, when things have normalized again, the underlying problems such as lacking of motivation or salary incompetence might be hidden again, only to be a problem when the social climate gets tense again. This theme will be further explored in the next chapter, as these kinds of issues are closely related to equality and sense of equality.

### 4.1.3 Equality and sense of equality

Regarding demographic factors, the interviewees unanimously perceived no inequity at all. Participants felt that employees are treated fairly regardless of their age, sex, education level, job role, marital status, nationality, ethnicity, and socioeconomic status. However, some unequal treatment was reported in areas such as task allocation and remuneration. As mentioned in the previous chapter, conscientious employees were perceived to receive more tasks than others without a corresponding reflection in pay. Some interviewees also felt that social ties (e.g., friendships or family relationships) exert an unduly large influence on opportunities to exercise influence or to advance. Perceived inequality also occurs between departments, often emerging from small, cumulative practices over time, for example, borrowing tools without returning them, or the late or partial dissemination of relevant information.

“Regarding demographic factors and such, people have always been treated equally in our organization. However, speaking of salaries and liberties on the job, some people are getting unjustified benefits, which are not spoken about.” (E)

A number of interviewees felt that performance expectations are not uniform, insofar as poor performance is not addressed consistently across roles. This finding seems to be closely aligned with the fact that conscientious employees carry more than their fair share of the workload. Despite the fact that it seems to be easier to give “ad hoc” tasks and other emerging responsibilities to conscientious employees, the other side of the coin seems to be that other employees are getting away with doing their least. Participants reported that the employees that do not actively seek responsibilities, end up having to carry very little workload, which then again adds burden to other employees. This phenomenon creates a sense of inequality, which weakens social cohesion.

Although friendship and family ties are common and natural, interviewees indicated that they can influence a surprising number of workplace dynamics. Participants reported perceived privileges and responsibilities that are believed to stem from such

relationships. Some interviewees argued that these ties can facilitate career advancement and influence in ways experienced as inequitable. However, other interviewees emphasized the opposite effect: friendship or family relationships at work can heighten expectations and pressure on the employee.

"I think other people see me as a privileged employee, having a family member as a supervisor. I personally feel like that puts additional pressure on me, and gives me tasks that I might not have to do otherwise." (A)

Several interviewees reported that family and friendship ties create additional pressure to perform well in their roles. They also perceived that they are more readily assigned unpleasant tasks, as the perceived risk of conflict is lower in close relationships. This observation aligns with Section 4.1.2, where Interviewee F describes how conscientious employees tend to carry additional weight of the workload.

"Despite the fact that I am good friends with my supervisor outside the workplace, we have managed to keep the personal life and professional life separate." (B)

Assessing the impact of social relationships on workplace equality is inherently difficult. Several interviewees regarded work life as entirely separate from personal life; for example, Interviewee B stated that these two domains are distinct and do not intersect. Others described extra-organizational ties as a positive addition to daily life rather than a factor relevant to success or equality at work. At the same time, Interviewee B noted that close familiarity with a supervisor makes it easier to approach them and to speak candidly, suggesting that off-the-job relationships may shape workplace conditions in practice.

The tendency to downplay the relevance of personal relationships to working life may reflect a desire to preserve a sense of equality. Yet social bonds are a natural aspect of human interaction, and attempting to suppress such ties in the name of equality is both

challenging and arguably unrealistic. Thus, I believe that the impact of personal relationships on workplace context is being diminished, to maintain the sense of equality.

For some, perceived inequity is tied to departmental identity, which is understood to be shaped by visible achievements recognized outside the unit or by the presence of particularly strong individual personalities. Sometimes the departmental identity can be affected by actions of others, people outside the unit. However the departmental identity is formed, it can have major impact on team members' feeling of equality, respect and social cohesion.

"Our department includes strong, highly vocal personalities. I wonder if, by virtue of their visibility, they exert substantial influence on how the department is perceived" (A)

In larger organizations, interaction tends to occur through departments and teams as salient social units. Each employee holds a mental representation of other units, and team members, in turn, form views about how their own team is perceived by colleagues. Team identity formation is a complex process that can shape workplace dynamics in subtle ways. Interviewee A reported feeling somewhat peripheral within their team, without being able to specify the reasons. At the meso level of social cohesion (the group level), A described fractures in trust and social relations, attributed to the presence of strong personalities who make decisions and communicate externally on the team's behalf. A does not always agree with these members and believes that they partly define how the team is viewed by the wider organization.

"Co-workers taking tools from our department and not returning them or leaving them all over the place is a real problem. Not only does it harm our work, but it feels like disrespectful, as if our department is not appreciated." (H)

The sense of inequality can affect social cohesion in a team in multiple ways. When interviewee H was asked whether the organization is equitable, they reported that their

team experiences a sense of inferiority. When probed for reasons, H provided the following example: tools are borrowed from the department without authorization and are either not returned or are returned to incorrect locations. These practices were interpreted as signaling a lack of respect, with visible effects on the department's identity and collective self-esteem. According to Healy (2013) democracy and sense of equality are critical factors for cohesion to exist.

#### **4.1.4 Meaningfulness of work**

Interviewees emphasized that individualized, knowledgeable feedback is meaningful. When asked whether positive feedback to the team is experienced as a personal success, or negative feedback to the team as a personal failure, most reported reflecting on their own role in the outcome. An interesting asymmetry emerged: negative feedback directed at the department was experienced more strongly as a personal failure than positive feedback was as a personal success. This likely stems from the organization's helping culture—when a team member fails, the sense of collective responsibility makes the setback feel personal. When asked whether they attribute their own failures to themselves or to external factors, all interviewees reported that their own actions were the primary cause. Such ownership of failure is closely aligned with the pattern observed in the Data Structure whereby mistakes are viewed as opportunities for learning.

“Meaningfulness of work consists of two things for me; the other side is seeing the concrete work I have done, and the other side is the social factors including various things. Then again, those two things are woven together, as the recognition and happiness are social factors, and they feed the sense of success, increasing performance on the job.”  
(E)

“There is no denying that recognition on organizational level feels somehow greater than a casual feedback, probably because it is quite rare. Nevertheless, I appreciate all the feedback, negative and positive, no matter how public it is.” (C)

Feedback at the organizational level was perceived as more significant than feedback from a supervisor, which in turn was experienced as more significant than feedback from a colleague. In other words, the perceived significance of feedback increases with organizational level. When asked about the expertise behind feedback, interviewees noted that colleagues and supervisors—depending on the team—are typically more knowledgeable about daily tasks than the employer. Even so, higher-level recognition was often deemed meaningful because of its rarity, although some noted potential downsides, such as questioning by one's own team when organization-level recognition is given. Then again the answers had variety, as one of the interviewees reported that the best feedback is seeing the work when it is finished.

#### **4.1.5 Learning and professional growth**

Interviewees often describe their sense of accomplishment through concrete outcomes. Most reported a particularly strong feeling of success after completing a challenging task, although feedback and social factors also contributed meaningfully to that feeling. Social facilitation effect shows that when people are being observed during a task, the impact of the audience depends on the level of skill of the person doing the task (Zajonc, 1965). If the person in question believes they are skilled in the task in question, the audience will increase their performance, as opposed to being bad at the task the performance is affected poorly (Zajonc, 1965). Based on this evidence, it could be argued that typically a more challenging task at hand would acquire more attention than the easier tasks, not only due to natural requirements, but also the curiosity of human nature, thus affecting the employees' performance by being observed during the task. Participants stated clearly that the challenging tasks are more rewarding, which reflects high level of expertise and an urge for personal professional development.

"I consider myself as quite a sensitive person, so that the negative things impact me heavily." (A)

Learning and professional growth can be seen as a double-edged sword. On one hand, encouraging the talk about mistakes and fostering constructive criticism is optimal for organizational and personal development. On the other hand, overloading the organizational climate with professional growth might suffocate some of the employees, who process criticism in a deeper way. From social cohesion perspective, it is a responsibility of everyone in the organization, especially employees in supervisory positions, to manage this balance of learning and professional growth. These kinds of macro-elements of social cohesion tend to be quite hard to notice on the day-to-day work, but they can undermine social cohesion in ways that can paralyze crucial elements of the organizations functions.

“Despite the good relations to my employer and supervisor, I can not trust them fully, since there has been times and situations when things have been promised, that has not been delivered.” (G)

Supervisors are described as proactive and approachable, and trust in immediate supervisors is strong. Trust in the employer more broadly is also commonly reported, yet a few interviewees expressed distrust toward the employer, citing failures to uphold shared rules or broken promises. Speaking of sense of success, supervisors and employer are seen as entities, that makes sure nothing is wrong, rather than improving certain things noticeably. Thus, supervisors and employer are crucial for making the employees’ sense of success possible with “hygienic factors”. In social cohesion theory, this refers to supervisors and employer contributing to the macro level of social cohesion, from employee point of view.

## **4.2 How do the different aspects of social cohesion contribute to employees’ sense of accomplishment?**

#### 4.2.6 Collaboration and communication

“I feel that, in general, the atmosphere is fairly relaxed and positive on the surface, however, during periods of time pressure it tends to become tense and somewhat strict. I also feel that, within our department, the atmosphere is somewhat tense more broadly.”  
(A)

The overall social climate of the work community is generally seen as positive. Certain departments, for structural reasons, maintain more internal client relationships across the organization; this is perceived to benefit their day-to-day functioning. By contrast, some departments work primarily within their own unit, which—according to the empirical material—very easily narrows the scope of social interaction. Some interviewees find this inward orientation somewhat troubling, while others experience it as liberating because it allows them to interact mainly with colleagues of their own choosing.

“My social relationships are quite limited to my own department, simply because we work together as a team. It seems hard to form relationships with other employees, since it is not acceptable to spend time talking about non-work-related stuff during working hours.” (D)

Interviewees generally report on social relationships within their own department. Some maintain ties outside the unit as well, but these are mostly linked to joint projects or tasks. At the same time, the prevailing climate is such that interviewees feel they could approach anyone in the organization; they simply see little need to do so, as most work is conducted with one’s own team and people largely enjoy working with them. Social interaction is considered to have a substantial impact on the sense of accomplishment. Positive—and even neutral—interactions are motivating and support task performance. Some interviewees cautioned that excessive sociability may reduce efficiency, yet they still viewed it as beneficial overall.

#### 4.2.7 Meaningfulness of work

Meaningfulness of work is a reoccurring theme in both chapters of the empirical data, because it proved to be quite a significant factor and it has elements of both; sense of accomplishment and social cohesion. A sense of belonging emerged as one of the most salient issues in the interviews. Interviewees reported an organization-wide sense of belonging, at least to the extent that no one is ostracized. At a reactive level, every member receives positive treatment; however, proactive construction of belonging in the daily work remains limited. When asked how belonging could be strengthened, the most common answer was spending time together. Most people share some commonalities that could support a sense of belonging, but finding or building those shared elements requires time spent together.

“I get the sense of meaningfulness from the amazing work community that we have. I get pure joy from the simple conversations that I have with my co-workers every day, and it keeps me going.” (C)

Furthermore, interviewees indicated that the meaningfulness of work is built largely around interpersonal relationships and the sense of accomplishment. Elements associated with social cohesion—such as trust, equality, altruism, and mental and physical well-being—were described as “hygiene factors” whose presence is necessary for both meaningful work and a sustained sense of accomplishment. Nevertheless, an organization in which no one is ostracized does not mean that the organization is cohesive and has sufficient social capital.

“Only a fracture of the feedback given is verbal in my opinion for example facial expressions and gestures tell so much, both positive and negative. Sometimes non-verbal feedback can be seen as a pure joy from one’s face or even such things as getting favors and help without asking for them.” (E)

Regarding the question: *“Do social interactions affect the sense of success during the day?”* many interviewees recognized a link between positive social interaction and successful performance precisely because positive interactions helped them perform better in their concrete tasks. When asked to set this mechanism aside, they still reported leaving work feeling more successful on days with positive social experiences. Notably, the perceived effect of negative social interactions on the sense of accomplishment was particularly strong. Responses to non-verbal feedback varied. Some interviewees felt they received subtle signals even from small cues—facial expressions, greeting behavior—whereas others felt that people behaved similarly regardless of their own actions. Nevertheless, participants clearly indicated that how people behave towards them directly affects their sense of success at work. Whether the effect is carried out by the social interactions affecting actual performance or perceived performance, daily social interactions have an impact on employees’ sense of success.

#### **4.2.8 Challenges of social cohesion**

Despite these tensions, communication is generally perceived as open and honest, and trust in co-workers is strong. Colleagues provide support altruistically, and all interviewees reported the presence of shared values and norms, which enhances a sense of belonging. That said, cooperation and social ties between departments are not always present, largely because formal collaboration is lacking. In general, people felt that colleagues across departments are approachable and that social contacts could readily be formed, but such outreach is often not seen as necessary. Seeking help—within and across departments—is considered legitimate, although some interviewees acknowledged a personal threshold for asking.

“It is an essential part of my role to interact with people across the organization. With most colleagues, our conversations concern work-related matters; with some, we naturally get along well, exchange jokes, and engage in small talk. There are also individuals

with whom interactions have at times involved conflict, however it is a rare situation.”  
(E)

Festinger (1952) describes social cohesion as a tendency to remain affiliated with the team. Participants reported little need to get acquainted with people from other teams, but also gave evidence of positive experiences of common projects amongst personnel from other teams. According to Festinger et al. (1952), after having such a positive experience together, employees would be happy to collaborate or communicate with the people in question again. According to most participants, they could seek their company, but do not feel the need for it, which refers to either low social cohesion, or high pressure on timelines. Furthermore, sometimes in a professional relationship people might be afraid to “break the bubble” by taking the relationship to more personal levels.

Referring to participant D’s comment about getting to know each other during the working hours being limited by the pressure to keep up with the work, it seems to be a time-limited issue. The time pressure felt could affect the interviewees’ answer as why they do not feel the “need” to connect with other people in the organization, or it feels like there is a threshold to form relationships. Having a busy working environment makes it notably harder to connect with a co-worker, when one might feel like doing it, the window rapidly closes due to busy working conditions.

## 5 Conclusions

This thesis seeks to address the core question: How does social cohesion enhance employees' sense of accomplishment in the workplace? Supporting the objective are following research questions:

1. How do employees describe and define their own sense of accomplishment at work?
2. How do the different aspects of social cohesion contribute to employees' sense of accomplishment?
3. How do micro-, meso-, and macro-level factors of social cohesion interact in shaping employees' experience of accomplishment?

First two of the research questions were answered in the previous chapter, and the third one is positioned in this chapter (justified at the end of chapter 3.4), answered in the following sections. This chapter integrates the findings of this empirical data with established theory to explain how social cohesion translates into employees' experienced accomplishment. Building on Self-Determination Theory and self-efficacy, we interpret the micro-level interaction episodes observed in the data (approachability, informational feedback, peer modelling), as need-supportive events that satisfy relatedness and competence and calibrate efficacy, thereby making progress felt, as tangible sense of accomplishment (Ryan & Deci, 2000; Bandura, 1997; Stajkovic & Luthans, 1998).

At the meso-level, these episodes accumulate into cohesion—shared norms, trust, and affective tone—that organizes feedback and recognition routines and legitimizes small-scale job crafting, a known antecedent of meaningfulness of work (Chan et al., 2006; Friedkin, 2004; Barsade & Knight, 2015; Wrzesniewski & Dutton, 2001; Rosso et al., 2010). At the macro level, organizational design choices around autonomy, goals, and feedback either enable or throttle these mechanisms (Hackman & Oldham, 1980). Boundary conditions are also considered: job demands and workload can compress interaction time and dampen these links unless buffered by cohesive practices (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007; Frese & Fay, 2001; Grant & Ashford, 2008). Together, the results advance cohesion

research beyond team-level performance correlations (e.g., Beal, Cohen, Burke, & McLendon, 2003; Gully, Devine, & Whitney, 1995; Castaño, Watts, & Tekleab, 2021) by specifying a cross-level pathway from cohesion to felt accomplishment and clarifying how it can be sustained.

### **5.1 How do micro-, meso-, and macro-level factors of social cohesion interact in shaping employees' experience of accomplishment?**

Evidence in this thesis suggests that employees' experience of accomplishment is not produced at a single position but arises from cross-level interactions in the social system. At the micro level, day-to-day exchanges—being able to approach a colleague, receiving timely informational feedback, observing a credible peer handle a task—directly satisfy needs for relatedness and competence and calibrate self-efficacy, making progress feel successful (Ryan & Deci, 2000; Bandura, 1997). These interaction episodes are the immediate “building blocks” of felt success: they reduce the threshold for help-seeking, increase the visibility of small wins, and turn private effort into socially recognized contribution (See Chapter 4: Collaboration & Communication and Feedback & Recognition).

At the meso-level of social cohesion—shared norms, mutual trust, and a positive affective tone—organizes and amplifies those micro-episodes into patterns (Chan et al., 2006; Barsade & Knight, 2015; Friedkin, 2004). Cohesive teams routinize coordination rituals (e.g. stand-ups and peer shout-outs) that multiply feedback opportunities and normalize vicarious learning and spontaneous micro-help, defined as altruism in social cohesion theory, as Lockwood (1999) states, it is one of social cohesion's key ingredients. They also legitimate job crafting—small, employee-initiated adjustments to tasks, relationships, and sense-making—which heightens meaningfulness and renders progress legible in the flow of work (Wrzesniewski & Dutton, 2001; Rosso et al., 2010). In this way, team-level cohesion functions as a relational amplifier: it increases the frequency, quality, and reach of the micro mechanisms that produce felt accomplishment.

At the macro level, organizational arrangements—reward systems, workload allocation, leadership climate, and structural interdependencies—shape what forms of cohesion are likely to emerge and which micro/meso mechanisms are feasible. Autonomy-supportive leadership and work designs with clear goals and informational feedback create conditions in which micro recognition is credible and meso routines are sustained (Hackman & Oldham, 1980; Ryan & Deci, 2000). By contrast, individualized incentive schemes and fragmented structures can foster isolated identification of departments or teams, constraining cross-team visibility and disrupting the channels through which feedback travels and peer-modelling is absorbed by (Chapter 4: Challenges of Group Cohesion and Equality). Thus, the macro-level either enables or throttles the local conversion of cohesion into felt success. Furthermore, macro-level factors influence “hygienic factors”—affecting everyday conditions of the employees—possibly affecting the social cohesion to sense of success ratio. However, this thesis does not provide factual information or precise empirical data on macro-level social cohesion impacts on the matter.

These levels together determine each other through feedback loops. Micro wins accumulate into a meso-level affective tone (around here, effort is noticed), which in turn encourages further micro help-seeking and modelling; supportive macro policies (e.g., time protected for brief check-ins) stabilize those meso routines. Under high job demands, the cross-level dynamics are most visible: workload compresses interaction time (macro to meso), weakening feedback quality (meso to micro). Cohesive teams buffer this by tightening cycles (shorter, more frequent check-ins), routing help effectively, and trimming low-value tasks (micro/meso job crafting), thereby maintaining the appraisal conditions for accomplishment despite pressure (Grant & Ashford, 2008; Frese & Fay, 2001; Chapter 4: Job Demands & Workload).

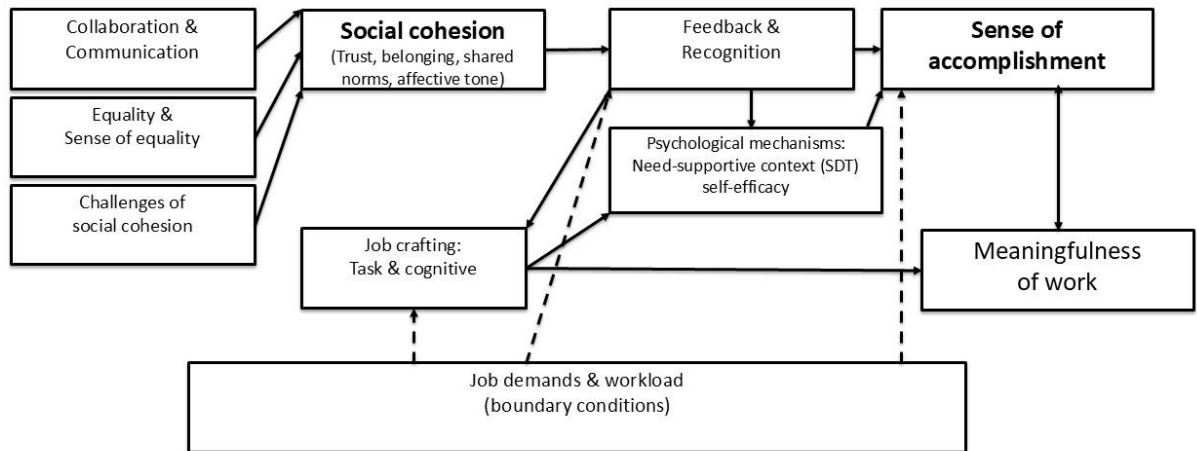
Synthesizing these phenomena, this thesis proposes a cross-level pathway:

Macro-level (need-supportive climate; structural interdependence, hygienic factors) to meso-level (social cohesion; feedback/job crafting routines; affective tone) to micro-level (peer modelling, informational feedback, experienced mastery episodes) to sense

of accomplishment, with bidirectional feedback whereby individual success signals and group level tone inform organizational adjustments (e.g., redesigning recognition practices). Importantly, job crafting is the micro-level foundation that enables social resources and concrete progress being translated into meaningfulness, the proximal psychological route to felt success. Social cohesion thus operates both as an outcome of effective collaboration and as an input that enables the very interactions through which employees come to experience their work as successful.

In theoretical terms, these findings integrate SDT, self-efficacy, and job design/crafting within a social-systems view: micro encounters satisfy needs and calibrate efficacy (Ryan & Deci, 2000; Bandura, 1997), meso-level social cohesion scales those encounters through routines and shared narratives (Chan et al., 2006; Barsade & Knight, 2015), and macro-level design either supplies or withholds the structural time and attention required for these mechanisms to operate (Hackman & Oldham, 1980; Wrzesniewski & Dutton, 2001). Practically, improving employees' experience of accomplishment is not a single intervention but a cross-level alignment problem: redesign macro-level (organizational) policies to be need-supportive, institutionalize meso-level (teams) routines that keep progress visible, and cultivate micro-level (individuals) behaviors—modelling, informational feedback, and everyday job crafting—that make success both attainable and felt.

## 5.2 Grounded theory model



- Cohesion enables frequent, proximal feedback; feedback and job crafting increase meaningfulness, which supports accomplishment.
- Solid arrows refers to a direct process. Dashed arrows indicate where high demands on workload can affect the outcome of the model.
- Learning and professional growth plays a role, but was intentionally left out of the grounded theory model.

**Figure 4.** Grounded theory model; from social cohesion to sense of accomplishment

### 5.2.1 From interaction episodes to social cohesion

The model begins with Collaboration & Communication, i.e., everyday interaction episodes (asking/receiving help, coordinating work, sharing information). Repeated, high-quality exchanges foster shared norms, mutual trust and belonging, which we treat as Social Cohesion (Chan et al., 2006; Friedkin, 2004). Cohesion also carries an affective tone—collective positivity or strain—that shapes how members appraise subsequent encounters (Barsade & Knight, 2015). In short, micro-level interaction patterns cumulate into a meso-level relational property. In addition, the model treats Equality & Sense of equality as a complementary cohesion input: perceived fairness in workload distribution, mutual respect, and equal access to support can consolidate trust and shared norms, whereas persistent inequity cues may gradually undermine them (Chan et al., 2006; Friedkin, 2004).

### **5.2.2 Cohesion as relational infrastructure for feedback**

The arrow from Social Cohesion to Feedback & Recognition indicates how cohesive ties lower the threshold for contact and increase feedback frequency and proximity (timely, specific and knowledgeable, consistent cues about progress). Need-supportive feedback satisfies competence in Self-Determination Theory (SDT), which strengthens intrinsic motivation and facilitates internalization (Ryan & Deci, 2000). It also provides the mastery evidence, credible models, and constructive persuasion that calibrate self-efficacy and, in turn, effort and persistence (Bandura, 1997; Stajkovic & Luthans, 1998). Classic feedback syntheses show that informational (non-controlling) feedback improves performance more reliably than controlling forms (Kluger & DeNisi, 1996). Psychological mechanisms layer (SDT, self-efficacy), represents feedback translating into motivation, persistence, and a sense of capability (Ryan & Deci, 2000; Bandura, 1997), which fed by job crafting, accumulates into sense of accomplishment.

### **5.2.3 Job crafting as the micro-foundation of meaning**

From Feedback & Recognition, the model branches to Job Crafting (task & cognitive). In cohesive teams, feedback conversations and approachable ties legitimize bottom-up adjustments to tasks, relationships, and sense-making (Wrzesniewski & Dutton, 2001). Such task and cognitive crafting raise the Meaningfulness of Work by connecting daily activities to purpose and impact (Rosso et al., 2010). Hence, the arrows from Feedback & Recognition to Job Crafting and Job Crafting to Meaningfulness of Work.

### **5.2.4 Meaningfulness and felt accomplishment**

Meaningfulness of Work feeds into the Sense of Accomplishment because progress is not only observed (via feedback) but interpreted as significant (Hackman & Oldham, 1980; Rosso et al., 2010). In SDT terms, when goals are volitional (autonomy) and progress is visible (competence) within supportive relationships (relatedness), accomplishment is more likely to be experienced as self-endorsed success (Ryan & Deci, 2000).

Accordingly, the model includes Feedback & Recognition to Sense of Accomplishment (visibility/validation route) and Meaningfulness of Work to Sense of Accomplishment (significance route). In addition, the Psychological mechanisms box specifies the appraisal conditions behind these arrows: need support shapes whether progress signals are experienced as self-endorsed, and self-efficacy influences whether demanding tasks are interpreted as manageable challenges rather than threats (Ryan & Deci, 2000; Bandura, 1997).

### **5.2.5 Boundary condition: job demands and workload**

The shaded box indicates Job Demands & Workload as a moderator that conditions multiple links. In the JD–R framework, demands are aspects of work that require sustained effort and are associated with physiological/psychological costs (Demerouti et al., 2001; Bakker & Demerouti, 2007). Higher demands compress time and attention, which can attenuate the Social cohesion to Feedback & Recognition link (fewer conversations), the Feedback & Recognition to Job crafting link (less room to adapt), and the Job crafting to Meaningfulness to Sense of accomplishment link (progress becomes harder to notice). However, cohesive teams often buffer these effects by tightening coordination cycles, routing help efficiently, and pruning low-value work—forms of proactivity and personal initiative known to sustain functioning under strain (Frese & Fay, 2001; Grant & Ashford, 2008). Under sustained pressure, demands can also highlight the salience of Equality & Sense of equality by making uneven task allocation and recognition more visible, which may weaken trust and reduce the supportive exchanges that sustain cohesion and feedback (Demerouti et al., 2001; Friedkin, 2004).

### **5.2.6 Cross-level logic and contribution**

Overall, the model specifies a cross-level mechanism: micro exchanges (asking, modeling, feedback) accumulate into meso-level social cohesion, which then amplifies the availability and quality of feedback and enables micro job crafting that produces

meaningfulness; together these pathways yield an individual's felt accomplishment. This extends cohesion research—which typically emphasizes performance outcomes at the team level (e.g., Beal, Cohen, Burke, & McLendon, 2003; Gully, Devine, & Whitney, 1995; Castaño, Watts, & Tekleab, 2021)—by clarifying how team-level cohesion is converted into person-level experience through SDT-consistent need support and self-efficacy building, with job crafting as the proximal route to meaningfulness. Equality & Sense of equality and Challenges of social cohesion operate as pathway conditions, affecting social cohesion, thus the whole process. Fairness perceptions stabilize trust and shared norms, whereas frictions such as help-seeking barriers or cross-boundary tensions can disrupt the interaction opportunities through which need support and efficacy are built (Chan et al., 2006; Friedkin, 2004). Psychological mechanisms then make the conversion logic explicit by linking cohesion and feedback to need satisfaction and self-efficacy, which render progress both meaningful and noticeably successful (Ryan & Deci, 2000; Bandura, 1997).

### **5.3 Self-Determination Theory & Empirical data**

Collaboration and Communication operates as a support for sense of success: dense, approachable ties lower the threshold to initiate interaction and create routine opportunities for help, different perspectives, and inclusion, thereby moving people toward the agentic pole described by SDT. Likewise, Feedback and Recognition are the everyday vehicles of competence support: timely, specific cues about progress and appreciation validate effectiveness and guide self-regulation, sustaining intrinsic motivation. By contrast, Challenges of Group Cohesion presented in the data; for example hesitancy to ask questions and cross-level frictions, signal frustration and elaborate why motivation collapses locally even when tasks remain the same. (Ryan & Deci, 2000)

SDT also clarifies the conditioning role of Job Demands and Workload. High time pressure and uneven workload constrict autonomy and impair competence experiences, crowding out the interactions that normally maintain cohesion and feedback; in SDT

terms, such conditions need satisfaction and shift behavior toward controlled forms of regulation (Ryan & Deci, 2000). Conversely, parallel themes Learning and Professional Growth and Meaningfulness of Work describe pathways through which cohesive ties and constructive feedback are internalized: shared norms and purposes become self-endorsed, yielding stronger commitment and higher-quality effort—the precise outcome SDT predicts when needs are supported (Ryan & Deci, 2000).

In short, social cohesion can be understood as a need-supportive context: it supports relatedness directly through belonging and mutual connection, competence through frequent informational feedback and recognition, and autonomy through low-friction, trust-based coordination that reduces controlling dynamics in everyday work (Ryan & Deci, 2000; Chan, To, & Chan, 2006; Friedkin, 2004). When these supports are present, employees are more likely to experience work as meaningful and to report a stronger sense of accomplishment, then again when they are absent—or when job demands overwhelm available resources—motivation and well-being tend to deteriorate (Hackman & Oldham, 1980; Rosso et al., 2010; Demerouti et al., 2001; Bakker & Demerouti, 2007).

#### **5.4 Social cohesion, Sense of success and Self-efficacy**

In a cohesive workplace, feeling of belonging and shared norms (Chan et al., 2006; Fonseca et al., 2019) and willingness to pursue common goals (Festinger et al., 1950) create dense, approachable ties that lower the threshold to initiate social interaction as discovered in the theme Collaboration & Communication (Chapter 4.2.6). These ties supply the four self-efficacy sources: credible models through cross-team visibility (vicarious experience), routine recognition and coaching (social persuasion), abundant mastery opportunities via fast help and coordinated practice (mastery experiences), and a positive group affective tone that stabilizes arousal and signals capability (Barsade & Knight, 2015). As a result—combining authors and empirical data—employees' self-efficacy strengthens, which leads into greater effort, persistence, and performance, thus a

stronger sense of accomplishment if feedback makes progress visible (Bandura, 1997; Artino, 2012; Stajkovic & Luthans, 1998). Put differently, social cohesion functions as the relational infrastructure that feeds efficacy beliefs through everyday interaction, thereby converting collective “social glue” into individually felt success (Friedkin, 2004; Chan et al., 2006)

### **5.5 Scientific contribution: What this study adds to the research field**

This study set out to explain how social cohesion translates into employees’ sense of success in everyday work. Prior research has established that cohesion relates positively to team performance (e.g., Beal, Cohen, Burke, & McLendon, 2003; Gully, Devine, & Whitney, 1995; see also Castaño, Watts, & Tekleab, 2021). Yet the mechanism through which cohesion is converted into individually felt accomplishment has remained under-theorized. By analyzing eight interviews with the Gioia methodology, this study articulates and evidences a relational pathway: cohesion to feedback to job crafting to meaningfulness to sense of accomplishment (supported by SDT, self-efficacy; moderated by job demands and workload). The contribution is triadic: 1. theoretical information and refinement of SDT- and self-efficacy-based cases in a cohesive team context, 2. Proposition for a mechanism that positions job crafting as one of the foundations of meaningfulness and recognition, and 3. boundary conditions showing how workload compresses or sustains the phenomena.

The data shows that in cohesive settings, employees experience frequent, proximal feedback and recognition and easy access to help and information (see Chapter 4: Collaboration & Communication and Feedback & Recognition). This directly confirms SDT’s prediction that need-supportive contexts—those that satisfy relatedness via belonging, competence via informational feedback, and autonomy via low-friction coordination—enhance motivation and well-being (Ryan & Deci, 2000). It also aligns with self-efficacy theory: routine exposure to credible vicarious models, constructive persuasion, and accumulative mastery experiences strengthens efficacy beliefs, which in turn predict effort

and performance (Bandura, 1997; Stajkovic & Luthans, 1998). In short, the findings corroborate that cohesion functions as need-supportive relational infrastructure, making progress more visible and success more “feelable”.

While work-design research emphasizes how task characteristics and feedback foster internal motivation (Hackman & Oldham, 1980), findings from the empirical data show employees actively crafting their jobs—adjusting tasks, relationships, and sense-making—to be able to track progress, thus make work feel meaningful (see Chapter 4: Learning & Professional Growth and Meaningfulness of Work). This extends prior job-crafting theory (Wrzesniewski & Dutton, 2001; Rosso et al., 2010) by suggesting an alternative route through cohesion. Not only do cohesive ties lower the threshold to initiate minor changes, but they also normalize reframing processes and circumstances, enabling small redesigns, and generating social reinforcement for those changes. The implication is a nuanced process view: social cohesion enables job crafting; job crafting increases meaningfulness; meaningfulness, coupled with recognition, emerges as felt success.

Consistent with research on initiative and proactivity under strain (Frese & Fay, 2001; Grant & Ashford, 2008), empirical data indicates that job demands and workload compress the time and attention required for interaction and reflective feedback (Findings: Job Demands & Workload). This phenomena further requires social cohesion’s benefits: high workload can weaken the social cohesion to feedback to sense of accomplishment link by—crowding out or critically affecting the nature of the very exchanges—through which success becomes visible and validated. However, the study also identifies buffering mechanisms for such circumstances: cohesive teams maintain fast support routes (reducing the cost/time of help-seeking), trim low-value tasks (task crafting), and sustain a shared purpose (cognitive crafting), preserving the experience of success despite pressure. Thus, the contribution is not only that social cohesion “helps”, but when and how it helps—when supported by crafting behaviors and informational feedback, it withstands high demands—when not, its benefits dampen.

Where earlier social cohesion–performance discussions tend to frame value only in output terms, findings in this thesis show that employees sometimes report a strong sense of success even when outcomes are delayed—provided that meaningfulness and recognition are present (Findings: Meaningfulness of Work; Feedback & Recognition). Contrary to a purely outcome-driven view, this indicates an opposite construct based on appraisal: sense of accomplishment should not be reduced to merely results, rather co-constructed through verbal and non-verbal feedback, social validation, and shared narratives—a perspective closely aligned with SDT’s emphasis on internalization and with self-efficacy’s calibration logic (Ryan & Deci, 2000; Bandura, 1997; Rosso et al., 2010). This expands the literature (sought by the author of this thesis) by specifying that success is experienced when progress is visible, meaningful, and socially acknowledged, not only when it is complete.

Taken together, the study fills the identified research gap by 1. theorizing and evidencing how social cohesion is converted into felt success through need-supportive interaction and efficacy-building processes; 2. declaring job crafting as one of the mechanisms that turns social cohesion into meaningfulness and recognizable progress; and 3. identifying job demands and workload as a boundary condition that can dampen or, when buffered by cohesive practices, spare the pathway. This yields a multi-level, mechanism-based explanation that integrates team-level cohesion (see e.g. Chan et al., 2006; Friedkin, 2004) with person-level experiences of efficacy and meaning (see e.g. Bandura, 1997; Ryan & Deci, 2000; Rosso et al., 2010).

## **5.6 Limitations and avenues for future research**

This study has several limitations that suggest caution and guide future work. First of all, the sample is small ( $N = 8$ ) and drawn from a single Finnish organization, limiting transferability across sectors, countries, and occupational cultures. Second, the cross-sectional qualitative interview-based design with inductive analysis captures rich narratives but not dynamic nor statistical changes in social cohesion or felt accomplishment over

time. Third, all data are self-reported, which inevitably causes subjectivity to some extent, although the Gioia approach and constant comparison mitigate this, multi-source triangulation would increase confidence in the findings.

Future research could address these constraints by (a) employing longitudinal, over-time studies in several contexts; (b) combining qualitative process tracing with—e.g., sensor-based interaction data to capture the micro-dynamics of social cohesion and recognition in different situations and circumstances; (c) deploying multi-level models across teams to examine how unit-level cohesion and leadership climate moderate the individual pathway; (d) testing interventions (e.g., autonomy-supportive feedback training or peer-modelling rituals) in field experiments to assess causal effects on felt accomplishment; and (e) expanding similar studies to varied contexts to specify boundary conditions.

## **5.7 Practical implications**

The findings translate into a need-supportive, social cohesion-enabled practice framework for managers and teams. Firstly, Institutionalize short feedback rituals (e.g., daily stand-ups and peer shout-outs) that surface micro-wins and provide informational cues about competence. Keep the tone autonomy-supportive (specific, non-controlling, rationale-rich) to strengthen efficacy without pressure (Ryan & Deci, 2000; Hackman & Oldham, 1980), and maintain the inner motivation, which according to participants is increased by autonomy.

Regarding the practical implications on group level, creating cross-functional visibility (rotating presenters, paired walkthroughs) and “buddy structures” makes credible peer models routinely accessible, lowering the threshold for help-seeking and accelerating mastery (Bandura, 1997; Stajkovic & Luthans, 1998). Furthermore, encouraging task pruning (drop or simplify low-value tasks), attention re-allocation (time-boxing toward strengths), and cognitive reframing (link tasks to purpose/customers) helps the units focus on the common goal, strengthening social cohesion even further (e.g. Fonseca et al.,

2018; Festinger et al., 1952) and making the progress visible. Position these as team norms—not private fixes—so they are reinforced by social cohesion (Wrzesniewski & Dutton, 2001; Rosso et al., 2010). Finally, under demand spikes, protect core coordination time (shorter but more frequent check-ins), design help protocols (who to ask for what), and apply shared reprioritization to preserve meaning and feedback quality (Frese & Fay, 2001; Grant & Ashford, 2008). The aim is to support social cohesion with the existing mechanisms (e.g. feedback, micro-wins, self-efficacy, workload management) when it is most at risk.

To sustain the mechanisms that have been established, they must be constantly supervised. Monitor feedback cadence, the latency to get help, and recognition density as leading indicators of felt success; supplement performance metrics with means of short notice on meaningfulness and accomplishment to detect drift early. Collectively, these practices convert social cohesion into personally felt success by ensuring that progress is visible, meaningful, and socially validated in the daily flow of work.

## **5.8 Conclusion**

Across this thesis, the central argument has been that employees' sense of success is not merely an outcome of individual performance, but an experience socially produced through everyday interaction and the wider cohesion of the work community. Building on the theoretical framing in Chapter 2 (SDT, self-efficacy and job crafting) combined with the empirical data, the Chapter 4 analysis shows that success becomes "felt" when progress is made visible, socially validated and interpreted as meaningful in context. The Gioia-style data structure provides the key findings from the empirical data, built into a grounded theory model, which combined with existing literature, provides logical suggestions on the possible mechanisms to enhance sense of accomplishment through social cohesion. The findings present Feedback and recognition (4.1.1) as a key mechanism for appraisal, shaped by Job demands and workload (4.1.2) and by perceived equality (4.1.3). Collaboration and communication (4.2.6) provides the foundation on

interactions through which social cohesion is formed, Meaningfulness of work is constructed (4.1.4, 4.2.7), and Challenges of social cohesion (4.2.8) expose the contextual boundaries that enable or constrain these dynamics. Combining these results, Chapter 5 proposes the grounded theory model, in which interactions on micro-, and meso-level build social cohesion, which enables feedback and job crafting, ensuring the sustainment and enhancement of the perceived sense of accomplishment (supported by mechanisms on macro-level) in daily flow of work, under constantly changing work conditions.

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## Appendices

### Appendix 1. Interview questions

#### 1. Social cohesion in the workplace

How would you describe the social atmosphere in your workplace?

In what ways do you experience openness and trust in your work community?

Do you feel that you share common values and norms with your colleagues?

What kind of support do you receive from your colleagues?

What kind of support do you receive from your supervisor(s)?

What kind of support do you receive from your employer?

Do you believe you would receive help if you asked for it?

Do you do selfless things for others? Do others do the same for you?

Do you feel a sense of belonging in your team or the organization more broadly?

Do you trust your coworkers, team, or employer?

In your view, is organization equal and fair? What about your team or department?

Do employees have equal opportunities for things like career advancement, well-being, or influence at work?

Do your personal values align with the organizational culture?

Describe your social relationships within your workplace. How do they affect your sense of success?

Can you describe a situation where collaboration led to a feeling of success?

#### 2. Sense of success and feedback

How would you describe the feeling of success at work?

What factors influence whether you feel successful?

How does feedback affect your sense of success?

Do you feel that the feedback you receive reflects your actual performance?

Do you experience feedback given to your team or department as personal, or vice versa?

How does personal negative feedback affect you? Do you perceive it as related to your own actions or the surrounding context?

Do you receive nonverbal feedback (e.g., body language, facial expressions, behavior)?

Does feedback feel different depending on who it comes from (e.g., a colleague, supervisor, or management)?

Do social interactions affect the sense of success during the day?

### **3. Meaningfulness and well-being**

What factors make your work meaningful?

How do feelings of success or failure affect your physical and mental well-being—both in the short and long term?

How do social support and teamwork affect your motivation and performance?

### **4. Ideas for development and reflections**

How could your work community concretely strengthen the sense of belonging?

What could be done to increase the experience of success at work?

Can you describe a concrete situation where you felt successful—what social factors contributed to that?

How could those factors be further strengthened?

