Hierarchical Structures in medium sized manufacturing companies and their lower boundaries. A case study
Abstract

Application of low hierarchy structures are becoming increasingly popular by enhancing job satisfaction and productivity of employees. On the other hand formation of hierarchy appears to be natural and beneficial in many cases. This study explores how low hierarchies could become and where the boundaries regarding job satisfaction lie as well as how these differ depending on formal position of employees. The inquiry is undertaken with a focus is on medium-sized companies in manufacturing industry in Germany where job satisfaction and productivity via such applications is vital.

Extensive qualitative data was collected with a single-case approach; analysis was conducted qualitatively likewise. The lower limits of hierarchy are discovered to lie in various aspects mainly relating to supervision, recognition of good performance and promotion opportunities and to differ significantly with formal position. The study is believed to be unique and assist in shedding light into the area of beneficial and practical low hierarchy applications.
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1 Introduction

This section of the report is composed of three sub-sections. Initially a broad background insight to the subject is provided through literature review. This is followed by precise description of the specific problem while justifying the importance of undertaking the research in the particular area. As the scope narrows down throughout the chapter, finally, the research purpose and question, which are to be fulfilled are explicitly presented.

1.1 About Hierarchy

Hierarchy structures can be approached in different ways. Hierarchy has not only been investigated as organizational measures, such as the number and patterns of positions in a firm (Finkelstein, 1992) but also as the degree of upward mobility (Paulson, 1974) the wage inclination and information sharing (Shaw, et al., 2002). As Gruenfeld & Tiedens (2010) make clear, there is no consensus which of these approaches is considered the best. Each of those has its eligibility in different cases. For this study, the authors decided to focus on “hierarchy in the sense of organizational measures as the formal position and its corresponding power of decision making.” This is found to be the most appropriate and clearest way to gain valuable outcome and to compare the results to other studies. The ground for this decision is that existing literature predominantly promotes this approach.

Existence of hierarchy reasonably generates leaders and followers, the former clearly having greater impact on effectiveness of the organization (Bass & Stogdill, 1990). Carpenter et al. (2004) and Hambrick & Mason (1984) took it a step further by suggesting that companies as a whole are mere reflections of their upper echelons. These studies also stated not just the prevalence of hierarchy but also its inescapable nature. Having no consensus of rank ordering in groups leads to low commitment and productivity of employees. Similarly Loch et al. (2000) assert the low satisfaction and productivity of such teams in contrast to those with clear consensus of ranks. This is due to the fact that lack of consensus generate more politicking and more competitive contests of status which results in decreased coordination and cooperation. As Magee & Galinsky (2007) suggests hierarchy can facilitate cooperation and presence of authority helps motivating employees. Therefore, although employees may claim aversion towards hierarchy, it appears to provide social glue and improve their satisfaction and productivity (Gould, 2003). Gruenfeld & Tiedens (2010) claim that organizations are characterized by hierarchy from the beginning and ordinarily become more hierarchal over time resulting in more layers, orders of ranks and cultures that legitimate such textures. This is observed very frequently in organizations suggesting that hierarchies become inevitable even when people seek more equality (Gruenfeld & Tiedens, 2010).

Unsurprisingly people strive for impact power and control but the degree of importance of such aspects varies among individuals. Nevertheless it is clear that they naturally construct hierarchical organizations in which they were found to commit and perform better in many cases and organizations with total equality without the incline to become hierarchical are assessed to fail (Baron & Hannan, 2002). As a result, people consistently end up preferring hierarchical structures to egalitarian ones (Gruenfeld & Tiedens, 2010).

Gaining competitive advantage through high productivity has evolved into a never-ending major contest among organizations worldwide. This is reflected well through studies that compare German and East Asian companies in this context. Modern western economies have been leading in this global stage primarily through their innovation power (Fees & Taherizadeh, 2012). Sternberg & Andt (2001) advocate this point by asserting that innovation is Germany’s key driving factor among international economies, in current economic globalization. Investigations by Fees & Taherizadeh (2012) reveal differences between Germany and East Asia in terms of their innovation management capabilities, which illustrate that German companies surpass the success of East Asian companies. Detailed analysis by Fees & Taherizadeh (2012) determined predominance of German firms to originate from their more effective practices of deploying the capability of their employees. These practices were accommodated by relatively lower hierarchical textures which are defined to promise a significant role in terms of assisting German companies to sustain their competitive advantage over emerging economies around the globe (Fees & Taherizadeh, 2012). Far eastern societies with high power distance ordinarily resulting in highly
hierarchical organizations (Fock, et al., 2013), which was the main underlying result of them being overpowered by German organizations that harnessed higher productivity from their employees through low hierarchy (Fees & Taherizadeh, 2012). As can be seen, different levels of hierarchy played a significant role while distinguishing productivity of organizations of two types of societies. The strong German economy generally incorporate substantially lower hierarchy levels in contrast to high power distant societies like China, Turkey and Pakistan (Aycan, et al., 2013). Low hierarchical structures have been appointed to significantly benefit German companies on global stage.

In the present age, virtually every company around the globe has been working systematically to improve their business processes in the pursuit of increased productivity (Hamel, 2009). The fact that job satisfaction is widely proven to increase productivity, combined with the importance of productivity for today’s business world, makes the clear effect of low hierarchy levels on job satisfaction important.

On the other hand, organizations with total equality and with no hierarchy have also been investigated but they were not found to necessarily work well. To facilitate low hierarchy practices, organizations commonly downplay hierarchical differences through removal of signals and markers of positions. However, this does not prevent people’s awareness of differences in the influence and value of different individuals or groups. People generally agree upon influence and value orderings of ranks and such perceptions regarding rank play out in social interactions (Berger, et al., 1972; Ridgeway, 1987). In addition, there are contexts in which people are actually welcoming of hierarchy. There are individual differences that lead to comfort with preference of hierarchy and inequality. Baron et al. (1996) bring forward other contexts such as poor performing teams, presence of experts, task difficulty and time pressure, which also result in preference of hierarchy by employees. Studies by Chow et al. (2008) found that despite general claims of opposing hierarchy, people generally embrace meritocracies in which they are rewarded in accordance with their contributions. Mannix & Sauer (2006) support these findings by asserting that people naturally create hierarchies in all sorts of organizations, which is the reason why attempts of finding organizations that are not characterized by hierarchy are unfruitful.

Although complete lack of hierarchy is generally unfruitful, low hierarchy structures at workplace on the other hand have been an increasingly celebrated managerial theme by generating numerous benefits for companies (Gal-Or & Amit, 1998; Vecchio, et al., 2010). It induces empowerment of employees and relates to managerial aspects such as motivation, job enrichment, participative management, delegation and feedback (Pelit, et al., 2011). Hales & Klidas (1998) on the other hand, relate low hierarchy to sharing information, power and knowledge with subordinates. It can assist in keeping the best employees by providing them with better training, higher responsibility and a more important role in determination of companies’ destinies. Other emerging advantages of low hierarchy are defined by Gal-Or & Amit (1998) as productivity and quality enhancement, restoration of individual and corporate vitality and improved ability in terms of responding to changes fast in the market. Investigations by Price, et al., (2012) express that low hierarchy enables employees to remake and create their jobs by applying existing and novel organizational practices. This goes in the same direction with Geary and Geary & Sisson (1994) and Schatzki (2006) who point out that, organizations, which authorize and even encourage such autonomy of employees to solve problems and to produce suggestions, achieve improved productivity. Pelit, et al. (2011), Spreitzer, et al. (1997) and Aryee & Chen (2006) examined employee job satisfaction dimension of such practices and reached the conclusion that it has a considerably affirmative impact. Moreover Kesting & Ulhöi (2010) claim there are two primary reasons for promoting low hierarchical structure. Firstly it is found to offer additional informational flow since employees are capable of identifying and seizing opportunities and anticipating consequences of decisions on a daily basis, which cannot be easily executed by management units. Secondly, it is assessed to upgrade job satisfaction, which is evaluated highly beneficial in terms of attracting and maintaining highly skilled workers as also denoted by Gal-Or & Amit (1998). Studies by Bonsdorff, et al. (2014), Butts, et al. (2009), Gallie, et al. (2012) and Karasek & Theorell (1990), remark that employees with higher autonomy perform better as well as demonstrating higher job satisfaction. In addition, Butts, et al. (2009) asserted that lower hierarchy texture in organizations lead to advanced job satisfaction, higher organizational commitment and developed performance. In a study with the similar direction, Vanhala et al. (2012) stated that employees with high productivity illustrated greater commitment and
ultimately showed higher job satisfaction. This is correspondingly supported by a preceding research by Vanhala & Tuomi (2006).

It can be seen that the recently pervading low hierarchy structures tend to promote job satisfaction and productivity, which appear to be two interconnected matters. As Price et al., (2012) sets forward, organizations with conventional managerial approaches implicate fixed or highly hierarchical relationships and appraise their employees based on their success with their formulated job description. On the contrary, recent empowerment practices have been reducing hierarchical relationships and inducing substantially more flat atmosphere at workplace resulting in the increased popularity of its benefits for companies (Price, et al., 2012). Enhanced job satisfaction inherently leads to higher productivity. Established benefits of flat hierarchies originate from their positive influence on employee job satisfaction and their increasing expansion, render it an important theme to be researched into for today’s business world.

As can be seen, hierarchy in organizations is a contradictory phenomenon. On one side, low hierarchies have well established benefits in terms of employee satisfaction and productivity. On the other side, formation and expansion of hierarchy in organizations appears to be inevitable and has its advantages.

1.2 Problem

As discussed previously, there have been a high number of studies conducted to observe and evaluate the effect of low hierarchy practices. The studies have generally been revolving around job satisfaction, improvement of which is widely defined to boost productivity as the key anticipated outcome of low hierarchy at workplace (Spreitzer, et al., 1997). Low hierarchies have been improving satisfaction and productivity of employees by equipping them with the ability of making decisions to design their own work and to seize opportunities independently. This autonomy enhances their motivation by enabling them to tailor their work with their goals. Ultimately based on the enhanced power of decision making, employees demonstrate more satisfaction, commitment and improved work output.

Despite the quantity and comprehensiveness of inquiries in this subject of beneficial low hierarchy applications, the problem is that hierarchy appears to be prevalent and inescapable. This major contradiction leads to question the lower limits of hierarchy. To put it differently, it is not clear to what extent low hierarchy practices would generate desirable satisfaction and higher productivity of employees. It remains ambiguous when flatness clashes with the seemingly unavoidable attitude of employees to naturally construct hierarchies. The definition of this boundary as to how low hierarchies could become while providing the advantages but also not conflicting with its natural beneficial formation, is worthy due to the discussed importance of high satisfaction and productivity.

Therefore the boundaries of hierarchy would potentially generate valuable findings to improve understanding of the genuine impact of limits of hierarchy. Understanding the actual effect of limits of hierarchy levels and its impact on employee job satisfaction and productivity, may provide valuable insight for management handling units to rethink and improve their hierarchical relationships and enhance company success. Conclusions from the study could also assist raising awareness among employees for them to be convinced and to alter their endeavours accordingly to enhance their individual success. Furthermore, depending on the determined effect of hierarchy in this context, the significance of surrounding factors that drive job satisfaction and productivity can also be estimated.
1.3 Purpose & Research Questions

As a result of the above discussion the purpose is to discover where the limits for low hierarchies depending on job satisfaction and productivity are, given it is widely established that complete lack of hierarchy is ineffective.

RQ1: Where are the boundaries of low hierarchies depending on job satisfaction?
RQ2: How do these boundaries differ in relation to the formal position of employees in the hierarchical tree?
Theoretical frame of reference

This section delivers discussion of the connection between hierarchy structures and job satisfaction, relevant aspects and framing of the investigations to address the research purposes.

2.1 Hierarchy Structures and Manufacturing Industry

Large organizations with complex management systems usually utilize highly hierarchical workplace structures. Each system is broken down to controllable parts via such hierarchical structures which give higher levels a greater authority over lower levels. This results in lower levels receiving direction and supervision from higher levels. However as discussed earlier, low hierarchy practices is becoming increasingly common with fruitful outcomes and they are strongly interrelated with empowerment of employees as Pelit et al. (2011) also states. To put it differently, hierarchy levels at workplace are decreasing as a major result of employee empowerment. Therefore vast majority of the studies regarding hierarchy levels revolve around empowerment and its accompanying elements. They have extensively been evaluated as two closely linked aspects that generate the presented benefits for companies. For this reason, our approach will fundamentally involve practices and outcomes of employee empowerment.

As put forward by Spreitzer et al. (1997) the two major results of employee empowerment originated low hierarchy structures, are enhanced employee job satisfaction and productivity. However a number of researchers such as Robert et al. (2000) and Fock et al. (2013) present, empowerment practices as a form of management intervention that vary in terms of compatibility, depending on people’s values. It is found to be less compatible with the communities high in power distance, where people are more receptive to and accepting of the unequal distribution of power across different levels of the organizational hierarchy.

On the contrary, as brought forward there have been numerous studies proving the inevitable tendency of people to form and develop hierarchical structures in organizations. The studies also revealed that total lack of hierarchy does not necessarily lead to advanced employee satisfaction and productivity. In fact the unavoidable prevalence of hierarchy was found to be beneficial in many cases. Such concerns regarding hierarchy, which we approach as formal position and independent decision making power, intensify in manufacturing/production industries rather than in large firms (Radner, 1992). This originates from the fact that these industries ordinarily implicate clearly formulated job descriptions for employees. This nature of such industries extinguishes practices that empower employees and equip them with decision making capability and authority. Hence one can presume that the natural construction of hierarchy will enforce such applications and accommodate consistent high employee satisfaction and productivity. Yet even in manufacturing/production industry, low hierarchy applications indicated enhanced satisfaction and productivity. Overall, despite the combination of inevitable development of hierarchy and an industry that actually facilitates hierarchies and absolute control and direction, empowerment in the pursuit of decision making power still provided benefits (Conger & Kanungo, 1988). This clearly is a different line of vision for assessing the optimal level of hierarchy, since here it is more of questioning how high could the hierarchies be in manufacturing/production industry. However the underlying approach is the same and it is to find out the boundary that defines the separation from increased job satisfaction and productivity with the appearing inescapable constitution of hierarchy. In order to achieve this, it has been decided to focus on the production industry as it incorporates hierarchy as a usual matter and as it also highly demands increased productivity as a major result of employee job satisfaction.

2.2 Job satisfaction and hierarchy

A highly recognized definition of job satisfaction is delivered by Locke (1976) who defined it as “(...) a pleasurable or positive emotional state resulting from the appraisal of one’s job or job experiences.” Low hierarchical structures have widely proven themselves to lead to higher employee job satisfaction and hence to heightened productivity at companies in Europe (Bonsdorff, et al., 2014; Butts, et al., 2009; Gallie, et al., 2012; Karasek & Theorell,
Theoretical frame of reference

Reasonably, hierarchy level does not alone influence job satisfaction at work. Many more variables may also well influence the job satisfaction for employees. Therefore, those other variables should be included in the examination of the phenomenon to reach valuable results from which the influence of hierarchy level on job satisfaction and lower limits of hierarchy can be assessed.

There has been many studies conducted to investigate employee job satisfaction in relation to empowerment and hierarchy levels. Unsurprisingly, there is an abundance of models that researchers have devised and utilized to investigate this phenomenon. Kesting & Ulhöi (2010) have identified five key drivers that are, management support, accommodation of an environment for idea creation, decision structure, incentives and corporate culture and climate. Psoinos, et al., (2000) involved aspects of work flexibility, commitment to company goals and motivation and practising of skills. On the other hand, Ramstad (2014) related job satisfaction mainly to well-being of employees, social relations and opportunities for learning and influencing others at workplace. Langbein (2000) and Harley (1999) considered how busy, demanding and stimulating the work is welcomed by employees as well as pace of work, how work is done and decision making processes.

Numerous well-recognized authors (Blake et al. (2004), Hancer & George (2003), Irving et al. (1997), Nysted et al. (1999)) have been using the factors of the Manual for the Minnesota Satisfaction Questionnaire which was developed by Weiss et al. (1967). Those factors were therefore seen as highly appropriate and used as a basis to build up a frame of important factors of job satisfaction. It is composed of twenty dimensions that constitute job satisfaction which effectively encompasses all the elements required in order for well-rounded investigation of the influence of the employee job satisfaction to be achieved. However only some of these twenty elements actually directly relate to hierarchy levels. Therefore the ones that do not relate to hierarchy levels and limits are going to be excluded in this study. Instead, extensive background research led to introduction of several more aspects which will lead to a more sophisticated assessment of job satisfaction based on hierarchy levels and its associated lower limit. To put it differently, some of the Weiss et al.’s (1967) dimensions that are immediately in connection with hierarchy levels are combined with further important factors that also closely linked with hierarchy levels. Selection of the factors also rely on extensive literature where these factors are distinctively considered while assessing job satisfaction in hierarchical contexts. The resulting model is composed of eleven aspects to be investigated to identify the current conditions of employee job satisfaction in accordance with hierarchy levels and the desirable lower limits of hierarchy. Elimination of some of the Weiss et al.’s (1967) elements and introduction of new ones to constitute the final frame, are explained as follows:
The diagram above illustrates the frame that is used in this study, the eleven factors that make up job satisfaction in context of hierarchy. As stated earlier the factors were gathered by integrating various literature that prominently put forward these eleven factors while assessing job satisfaction in low hierarchy applications. It is important to note that constitution of this model is based on aim for inclusion of all related distinct factors that are prominently accounted for investigating job satisfaction in low hierarchies. To be more clear there are a variety of factors taken into account by different researchers for different purposes. Yet when the filter of hierarchy is applied by the authors to wide range of job satisfaction factors, the remaining factors are these eleven. In other words the important factors, which regard job satisfaction in context of hierarchy are obtained by eliminating irrelevant ones through extensive review of literature. This is illustrated with figure 2 below:

**Figure 2: Development of the eleven job satisfaction and hierarchy influencing factors**
The theoretical frame of reference

The implication of each of these factors are explained as follows:

**Authority**
It refers to the chances of an employee to dictate others’ activities by giving them directions and telling them what to do. Highly hierarchical structures clearly are in favour of such authoritarian practices by equipping individuals of higher ranks with superior formal powers.

**Advancement**
This represents the opportunities that the workers are given to seize promotion. Flat workplaces offer more chances for employees to demonstrate their capabilities and prove their suitability for a higher role. On the other hand flat structures tend to consist of relatively less number of layers for employees to climb through.

**Independence**
It relates to the freedom of an employee to execute his/her assignments on his/her own without having to continuously co-operate or remain under constant supervision. Low hierarchies equip employee with the option to work on their own if applicable. This does not preclude collaboration with others or observation by managers, instead it provides the worker with opportunity of working independently when he/she considers it favourable.

**Recognition**
This signifies the level of acknowledgement by managers and other employees when the employee carries out a remarkable work.

**Relationships with Superordinates**
It may implicate different factors depending on the individual, however in general it indicates mutual respect and understanding on intellectual and social levels between the workers and managers.

**Responsibility**
Responsibility has defined itself as one of the major steps to enhanced job satisfaction and as a major influence on hierarchy. Weiss, et al. (1967) defines responsibility in the following way “The freedom to use (...) own judgment”, which means that someone is forced to build him- or herself an own opinion and is free to tell it. Despite responsibility can be seen in many different ways, to define hierarchical structures the previous named way is considered as the most reliable.

**Supervision**
It refers to monitoring and inspection by managers on work of those who they manage. How strong the supervision about employees is and how strong they feel supervised is strongly related to trust and hierarchy levels in companies. It has been shown that when superiors and subordinates had a relaxed and indirect (but also recursive) relationships, the hierarchy form changed (Accard, 2015). If the hierarchical levels are generally flatter the supervision will be lower than the other way round.

**Management support**
The support can take part in different ways; in this study the focus is on the support that managers provide for employees with their work for facilitation and assistance with their tasks.

**Influence on others**
This refers to chances of a worker to have an impact on their managers and peers with their skills, experiences and ideas.

**Communication**
It relates to accessibility and convenience of communication through different layers in an organization. A good communication within teams and to supervisors is crucial to build up a good connection and lead to higher satisfaction.
Creativity
How high the chance is to try own methods of how to do the job is the main focus within this study regarding creativity

Each of these factors will be investigated as to how much of low hierarchy attributes they can incorporate for maximal job satisfaction. Boundaries are aimed to be discovered by focusing on current and future problems associated with excessively low hierarchies. For instance as hierarchies get lower relationships across layers become more informal in general. Hereby problems associated with complete lack of hierarchy and in this example with very highly informal communication may not necessarily be optimal. The issues that appear to prevent complete flatness from being ideal should indicate boundaries of low hierarchy.

Rank of employees should also have a significant role as they represent hierarchical trees. It is generally seen that managers do have a different view on organizational matters. Therefore it is assumed that the boundaries for low hierarchies lie on different places in terms of some if not for all aspects; higher or lower than those with non-managerial functions. It is suggested that different ranks influence the need and the strive for power and that ranks in return influence the eleven factors (e.g. need for authority) which again leads to a need of different level of hierarchy. Furthermore it has several times been shown that job satisfaction itself depends on the rank of an employee in different aspects (Oshagbemi, 1997; Eyupoglu & Saner 2009).
3 Method

3.1 Research Approach

The authors have taken a constructionist epistemological standpoint which is well supported by qualitative methods. Qualitative methods do not only show “data”, they can also show reactions, feelings and detailed thoughts among the participants (Easterby-Smith, et al., 2015). Comprehensive and broad information which otherwise could not be collected and analysed is considered highly valuable. The epistemological perspective of the authors is represented in figure 3 in quadrant B which is a combination of constructionist and “detached” standpoint. This had three major implications for this study. Firstly, organizations and hierarchical structures are considered dynamic and changing rather than static and monolithic. Secondly, emphasis is put on the invisible processes and elements of organizations involving tacit knowledge and informal processes of decision making. Thirdly, this standpoint indicated use of context-based observations for analysis. Confidence in this epistemological perspective has been steadily reinforced via extensive literature review, during which it was repeatedly confirmed that this perspective is the most suitable one among others in relation to the purposes of this research.

As can be seen, it is important to decide on how the research is approached with regards to the research purposes and questions. There are qualitative, quantitative and mixed method option from which the first one was selected for this study. Choice of the qualitative methods approach originates from the nature of the research questions which are aiming for unique explanations and detailed analysis as well as great diversity of views. The aim to discover boundaries and their connection with ranks requires in-depth and well-rounded information to be gathered. Besides qualitative methods better allow for acquiring unexpected valuable insight from respondents (Creswell, 2013).

It has been seen that the positive sides of using qualitative methods overweight their disadvantages which are mainly the difficulty in replication of the study and the use of a competent overall
design. It was aimed to keep those disadvantages as low as possible and to preclude them. The transferability is ensured through carefully prepared interview questions and therefore a replication of the study can be made. Although another drawback of the qualitative method was the challenge it induced for designing the research in strong relevance with the research questions, requiring very accurate collection and analysis of data. These potential disadvantages were tackled by elaborately designing the research via literature aid to effectively obtain and interpret results. Plus, using qualitative methods ensured high diversity of views, could help synthesis and integration of theories, increase the validity, confidence and credibility of the results (Easterby-Smith, et al., 2015).

A further advantage of qualitative methods as outlined by Easterby-Smith et al. (2015) is that it can uncover deviant dimensions which in this case relate to job satisfaction factors and unknown dynamics of hierarchical structures. Finally qualitative methods enable combination of confirmatory and exploratory research. This is estimated to be well-matched since this study involves both, confirming beneficial influences of job satisfaction on productivity and exploring what the lower limits of hierarchy and what their dependence on employee’s position are.

There were also particular reasons for eliminating application of purely quantitative methods. This decision was also strongly related to the research purposes. Investigating the limits of hierarchy and its correlation with the position of workers is by nature not suitable for quantitative analysis. The ground for stating this is that there is not an established scale of hierarchy levels to determine where the lower limit lies in. Not only non-existence of such a scale but also the scarcity of any studies to directly help developing such a scale made it impractical to handle this phenomenon quantitatively.

### 3.2 Research Design

The study aims for an in-depth analysis of the exact boundary of hierarchy levels in organisations. Through an extensive literature review, those boundaries are estimated to vary among different cultures and organisations, therefore it is required to have an in-depth view to identify those boundaries in specific situations. Close investigation in real-world contexts produce invaluable understanding and insightful appreciation of the cases as Yin (2009) sets forward. As Yin (2009) also states, such rich descriptions and insightful explanations are most likely to be achieved through case studies while still being able to generalize the findings to other situations qualitatively. This study therefore relied on a case-study method which is generally agreed to bring up the most reliable detailed results (Yin, 2012; Yin, 2009).

After deciding on a case study approach, it was important to specify whether the research will proceed with a single case or a multiple case method. Easterby-Smith et al. (2015) hereby state that single case studies in general harmonize a more constructionist epistemological view whereas researchers who employ multiple case studies usually fit with a more positivist epistemology. This logic was followed in this study due to the authors’ constructionist epistemological standpoint, which implicated in-depth context-based investigations for analysis. In addition to its coherence with the research philosophy of the authors, single case studies can serve for significant explanations and generalizations as Yin (2009) asserts. The purposes of the study that are to explain where hierarchy levels cease to benefit employee satisfaction, explore its connection with workers’ positions and to qualitatively deduce generalizations, are well aligned with these merits of single case approach. Multiple case studies on the other hand allow for cross-case analysis in a comparative nature. They are often considered to be more compelling, deeming the whole study more robust. However considering the purpose of the research, studying one case that uniquely incorporates all attributes in terms of industry, size and culture was decided to be more effective. Because, the objective is to closely investigate a situation representing all points of interest rather than handling multiple cases to make comparisons.

Hereby Yin (2009) presents five different potential single-case designs. First the *critical case* which is about testing a well-formulated theory. Second the *unique case* where a situation or a case occurs which is very extreme or unique for its environment. Third the *representative* or *typical case* wherein one objective shows a typical “project” among many different projects. Fourth option is a *revelatory case* wherein the investigator has an opportunity to observe a very
specific case which is normally not possible in usual circumstances. And fifth the *longitudinal case*, where the same single case is studied at two or more different places in same time.

Due to the purposes of the study and the previously mentioned close investigations it was required to research into an organization that to a large extent possesses very typical properties of its surrounding companies in the same industry, size and culture. Another reason for aiming to study such an organization is that utilizing an extremely typical organization in this context, was estimated to best facilitate for qualitative generalization to other organizations thus provides more value to the literature (Yin, 2009). Therefore this study employed Yin’s (2009) third model, the typical case for in-depth examination of all the points of interest to discover the hierarchy limits and their dependence on employee's position.

### 3.3 Selection of Cases

Specifying a typical case as expressed previously is strongly in relation with the purposes. The study tackles German, middle-sized companies in manufacturing industry. The first reason is the previously explained job satisfaction vitality in manufacturing industry in Germany and how they are established to be leading in global stage with low hierarchy based high job satisfaction and efficiency. Secondly a very high percentage of companies in this industry is composed of medium-sized companies. Therefore, the case to be selected had to be in this category and had to show very typical attributes of organizations belonging to this category as explained in chapter 3.2.

99,7% of German Companies are located within the “German Mittelstand” (Günterberg, 2012) which means they have below 500 employees and an annual revenue below 50 Million Euros. 95,3% of those companies are family owned businesses (Haunschild & Wolter, 2010) the searched company therefore should naturally be within those boundaries.

A study has been made among German companies within these boundaries which might be interested to be in this research study. Finally one company could be selected which was determined to be a typical case within this frame. The chosen company is a family owned, manufacturing company which has around 260 employees and an annual revenue of about 40 Mio. Euros. Given the data of the “German-Mittelstand” this company represents many similar ones in terms of many attributes such as size, revenue, ownership and number of employees making it typical and was therefore seen as an appropriate and reliable research case.

The selection of the interview participants took place through random sampling (Easterby-Smith, 2015). Nevertheless it was tried to have the same composition of managers/non-managers as in the overall firm. As can be seen in figure 4 below approximately one third of all the employees are in a management position. Therefore nine interview appointments were made wherefrom three has been with managers.

![Figure 4: Composition of case firm in terms of management positions. Source: Firm intern papers](image-url)
Method

3.4 Data collection

The data collection comprised a qualitative approach. The data was gathered through interviews which were found to be suitable for the study.

3.4.1 Interviews

Through the interviews it was aimed to gain in-depth information from individuals of various hierarchy positions regarding their detailed thoughts and desires about job satisfaction in relation to hierarchy in the organization. Since the research is utilizing a case study method, the inquiries were designed as guided interviews, instead of deeply structured queries. The motivation for this approach was to prevent reflexivity, which refers to an atmosphere where the interviewee gives the answers that interviewer wants to hear (Yin, 2009). This also provided an unconstrained environment for the interviewees to give their opinions from a distinct and unforeseen perspective which may have been missed on with a strictly formulated interview structure. Nevertheless it was ensured that the interview followed the line of the inquiry and that questions were asked in an unbiased and neutral manner. When necessary, quick follow-up questions were directed to integrate improved completeness with the acquired information. It was furthermore made sure that the participant was not pressured and turned into a defensive attitude.

Respondents were approached well before the interviews by presenting them with the nature and aims of the study. After convincing them of the value of the research for them and agreeing upon confidentiality and anonymity, nine interviewees from different hierarchical levels were scheduled as shown in table 1. To prevent any misunderstandings due to the language barrier, the interviews were mostly held in German language but three were in English since this was the native language of those respondents, as revealed in table 1. It also shall be noted that all of the interviewing took place via Skype-Video Talk. This might have had some negative influence on the fluency of the interview due to some connection problems, but it could be guaranteed through the video that no gesture reaction was missed. Audio was recorded during the video-calls to be carefully transcribed at a later stage to reach the final product of collected data from the interviews.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No.</th>
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<th>Length</th>
<th>Language</th>
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</tr>
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<tr>
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<tr>
<td>R7</td>
<td>29.04.16</td>
<td>Non-Manager</td>
<td>28min</td>
<td>German</td>
<td>Video Call</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R8</td>
<td>18.04.16</td>
<td>Non-Manager</td>
<td>40min</td>
<td>German</td>
<td>Video Call</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R9</td>
<td>02.05.16</td>
<td>Non-Manager</td>
<td>42min</td>
<td>English</td>
<td>Video Call</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

3.4.2 Development of Interview Questions

Semi-structured approach was selected for interviews since this allows for inclusion of all factors but also promoting freedom for the interviewees to express unexpected valuable ideas. The interview questions were developed carefully among the frame of Weiss, et al. (1967) who developed job satisfaction influencing factors over years. Additionally factors which were found to be related were also integrated. Detailed information about the chosen factors are stated in chapter 2. Among these factors the questions were formulated elaborately still being aware of not
Method

dwelling on the wording. Through this it was tried to get an objective feedback from the participants without influencing their opinion in the first place.

After some introduction and “icebreaker” questions the interviews were conducted with focus on the eleven factors. All eleven factors were aimed to be discussed with each interview regarding how low hierarchical attributes they would desire in terms of these factors. In other words questions based on these eleven factors constituted the skeleton of the interviews. Further, the interviewees’ perspective about how they consider job satisfaction, its relation to productivity and conception of hierarchy in general was obtained. The questions were designed to promote open-ended answer to enable the interviewee to reflect on ideas, experiences and other pieces of information as Easterby-Smith, et al. (2015) suggests. A topic interview guideline can be found in the appendix.

3.5 Data Analysis

The data has been analysed qualitatively. This approach was chosen since qualitative analysis gives the authors the chance to interpret the meanings of for instance gestures and special accentuated words (Yin, 2009).

The data analysis took place as follows:

Firstly all eleven hierarchy based job satisfaction factors (as clarified in chapter 2) were assigned a result and an analysis part each. Presenting results and analysis successively for each factor aimed to assure that the reader does not lose track of the factors due to high number of them. Secondly consensus of participants based on their statements and were assessed and categorized in accordance with the classification expressed in figure 5. Letter A signifies overall opinion that indicates existence of limits to low hierarchy in terms of the relevant factor. A1, A2 and A3 respectively indicate excessively low hierarchy, optimally low hierarchy and insufficiently low hierarchy. B on the other hand refers to non-existence of any limits based on assessment of the evidence meaning that total lack of hierarchy is applicable for optimal job satisfaction.

Respondents were defined as A1 when they mentioned dissatisfaction about a factor which implicated excessively low hierarchy. So if a factor is assessed to have characteristics of low hierarchy at a grade that the respondents is not satisfied with he/she was specified to be A1. In other words the existing limit was already passed over and the current situation was too flat for such respondents. Participant appointed as A2 when they mentioned optimal satisfaction with the current hierarchical situation in terms of relevant factor. They were satisfied with the exact level of the present level of hierarchy. On the other hand A3 was determined to be the case if the respondent was found to appoint a desire towards lower hierarchy but not to total lack of it. For instance, margins between A2 and A3 were really small meaning that those in A3 requested only slight shift towards a more egalitarian atmosphere. Key phrases like “almost”, “nearly” and ‘slightly’ and “could be a bit more” helped to identify such small difference between A2 and A3. Finally statements which indicated no limits to low hierarchy were defined to be B. This was appointed when participants were identified to be in favour of complete lack of hierarchy with regards to the factor of focus.

Figure 5: Developed concept of data analysis

Respondents were defined as A1 when they mentioned dissatisfaction about a factor which implicated excessively low hierarchy. So if a factor is assessed to have characteristics of low hierarchy at a grade that the respondents is not satisfied with he/she was specified to be A1. In other words the existing limit was already passed over and the current situation was too flat for such respondents. Participant appointed as A2 when they mentioned optimal satisfaction with the current hierarchical situation in terms of relevant factor. They were satisfied with the exact level of the present level of hierarchy. On the other hand A3 was determined to be the case if the respondent was found to appoint a desire towards lower hierarchy but not to total lack of it. For instance, margins between A2 and A3 were really small meaning that those in A3 requested only slight shift towards a more egalitarian atmosphere. Key phrases like “almost”, “nearly” and ‘slightly’ and “could be a bit more” helped to identify such small difference between A2 and A3. Finally statements which indicated no limits to low hierarchy were defined to be B. This was appointed when participants were identified to be in favour of complete lack of hierarchy with regards to the factor of focus.
Method

After generally categorizing respondents to A1, A2, A3 and B under each of the eleven factors, dissatisfying aspects of egalitarian structures from perspectives of A1, positive and negative attributes of the current situation for A2 specifications and the reasons behind why those with A3 label still desire some limits were identified and analysed. Under each factor, different perspectives were contrasted and critically assessed and the underlying results for desire of limits were interpreted. Interpretations simultaneously accounted for positional differences as well. Although this was the focus of the second research question, it was addressed together with the first research question all along as the findings and interpretations were closely linked and incorporated within each other to a large extent.

3.6 Assessment of Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness is a vital matter to be addressed to ensure integrity and value of any research. Assuring trustworthiness required handling four main aspects as outlined by Guba (1981), namely credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability.

Credibility

The authors have adopted well recognised methods by incorporating approaches of relevant prestigious researchers such as Yin (2009), Yin (2012) and Easterby-Smith (2015). Appropriateness of the choices have been justified in a critical manner, along the research. Extensive description of the low hierarchy and job satisfaction phenomenon under investigation have been provided. Plus, previous researchers in the area have also been closely examined to frame conclusions.

All respondents were free to participate the research, so it was ensured that the data collection included only willing people (Shenton 2004). Besides it was assured that there was a comfortable atmosphere to facilitate encouragement and honesty in the interviews. Shenton (2004) also puts forward that it should be made sure that the participants do not feel as if there are “right” or “wrong” answers. In this direction, the interviewers had neutral standpoints and did not lead the respondents to one or another direction. Similarly, the interviewees were too comforted to speak freely and expressly since there was no “right” or “wrong” answer.

To ensure high credibility among the interviews, they were transcribed and the dialogues were sent to the participants. Shenton (2004) illustrates that the informants can reconsider if their statements match what they had actually intended ultimately generating more credible data. Due to the fact that most of the interviews were conducted through Skype-video calls it could also made sure that articulations were recognized and captured accurately to be included in transcription documents.

Last but not least, the development and execution of research was aided predominantly by peer-reviewed articles and only well-established books while also receiving regular guidance and feedback from an expert in management research field. Combining these with the previously explained points of concerns, gives the authors’ confidence in credibility of the study.

Transferability

In order to be transferable, the authors first attached importance to provide sufficient contextual information about the fieldwork covering previous studies regarding hierarchical structures and job satisfaction as well as the development of the research purposes and execution of the entire study. By delivering a clear and detailed picture all through, it was aimed to maximize confidence of the readers to transfer the results and conclusions to other situations. As (Shenton, 2004) asserts, this type of approach that equips readers with a proper understanding of the phenomenon under investigation, is believed to enable readers to compare the instances of the elements explained in the report with those which they might observe in their situations. As (Cole & Gardner, 1979) puts forward, transferability also required illustrating the limits of the study by revealing the number and the type of organizations and participants, type of respondents, data collection methods with number, length and time period of sessions as well as analysis methods. These were all explicitly provided in appropriate sections of the report.
Method

One may argue that findings of one case study may not suffice to be transferred to other circumstances. However by exhaustively presenting the context of all the stages it is believed to provide value in terms of transferability. This is supported by (Borgman, 1986) who states that understanding of a phenomenon is gradual via several studies rather than a single one conducted in isolation. Although the results of this information may possibly not fully overlap with one another, this does not imply untrustworthiness. In fact they would reflect multiple realities which is highly valuable (Shenton, 2004). The authors are confident that this study possesses transferability by providing detailed description of all contexts and results to provide sensible reasons for any variations when transferred to other situations.

Dependability
To address the issue of dependability, processes of the study was reported in detail as suggested by Shenton (2004) to enable other researchers to replicate the work while not necessarily having to reach the same results. Although qualitative analysis makes dependability difficult to address three major points were handled to achieve it as also proposed by Shenton (2004):

Firstly the research design and its implementation were described carefully disclosing what was planned and executed on a strategic level. Formulation of the purposes, detailed information of the participants and strategy of how to gather information was displayed in detail. The specific participant positions in the company (table 1), the lengths of the interviews (table 1) and the interview guideline, which can be found in the appendix are some of these. Secondly the operational detail of data gathering has shown itself as the next significant point which ensured dependability as supported by Shenton (2004). Given the in-depth descriptions in chapter 3.4 this can be seen as fulfilled, too. As the final main point for dependability Shenton (2004) reflects to the appraisal of the project and the evaluated effectiveness of the process of inquiry undertaken. This is achieved by reflecting on the entire process effectiveness and findings in order for readers to perceive the whole image clearly and to replicate the study to potentially reach similar results in the same context, while being able to make sense of any variations in results.

Confirmability
Shenton (2004) defines the concept of confirmability as the objectivity of the investigator’s concerns. This required assuring objectivity in research techniques, in the case of this study, interviews. This was achieved through objective interview questions (chapter 3.4.2 & appendix) Furthermore it can be guaranteed that the findings and conclusions of the study are based on experiences and ideas of the participants, not influenced by characteristics or preferences of the authors by any means.

The authors are confident that through all-round objective attitude and the in-depth and detailed descriptions, it is ensured that the confirmability of the research results is achieved. As advised by Shenton (2004), this should enable readers to decide how far the data and constructs arising from it might be accepted. It is believed that any observer can trace the course of the study step-by-step with the decisions made and procedures critically justified and described.

In conclusion, numerous points have been addressed as explained under the four main aspects to achieve trustworthiness. In this direction, the authors believe that the study has academic integrity and promises value to the literature.

3.7 Ethical Issues
In order to ensure a fully ethical status for the study, two sets of concerns were carefully addressed. The first set refers to the protection of the research subjects and informants and are as follows:

- It was assured that the participants did not receive any sort of harm and that their dignity was highly respected. Completely respectful, honest and polite attitude was maintained in all kinds of contact with the participants.
- Fully informed consent of all those involved was obtained prior to conducting the interviews.
Method

- The privacy of the participants was highly regarded. Although interviewees and those directly interacted were personally identified by the researchers, their anonymity was also fully secured.
- All collected data has been kept confidential as agreed with the participants in advance.

The second set of aspects refers to protecting the integrity of the research community and they are as follows:

- There has not been any deceptions regarding the nature and the aims of the research.
- Throughout all the stages, the research has been communicated in an honest and transparent manner avoiding any misleading or incorrect presentation of research findings.
4 Results & Analysis

Here the lower boundaries of hierarchy are discovered by closely examining relevant results. The results and analysis for each factor is delivered consecutively so that the reader does not lose track of the analysis due to the high number of factors.

4.1 Importance of job satisfaction and hierarchical situation

4.1.1 Results
To begin with, all nine interviewees defined job satisfaction as a very crucial element of their working life as expected with two of them actually pointing it out as the most important aspect of work. It was also noted that the respondents had a slightly different perception of job satisfaction as some put emphasis on comfortable environment and some directly reflected on pleasant colleagues while content of work itself was of focus for others. Three statements that accurately represent these, all from different interviewees are illustrated below; it can be seen that weightiness of job satisfaction and the aspects that the respondents initially associated job satisfaction with, varied.

R6: “[...] Job satisfaction is the most important factor for me. I do not want to spend time in a job, which I do not like, even though I would earn a load of money [...]”

R3: “Mmm, it is very crucial. For instance if I already get up in the morning with the thought “What shall I do at work again, I feel mistreated” then I will literally not be as effective as when I am highly satisfied.”

R1: “Definitely very important and I think I am lucky to be doing what I enjoy.”

4.1.2 Analysis
As previously mentioned job satisfaction was valued as a crucial element of working life by all participants who were not by any means willing to keep a job which they are not contented with. It was consistently and implicitly expressed that the hierarchy situation in the organization had a major influence on the job satisfaction. Hence it can be stated that the participants strive towards maximal job satisfaction and therefore towards an ideal situation of hierarchy from their perspective. This aligns with studies by Bonsdorff et al. (2014) and Gallie et al. (2012) who emphasize the significant impact of hierarchical textur on job satisfaction. Another notable finding here was that the line of vision of the respondents clearly varied while assessing job satisfaction. Some of them focused on their work environment relating to physical comfort and pleasantness of their workplace while some reflected on how colleagues matter in terms of likability and convenience of the job. The others put emphasis on the actual meaning and content of the tasks which they undertake relating to utilizing their skills and being proud of their contributions. Nevertheless, these different standpoints have not produced considerable differences while investigating job satisfaction in the context hierarchical structure. These are attributed to individuals’ particular perspectives; thus job satisfaction was treated irrespective of how the respondents looked at it. This concurs with research by Gal-Or & Amit (1998) and Weiss, et al., (1967) who consider such noticeably diverse perspectives to be natural and dependant on the individual.

4.2 Connection between job satisfaction and productivity

4.2.1 Results
Enhanced productivity, a major outcome of high job satisfaction was spontaneously mentioned by two of the interviewees as can be seen from their expressions as given below. On the contrary six respondents only positively linked job satisfaction with productivity when they were asked while one respondent distinctly disassociated job satisfaction and productivity.

R2: “We made experiences that if somebody is satisfied they are more concentrated and more productive as well.”
Results & Analysis

4.2.2 Analysis
Connection between job satisfaction and productivity was explicitly mentioned by the participants. It seems that majority of the participants see those factors as interconnected matters, both for themselves and for others whereas a minority of the respondents saw productivity as a personal value and claimed that they prefer to do more satisfying things but that it does not change their productivity in general.

This shows that even though Tuomi (2006) and Butts et al. (2009) claim that there is a pretty big connection between productivity and job satisfaction this might be influenced from personal characteristics of a person. The personality cannot be eliminated and has a big influence on the productivity and therefore job satisfaction might predominantly determine by personality factors.

Nonetheless the dissociation of job satisfaction and productivity as uniquely proposed by that one respondent required deeper interpretation. The comments of this respondent on various aspects on job satisfaction, displayed some contradictions regarding this matter. She reflected on how working and using her judgement and ideas independently and taking initiative in a responsible manner improved her efficiency that is essentially the same affair as productivity. Plus the autonomous model of working, which she described heavily revolved around independence and responsibility which in fact were two of the elements constituted job satisfaction with regards to hierarchy. Thus it is conceived that this respondent’s productivity which she referred as efficiency, was also considerably influenced by her contentment with the nature and texture of her work on the basis that her productivity is complemented by characteristic opportunities emerging from low hierarchy applications.

4.3 Natural formation of hierarchy
Three of the nine interviewees identified formation of hierarchical relationships among people who actually have an identical formal position. They also specified that such formation of leader and follower relationships is common, one of them even appraising it to be unavoidable. At the same time they identified such situations to be natural and efficient. Although the other seven interviewees did not explicitly discuss formation of hierarchical structures among equally ranked people, two displayed various implications in their statements that reflected acknowledgement of existence and beneficial nature of such formations.

4.4 Problems with very low hierarchical structures
Although the interviewees’ general consensus was that low hierarchical workplace is favourable for their job satisfaction, some interesting statements were recorded. While spontaneously discussing applicability and desirability of low hierarchy, five of the nine interviewees identified difficulties, which they think limit feasibility of extremely egalitarian organizations. The main theme of those arguments was that such atmospheres significantly retard and complicate decision-making processes as exemplified below:

R7: “Decisions will take too long and problems won’t be solved or too slow. Because too many people are taking part in the decision-making process”
4.5 Authority

4.5.1 Results

Managers
Even though two of the three interviewed managers still have a hierarchy level above them, both stated that they have a high level of authority given. All three agree on that they demand on their decisions and make compromises very rarely. Moreover all three stated that their current authority level is satisfying in the way it is right now or slightly higher. Representative statements from the interviews are exemplified as follows:

R3: “In this case I would rather say, no compromises because if I say to make it like this than we do it like this! I have the responsibility about the decision (laughing). No seriously, because most times when I have a new order and there are questions about how to do and solve it, I thought about it before [...] already”

R2: “If [...] 'I asked this already 100 times in my 30 years of experience, I will not ask this again I appoint that!”

Non-Managers
Here none of the respondents had formal authority to tell people what to do, nevertheless it was observed that four mentioned the high value of the teamwork and that in their teams every opinion is most times equally regarded. These are illustrated in the following statements:

R4: “I am not really in contact with many others to have some authority over them. But I receive guidelines and demands from managers and the board. But with my peers it’s much more relaxed and informal, we make requests and assist each other all the time. ”

R6: “In my position I do not really give orders, I am part of a project team and of course I have to do what my supervisor tells me to do. But in our team we are more seen like colleagues than different positions [...]”

R8 and R9 on the other hand demonstrated minor unhappiness regarding high authority of managers, which can be seen in the following statement of R8:

R8: “Didn’t have much to say, my project leader was more above me than next to me. I would wish that everybody has the same authority [...] Furthermore I would like it to be that every opinion has the same weight.”

4.5.2 Analysis

Table 2: Evaluation of respondents’ answers of the factor ‘authority’

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Factor</th>
<th>Respondent</th>
<th>Evaluation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Authority</td>
<td>R1</td>
<td>A2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>R2</td>
<td>A2</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>R3</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>R9</td>
<td>B</td>
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</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Overall manager(R1-R3)/ non-manager(R4-R9)</th>
<th>A2</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Authority</td>
<td>A3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Results & Analysis

The managers appreciated having authority at workplace by means of dictating subordinates’ actions. However this was found to take place in a highly soft manner for instance when subordinates are given some directions by their authorized managers the interactions appear to be fairly informal and certain undertakings are gently requested rather than firmly demanded. So from managers’ perspective the authority over lower layers is desirable for their job satisfaction. Thus the authority situation between layers as it is seems to be optimal from managers’ perspective. Yet the most prominent benefit of authority seems to come true among employees of the same team in a different sense. Although teammates generally have similar authority, frequently requesting certain things from each other appears to improve teams’ productivity and members’ satisfaction. It should be noted that such practices are facilitated by the overall organizational situation and it can be suggested that such high authority particularly among teammates leads to improved job satisfaction and working efficiency.

It can be seen that authority is interpreted differently by managers and non-managers. Managers took it as controlling sub-layer’s activities and relish such power. Hence their job satisfaction regarding authority in the context of hierarchy did not favour egalitarian structures. Non-managers rather took it as an opportunity to boost their communication and effectiveness within the team by giving and receiving orders. Seizing this opportunity serves well for their job satisfaction. The more flatness among the team members irrespective of minor positional differences is beneficial making egalitarian team textures promising to grant team members with even more authority over each other in this context and boost job satisfaction.

4.6 Advancement

4.6.1 Results

Managers
The promotion opportunities have been described by all three managers as fairly good. When talked about the promotion chances of their subordinates they all agreed on equal advancement chances in the whole firm over all different hierarchy levels. Following two expressions represent managers’ consensus well:

R1: “I think we’re quite equal here when it comes to opportunities to promote.”

R2: “Actually the ability of promotion is good I would say! [...] all our project leaders started as technical drawers first [...] and the best get the chance to be a project leader. I think more promotion abilities would be hard to launch”

Non-managers
Respondents vastly assessed the chances of promotions in the company to be very low unsurprisingly making them dissatisfied. Five of the six went further to criticise the flat structure since it generated relatively less number of layers for promotion. Overall judgement of the respondents can be seen as illustrated below:

R6: “Promotion is hard to get here, I think because of the few levels erm stages in the company. Like I said, more colleagues than bosses or supervisors. But indeed you have a chance of promotion [...], I could get project leader of a whole project team [...] the wage difference is not so high though, but this can rise over the years with more experience and when you get more “unique” and I would be glad to have a different position with some different work.”

R9: “There is an upper limit due to the size of the company [...], I would say my promotion abilities are erm medium-to-high.”

R7: “Not high I would say. No if I am honest there are not much positions where one can get promoted to. There are of course only a few leading positions.”

4.6.2 Analysis
Results & Analysis

Table 3: Evaluation of respondents’ answers of the factor’ advancement

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Factor</th>
<th>Respondent</th>
<th>Evaluation</th>
<th>Overall manager(R1-R3)/non-manager(R4-R9)</th>
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<td>Advancement</td>
<td>R1</td>
<td>A2</td>
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<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td>R9</td>
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</table>

From managers’ standpoint, promotion opportunities in the organization were pleasant and equally reachable by everyone. Managers perceive that the organization has an egalitarian texture in terms of chances of advancement. The predominant consensus is that provided that the effort is put in by workers, everyone has equal opportunities to rise regardless of their current position. In other words promotion chances are strongly related to willpower and hard work. When it comes to employees with non-managerial roles the situation was appraised as quite undesirable. It was predominantly claimed that the chances of promotion were very low and a clear desire to improve the situation was mentioned frequently. A lower hierarchy atmosphere was very commonly assessed to be offering more opportunities for taking more responsibility, demonstrating their increasing competence and being recognized more for their valuable contributions to result in promotion for them. However the general strive towards higher possibilities of advancement leads to the conclusion that more different levels are required to rise through. This induces a problem since low hierarchy organizations reasonably incorporate relatively less number of layers hence less chances of promotion. This is also represented in table 3 where the non-managerial respondents consider the organization to be too flat referring to low number of layers that diminish promotion possibilities. This aspect therefore indicates a limit as hierarchy levels should be sufficiently low to set the stage for better demonstration of employees’ skills but also not too low which would significantly reduce the number of layers for employees to climb through.

One interviewee asserted her current promotion opportunities to be so displeasing that she considered switching to another company to fulfill her potential with a higher title. This implicates a noteworthy contradiction with the existing literature in which the predominant consensus is that job satisfaction through low hierarchy applications is very beneficial to keep skilled workers in the company. This phenomena renders hierarchical relationships and layers to be optimized in a way that low hierarchy still enhances skilled workers’ satisfaction by providing them with sufficient chances for promotion to a good few layers to keep them going.

Managers and non-managers here have substantially different points of view. Managers see the given promotion chances as adequate and ideal whereas the non-managers appoint that those opportunities are too few as previously discussed. On the one hand this could be that managers have a different view on the advancement than non-managers based on the situation that they are already in their desired positions and do not have to think of their own promotion chances. Plus they may not know their subordinates’ current opportunities in detail. On the other hand it should be remarked that two of these three managers had a non-managerial role at this very company. Therefore the emphasis they put on equal opportunities and dependence of promotion on hard work should be noted. Either way it can be concluded that the positional differences have a significant impact on how employees conceive, how much they appreciate and desire chances of advancement.
4.7 Independence

4.7.1 Results

Managers

Respondent R1 values independence very highly but furthermore relates to teamwork and mentioned that teamwork is very crucial for him as well which limits the independence.

R1: “I think it’s good to have independence and kind of do things your way most of the times. But we also work in teams constantly and it definitely pays off when you assist each other.”

Whereupon R2 and R3 mention their full independence and their gladness about it.

R2: “Due to my position I can work fully independently [...]”

R3: “I work fully independently all the time and enjoy doing so, I can make my own schedules and can therefore balance family and work very good. This is essential in a job I would say”

Non-Managers

Independence is regarded to be very important among five interviewees (one interviewee did not discuss). In addition the actual level of independence in the company is considered high and satisfying. The thoughts of all respondents can be represented with a statement of respondent R6:

R6: “[...] I can nearly completely work independently on [the tasks]. I mean if there is something special in a task and I cannot solve it on my own, my supervisor helps me and is leading me a little. But in general I see myself as a very independent worker, [...] I very much appreciate the independency in this job and it has a big influence on my gladness”

R8: “I work independently until the project is finished and then I present it. So I work independently but of course you have to show what you got on some point.”

4.7.2 Analysis

Table 4: Evaluation of respondents’ answers of the factor ‘independence’

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Factor</th>
<th>Respondent</th>
<th>Evaluation</th>
<th>Overall manager(R1-R3)/ non-manager(R4-R9)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Independence</td>
<td>R1</td>
<td>A2</td>
<td>A3</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>R2</td>
<td>B</td>
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<td>R3</td>
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<td>R4</td>
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<td>R5</td>
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<td>R6</td>
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<td>R8</td>
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<td></td>
<td>R9</td>
<td>B</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

To begin with when the respondents were asked about independence, all described their current working situation as highly independent-working which is a high indicator of flat hierarchies. Increasing independence is assessed to be in favour of job satisfaction of both managerial and non-managerial employees.

Examining deeper, two main dimensions emerged in this regard, the first one being designing work independently and the second one being team-work. Regardless of their function and hierarchical position employees much rather prefer being able to plan and prioritize their actions
autonomously to a large extent. Working this way has been demonstrably rendering them highly efficient as the inclination is towards an environment with even more opportunities to project and conduct their work independently. This may raise questions regarding team-work and collaboration but such independence is found to not isolate individuals from their colleagues but in fact bring the best out of each worker and reinforce co-operation by equipping them with the freedom of contributing with their peculiarly strong skills generously in ways that they are the most comfortable and efficient with. Overall, it can be stated that advanced independence at work in this sense does not bring limits in its wake as the more independent the workers are the more satisfied and productive they are highly likely to be.

4.8 Recognition

4.8.1 Results

Managers
For recognition the three interviewed managers mostly discussed how they handled praise among their employees. All three valued it certainly high and agreed that they probably give praise rarely due to different reasons. The general thoughts can be represented well as follows:

R2: “Yes sure if somebody does his work very well than you can praise him verbally. [...] I think I could give a little more but sometimes it just doesn’t fit [...] in the right situation and would seem artificial. Too much is not good either [...] it often comes immediately back like a boomerang, so they then adamant on, for instance, more money. So [...] you do not want to pay for every praise, of course. So this is a little bit holding the balance. And accordingly I probably give a little too less praise.”

Interestingly Respondent R1, which has a middle-manager position could see assess it from both sides, as a manager and as an employee and desires both to be receiving and giving more praise as below:

R1: “I think it would be nicer if I heard more from my upper manager when we accomplish something. Not that I think he is unhappy with the work, but I think it would motivate me and others a lot more. I also try to praise my employees as much as possible but sometimes I just forget about it or it is not the right moment. [...]”

Non-Managers
Four of the six respondents assert that sufficient praise is not given in the current situation, which can be demonstrated through a statement of respondent R8:

R8: “I think it is not enough. To less praise in general. I don’t have to praise five times a day and for every small thing but it doesn’t hurt anybody to give a praise sometimes, and this is really motivating! So very rarely the case here. Too much implicitness…”

R6: “Mm, I think we get to less recognition for good work here. I mean my project leader he is praising me regularly and that’s ok, but it could be more. And from the upper bosses the praise, even for very outstanding work is very seldom. It would definitely enhance my satisfaction here if there would be more praise, I would like that. On the other hand too much praise would also be silly I suggest because then the effect disappears, I think the right balance has to be found here.”

However the remaining two respondents evaluated the current situation more positively as can be seen from a statement that represents this perspective well:

R9: “Eerm, yeah I think it’s quite alright. If you do a good job, the bosses would say ‘Yeah well done, good job, that was a great way to make it’ and things like this. However, there is not too much praising.”

4.8.2 Analysis
In terms of recognition from superordinates there was a strong consensus among non-managerial respondents that recognition was low. Assessing from hierarchical perspective, this meant that managers overlooked hard work and success of subordinates. It was identified that recognition played a high role for the job satisfaction of these employees whether it was from their teammates’ or from their superordinates. They explicitly mentioned that the situation with the superordinates is displeasing while their peers provide them with pleasant praises for good performance. The desire of non-managers is towards more recognition from managers. In contrast they do not seek constant praise and appreciation since it could be artificial, ineffective and even disturbing. Thus the optimal frequency and fashion of recognition and praise should be well managed by managers.

The observation that managers admit giving limited praise to their subordinates is remarkable since this is found to stem from three main reasons. The first one was that finding the right place, time and atmosphere is perceived as a difficult task by managers. Secondly the hectic nature of the work results in them actually forgetting about expressing their words of praise and appreciation. Thirdly managers tend to deliberately limit the praises they give to subordinates to avoid situations where the subordinates demand additional treatment or payment on the basis of their notable contributions. So they aim to praise them to keep them motivated and notified of the value of their contributions, yet they practise it to a limited extent in order not to feel indebted towards subordinates. Hence when it comes to satisfaction of managerial employees, recognition does have its limits that is a result of optimization between praise and indulgence.

4.9 Relationship with superordinates

4.9.1 Results

Managers

As a sign of flat hierarchical structure, R1 and R3 have a very casual relationship with their upper managers. R2 on the other hand had the highest position in the hierarchical tree thus no managers for him to have a relationship with. Yet the following statement of respondent R3 represents the managers’ general consensus well.

R3: “[...] furthermore we also have good relationships to the upper bosses and do not have to take the way over “in-between-bosses” and can go the direct way. Than the whole work and the whole relations are much easier.”

However, in respondents R1 statement it can be seen that some still desire indeed a very casual relationship but still a professional one,
R1: “I have quite a formal relationship with my managers in general. It’s not that they're unfriendly or arrogant, they just prefer keeping it that way and I think I prefer this too. They're easy to talk to and we communicate well often, but I like some distance, as it's a professional environment at the end of the day.”

Non-Managers
One of the respondents here has a kinsman like relationship with his manager hence the participant preferred not to discuss this issue. Among the remaining five, it was noted that overall the relationship with upper layers is considered to be very pleasing and appropriate by all respondents, as exemplified below:

R4: People with high positions treat me very well. They are friendly but it’s not like we hang out on the weekends and I think I would keep it that way. I think it’s not necessary to have a personally close relationship in or outside the work, if you can already communicate well with them.

R9: “[...] we have activities together, sometimes we go for hiking, in the summer there is also a family party. It is quite sociable [...] so it’s really friendly, you can easily talk and socialize with your boss and other colleagues”

R6: “My relationship to my direct supervisor is very good [...] also to the upper managers [...]. This has a really positive influence on the working climate and is crucial for a satisfying work, I think.”

4.9.2 Analysis

Table 6: Evaluation of respondents’ answers of the factor ‘relationships with superordinates’

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Factor</th>
<th>Respondent</th>
<th>Evaluation</th>
<th>Overall manager(R1-R3)/ non-manager(R4-R9)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Relationships with</td>
<td>R1</td>
<td>A2</td>
<td>A2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>superordinates</td>
<td>R2</td>
<td>-</td>
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<td></td>
<td>R3</td>
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<td>R4</td>
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<td>R5</td>
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<td></td>
<td>R8</td>
<td>A2</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>R9</td>
<td>A2</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Relationships with managers involved mainly two sorts; indoors and outdoors interactions. The former related to relationships with superordinates during the working hours within the company. In this sense employees heavily agreed on positive communication and relationships. Yet it is comprehended that employees are not in favour of close bonds or personal relationships at workplace. So even though low hierarchy facilitates relationships across layers, subordinates are seemingly perfectly fine with maintaining professional, mutually respectful and efficient relationships rather than taking it to measures of high informality and friendliness with managers. On the other hand outdoors interactions remarked appreciation of social activities that brought people close outside the work through occasional activities. This was slightly contradictory to indoors relationships where formal and easy-going relationships were promoted. This issue seems to arise from the situation that workers did enjoy spending time outside work particularly with their peers who they closely work with on a daily basis. It can be stated that the hierarchy structure prevail to some extent even outside the work and workers are well satisfied with it.
Even though all employees regardless of their position see their current situation as ideal and the limits reached regarding closeness, all have different expectations of an ideal relationship. This may be highly connected to the personal character of each participant. Therefore preferences regarding the bond, closeness and all other interactions with upper layers varies depending on personality. In other words the limits are particular for each individual yet as previously discussed the overall desire is easy-going and efficient relationships which they appear to already have.

4.10 Responsibility

4.10.1 Results

Managers
By all three interviewees the responsibility was seen as a crucial factor which influences their work motivation and therefore their job satisfaction. Moreover all agreed that their current situation assigns them a high amount of responsibility. All in all respondent R3 gave the most representative insight regarding this point:

R3: “yes, there are many decisions which I can make on my own and where I just need a sign of the CEO to complete it, often he says here that I anyway have to decide it because he is not in detail informed about this project. So yes I would say my responsibility here is quite high”

Non-Managers
Responsibility is valued highly by all six respondents. The current situations appears to be satisfying their desires as can be seen in the following declarations of respondents R6, R8 and R9:

R6: “[…] mmh, I would say I have some responsibility. I mean nowadays my supervisor knows what I can do and he trusts me […] I like to have this kind of responsibility, it feels more…. Mmh how shall I say... more real or more that I do something important and that people trust my choice and my opinions. This has a big influence on my happiness here at work as well I would say.”

R8: “Everybody can tell his own opinion and use their own judgement. I also would say to 50% it gets considered by the bosses and is taken serious. So it is taken in consideration and is used sometimes”

R9: “In this department it is not possible to give even more responsibility about decisions, some things have to be decided by the CEO’s”

4.10.2 Analysis

Table 7: Evaluation of respondents’ answers of the factor ‘responsibility’

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Factor</th>
<th>Respondent</th>
<th>Evaluation</th>
<th>Overall manager(R1-R3)/non-manager(R4-R9)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Responsibility</td>
<td>R1</td>
<td>A3</td>
<td>A2</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>R2</td>
<td>A2</td>
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<td>R4</td>
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<td>R5</td>
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<td>R6</td>
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<td>R7</td>
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<td></td>
<td>R8</td>
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<td></td>
<td>R9</td>
<td>A2</td>
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</table>
Results & Analysis

Respondents predominantly demonstrated satisfaction with being given challenging responsibilities and having some flexibility to design their work when addressing them. It is interpreted that tackling demanding responsibilities and even taking initiative originates from the aspiration to fulfil one’s potential. This revolves around using and improving new sets of skills and making valuable experiences which remarkably improves job satisfaction. Undertaking responsibilities in an autonomous manner even further improves job satisfaction. Having high responsibility does enhance job satisfaction as long as autonomy is provided, which can be well accommodated with low hierarchy applications. As a result it can be concluded that, the more an organization demands from workers, the more autonomy they should ideally provide them with.

4.11 Supervision

4.11.1 Results

Managers

Due to the fact that all three managers were quite high up in the hierarchical tree supervision from above was not a significant point of concern for them. Nevertheless they agreed upon the idea that they try to conduct their supervision towards subordinates on a minimal level to enhance the individuality and creativity among them. Well-representative expressions are as follows:

R1: “We are not being supervised that often here, we’re quite self-sufficient I think. There are certain checkpoints and supervision by management but it’s very smooth. But when we present a new suggestion that might concern other departments, managers are much stricter. I think this helps, the regular supervision and those exceptional ones help us to move in the right direction. It is comforting like this but I would probably be a bit irritated if they checked my every move.”

R3: I try to keep the supervision as low as possible. But of course there are employees whom I have to check more closely or more often. It is always about the right balance, not too much supervision so one does not destroy the working flow and creativity but also not too little so your employees feel that the things they do are important and that they are efficient”

Non-Managers

Under this category all six respondents reached nearly the same conclusion that is some supervision is desired but not too much. The current situation seems generally satisfactory. More specifically these can be illustrated through the statements of respondents R4, R6 and R9:

R4: “Well, our work directly concerns the board and the company’s direction. So there are high expectations and the managers regularly check […]. To be honest, we sometimes need this kind of supervision to make sure that we deliver the tasks well and add value. I think our manager’s balance it well, they don’t over-run our work but they also don’t just leave us confused.”

R6: “I mean my supervisors know what I can do so they do not control or supervise me the whole time. Some tasks they look still over my shoulder but mainly I work […] without supervision which makes a very relaxed working climate. And if I really need help I can ask for some supervision all the time.”

R9: “[…] I think I also like some control, well not control but some help and support. You know, I would like the boss to be checking my work and responding to me regularly so I know […] that I am in the right direction. I think this is important but in general I like to work quite autonomously. So yeah I don’t like to be bossed around but I think I need some guidance.”
4.11.2 Analysis

Table 8: Evaluation of respondents’ answers of the factor ‘supervision’

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Factor</th>
<th>Respondent</th>
<th>Evaluation</th>
<th>Overall manager(R1-R3)/non-manager(R4-R9)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Supervision</td>
<td>R1</td>
<td>A2</td>
<td>A2</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>R2</td>
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<td>R8</td>
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<td></td>
<td>R9</td>
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Working with relatively low supervision from upper layers is found to be serving well for employee satisfaction for all. Being reliable and self-sufficient has a noteworthy positive influence to a large extent among employees. However by the nature of the industry and as in many organizations managers conduct regular monitoring and supervision. These are considered to be beneficial and vital by respondents to ensure high quality work. Employees prioritize successful outcome of their efforts and assess managers’ inspection and feedback to be assisting in this pursuit. Low hierarchy applications ordinarily promote autonomy and relatively less supervision however supervision from upper layers is appreciated here. Managers stepping in, providing guidance and working as a useful checkpoint mechanism improves employee satisfaction. Therefore in this context the conventional hierarchical application of supervision is assessed to be advantageous in contrast to rare supervision associated with highly flat structures.

Another important aspect is the intentional acts of employees to keep the supervision rather low in order to stimulate creativity and individual effectiveness. This also requires appropriate adjustment from managers’ part.

In addition employees’ desires regarding the nature of supervision was interpreted. Although they welcome supervision it is strongly preferred to be done appropriately and systematically. To be more precise the feedback received should be conveyed in an enlightening and gentle manner. Besides regularity of supervisions are required to be managed well. It seems that, at the end of the day it comes down to balancing; that is not overrunning workers by intervening frequently but also not leaving them with ambiguity and confusion.

4.12 Support of superordinates

4.12.1 Results

Managers
Reasonably the emphasis here was on the support they provide to their subordinates rather than what they receive from above. They focused on sharing their knowledge and helping out project leaders if they see appropriate and necessary. It is commonly acknowledged that they rely on other managers (middlers) to provide managerial support to lower layers. A statement from Respondent R1 who is a middler represents the general perspective well:

*R1: “Managers are quite understanding here. As I said before, we’re not very close but they are helpful and engaged with the work. So yeah, we’re well supported here I think. [...] So counting on the managers in case of a problem is always great.”*

Non-Managers
Results & Analysis

Four of the six employees are fairly satisfied with the support they receive from their managers yet they propose that it could be further improved. Their overall consensus can be illustrated as below:

**R6:** “[...] I would say it is alright. If you first want something you go of course to your direct supervisor first. But if it is a bigger problem or concern you can ask directly the upper management for support, and mostly they are quite understanding and helpful.”

**R7:** “Yes if you need days off you are going to get it [...] so you can plan your family and private life very well. [...] Offers for further education are also given, mostly to project leaders or something. Me myself I would need to plan it one year in advance that is a little bit disturbing and so I cannot use those possibilities so often[...]”

On the contrary, Respondents R8 and R4 regard the current situation as fully developed and they do not desire any further improvements. A statement of Respondent R8 displays this well:

**R8:** “We have utterly much information material in the office, about every subsection and about all materials, so you can look into that whenever you want to. The manager also ordered 4 different professional journals. He is also extremely eager to organise further educational trainings for his employees.”

### 4.12.2 Analysis

**Table 9: Evaluation of respondents’ answers of the factor ‘support of superordinates’**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Factor</th>
<th>Respondent</th>
<th>Evaluation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Support of superordinates</td>
<td>R1</td>
<td>A2</td>
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<td>R2</td>
<td>A2</td>
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<td>R8</td>
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<td></td>
<td>R9</td>
<td>A3</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

From managers’ standpoint they are providing sufficient support to their subordinates in useful ways. Their personal intervention seems to occur quite rarely and in a formal fashion and usually towards subordinates with a managerial role. They hardly ever closely deal with providing guidance, proposals or support for non-managerial personnel. Instead, those at the lower end of the hierarchical tree receive the support they seek, from middlers. In fact support in this context goes beyond work related problems and taps into helping with private matters which is highly appreciated. However the fact that majority of non-managerial respondents desire slight improvement revolves around the quality of support provided. People with a higher formal position appear to receive more support, tolerance and allowance in various dimensions. For instance they are encouraged and motivated considerably more to develop themselves with particular training or even part-time academic courses and they are provided with more flexibility when it comes to designing their work with regards to their private matters.

So on one side middlers and non-managerial employees have quite flat atmospheres among each other with invaluable understanding and support towards the subordinates. On the other hand the top managers isolate themselves and delegate middlers to deliver the required support throughout the organization and the formal position appears to be strongly connected to the quality of support received. As a result all employees (managers and non-managers) are satisfied.
for the most part in terms of superordinates’ support. The fact that top managers do not directly support those at the low end of the hierarchical tree does not harm job satisfaction as long as middlers maintain their valuable services in this pursuit. However further improvements could be implemented that is the support employees receive should be less dependent on the level of their formal position.

4.13 Influence on others

4.13.1 Results

Managers

Managers explicitly assert that while making decisions they do not attach any solid importance to what their subordinates think. As can be seen from the example statement below they are not influenced yet they project the problems with being overly heedless of others’ opinions:

R3: My subordinates do not influence me very much, most times I rather say “no compromises!” because if I say to make it like this than we do it like this, ha-ha. No seriously, because most times when I have a new order and there are questions about how to do and solve it, I thought about it before. But lately I tried to give them more chance to promote their ideas because I made the experience that this brings up issues I didn’t see before. Still some way to go here.

Non-Managers

Four of the interviewees identified their influence on others to be light as illustrated below:

R4: “I think I influence others with my work. I mean with the content of my work. But I think the hierarchical tree is strong when it comes to decision making. I have chances to give my opinion all the time but in the end it’s always the boss who has the power. She would decide what to do next, so it’s not very open to discussion then.”

R9: “[...] it really depends. For instance if he has really good ideas, he might be very stubborn and just go ahead with it without opening to much discussion. But I can still raise my voice and give some input. He might then make some compromises and sometimes I am actually on the right side. So he rethinks his judgement and refines his decision. But this does sadly not happen very often.”

The remaining two were content with the situation despite agreeing on the low influence of their experience, skills and ideas as exemplified below:

R6: “In my team I think I have quite an influence on my team members and my supervisor. They really appreciate my ideas and my opinions and take them in consideration. This really makes me feel like an appreciated team member [...] Sometimes of course the supervisor decides stuff on his own, but this is also ok because he has to take the responsibility [...] and has a better overview of the whole project rather than a detailed view”
4.13.2 Analysis

Table 10: Evaluation of respondents’ answers of the factor ‘influence on others’

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Factor</th>
<th>Respondent</th>
<th>Evaluation</th>
<th>Overall manager(R1-R3)/ non-manager(R4-R9)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Influence on others</td>
<td>R1</td>
<td>A2</td>
<td>A3</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>R2</td>
<td>A3</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td>R3</td>
<td>A3</td>
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<td></td>
<td>R4</td>
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<td></td>
<td>R5</td>
<td>A2</td>
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<td></td>
<td>R6</td>
<td>A2</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td>R7</td>
<td>A3</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>R8</td>
<td>A3</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>R9</td>
<td>A3</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Both managers and non-managers suggested for improvements to be made here. Managers justify that they rather make the final decision on their own based on their broader competence and responsibility. Nonetheless they try to take ideas from their subordinates more into consideration to tackle upcoming issues they did not envisage by themselves. There is a well-controlled balance between confidence in knowledge and experience and the time and effort they are willing to put in, to harness potentially valuable contribution from diversity of skills, experiences and ideas of subordinates.

The non-managers felt very much appreciated when their ideas were taken into consideration. Nevertheless it was stated that the situation could still be improved and that the managers should consider their ideas and proposals more frequently. However, it should be noted that there is a limit due to the complexity and urgency of decision-making processes. Besides the managerial employees have a more comprehensive and “outside the box” view, whereas others tend to focus more on details. Plus managers are ordinarily more capable of seeing forward and planning accordingly with more variables and issues in mind. This leads to the conclusion that both, managers and non-managers, would like to have an even flatter structure wherein it is possible to have a higher mutual influence on each other. Consequently it comes down to practically compromising between achieving goals in time efficiently and establishing opportunities for all employees to influence and contribute that ultimately enhances their job satisfaction.

4.14 Communication

4.14.1 Results

Managers
The communication channels are defined to be very well developed by all three respondents. The type of the communication is identified as very casual mostly taking place in personal encounters. Respondent R1 represents the general impression well:

R1: “Communication is very smooth as I said before. Both my employees and upper-managers are pretty easy to reach. There is not a barrier or long wait when someone wants to directly contact managers. I think the better the communication the more efficient the company is as a whole.”

Non-Managers
Likewise the communication is described by all six participants as quite informal and somehow neither perfect nor bad. The most commonly used communication channel is face-to-face contact.
The second mostly used one seems to be e-mail. Despite the overall content even better communication is desired as illustrated below:

R8: “I think the communication is alright but I miss a lot. In every case there should be made weekly meetings within your team and also with the boss, this is what I miss very much. So to say where you talk about proposals, improvements and thoughts, nothing is given there yet neither in the team nor in the whole company.”

R6: “Like I previously mentioned the communication is very casual to the most of the people. Especially in the project team it is very good. And even to other project teams the connection is very good, mostly via personal contact or email. I would like to have a little more meetings, to talk about problems and improvements together. On the other hand too much “speaking” might not be good either, then nobody has the chance to work anymore ha-ha.”

R9: “Hmm, yeah they work well I think via telephone or e-mail it’s quite effective. [...] in general it is very good. Also when you walk out in the factory you can easily communicate with many people.”

4.14.2 Analysis

Table 11: Evaluation of respondents’ answers of the factor ‘communication’

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Factor</th>
<th>Respondent</th>
<th>Evaluation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Communication</td>
<td>R1</td>
<td>A2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>R2</td>
<td>A3</td>
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<td>R3</td>
<td>A3</td>
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<td>R4</td>
<td>A2</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>R5</td>
<td>A3</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>R6</td>
<td>A3</td>
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<td></td>
<td>R7</td>
<td>B</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>R8</td>
<td>B</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>R9</td>
<td>A3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Irrespective of employees’ positions two major issues emerge here. The first one relates to accessibility and approachability. Throughout the whole organization layers do not create barriers for either side for contacting each other and exchanging information. In fact most of the interactions appear to occur face-to-face giving rise to a more egalitarian environment where the position of managers do not make communication with subordinates highly formal and fussy. This situation clearly helps with job satisfaction of all employees with different functions and hierarchical levels.

The second major issue is the application of communication both within departments and in cross-departmental contexts. Although communication is convenient for everyone it does not seem to be utilized as much as it is desired which is why particularly those with non-managerial roles desire that there would be more meetings to avoid some disconnections and ambiguity. However as the respondents also propose, this should not be exaggerated as too many or too frequent meetings may disrupt workflow and efficiency. In this case another dimension to consider is the communication effectiveness. Although the communication across layers and departments may be convenient, the time dedicated to them should be minimized to assure overall productivity.
4.15 Creativity

4.15.1 Results

Managers
All three stated that creativity is important for sustainable success and therefore they encourage their subordinates to seek new approaches. They also agree that creative ideas can be implemented only by certain teams and requires attention for practicality reasons as illustrated:

R3 “[...] pull the strings in the right way, so how you handle and organize your workload and employees [...]”

R2: “I try to give them a certain amount of freedom to enhance creativity [...] preferable something arises no matter it is right or wrong but the creativity was boosted. [...] On the other hand you have to pay attention, when you enhance creativity and there is somebody who is than too enthusiastic but he or she only comes up with inappropriate suggestions which are not up for debate at all [...] so this is a very thin line between promoting creativity and keep things running. If I enhance too much there comes more back which I have to “kill” which leads to demotivation. If I enhance it too less on the other hand it comes to less to me. Here a lot of psychology and knowledge of the human nature is needed.”

So he sees encouraging of creativity critical in a sense that it could lead to demotivation because not everything is needed.

Non-Managers
Two participants feel that their work does not require or encourage creativity. It seems that this does not bother them as can be seen in a statement given by respondent R4:

R4: “I think the work doesn’t really need much creativity. It’s more like doing what you have to do and that’s it. Of course I sometimes have original ideas to present but I don’t think that’s what’s required. It doesn’t bother me though because I already use my skills well and develop new ones.

Whereas three were slightly more concerned with this issue as exemplified below:

R6: “[...] we deliver always [...] customer designed units, every unit is different. Nevertheless in my position creativity does not play such a big role. I wish this would be a little more, in my perfect job I would prefer to be more stimulated in the way that I have to be more creative. I think creativity has a major influence on job satisfaction, at least for me.”

4.15.2 Analysis

Table 12: Evaluation of respondents’ answers of the factor ‘creativity’

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Factor</th>
<th>Respondent</th>
<th>Evaluation</th>
<th>Overall manager(R1-R3)/non-manager(R4-R9)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Creativity</td>
<td>R1</td>
<td>A2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>R2</td>
<td>A2</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td>R3</td>
<td>A2</td>
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<td>R4</td>
<td>A2</td>
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<td>R5</td>
<td>A2</td>
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<td>R6</td>
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<td>R7</td>
<td>A3</td>
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<td></td>
<td>R8</td>
<td>-</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>R9</td>
<td>A3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Results & Analysis

Although low hierarchy applications generally allow for more creative ideas by low ranks to be brought onto surface, employees with non-managerial roles do not have significant complains unless their work actually demands genuine acts of creativity as in R&D department. Nevertheless they are welcoming of tasks that would stimulate them to think and take action more creatively. Managers on the other hand are satisfied with the novel ideas delivered by the delegated units mainly being R&D department. Although they are aware of the importance of pushing all their subordinates forward to be welcoming and contributing to innovative acts, they prioritize successful execution of assigned tasks. Similarly employees who are not in charge of delivering creativity are more concerned about accomplishing with ongoing and upcoming projects. Hence there is a limit to how much creativity can be expected to enhance job satisfaction. At the end of the day irrespective of position employees seem to be most satisfied when they are doing what they are expected to do. Although slightly more creativity would be appreciated particularly by non-managerial employees, lack of creativity does not considerably affect job satisfaction.

The interpretation goes against Price et al. (2012) who claims that low hierarchy applications enhance job satisfaction by allowing subordinates to remake and create their own methods. As discussed, satisfaction in this case is based on fulfilling expectations in ways that are already established to be effective. This contradiction is assessed to possibly originate from two matters. Firstly the working procedures and methods might already be consummated parallel to employees' desires. Secondly the employees may not be willing to be expected of producing novel ideas on top of their demanding daily routine.
5 Discussion

Discussions for the two research questions are strongly connected with each other as it was during analysis. Therefore conclusions address both research questions simultaneously rather than in division to sub-sections per research question.

5.1 Conclusions

By investigating the eleven hierarchy based job satisfaction factors, numerous aspects that limit application of completely flat structures for maximal job satisfaction have been discovered. They originate from various reasons in different contexts and they differ depending on employee’s position. The prominent indications of the study are presented as follows:

- Independence stands out as the only factor that does not bring any limits in its wake. In other words the more independent employees are the more satisfied they seem to be. Hence the interpretation is that a completely flat structure where everyone is highly independent regardless of their formal position would be ideal.
- Advancement is found to indicate a tricky limit phenomenon for non-managerial employees requiring hierarchy levels to be low enough to allow for them to take more responsibility and demonstrate increasing competence but also adequately high to consist of desirable number of layers to climb through. In contrast managers can be assessed to be less concerned with promotion chances, the higher position a manager possesses the less attention he/she attaches to this aspect in terms of job satisfaction.
- As for recognition positional differences also arise with non-managerial employees expecting solid recognition by means of appreciation and motivation while desiring it not to be taken to artificial and disturbing measures. When assessing the evidence the remarkable limit is deliberately introduced by managers and it revolves around intentions of not indulging or pampering subordinates who could demand unreasonable compensations for their valued contributions.
- Although lower the hierarchy becomes the less supervision, monitoring and controlling takes place in general, complete lack of supervision is not desirable. Non-managerial employees do expect mild supervision to eliminate confusion and ambiguity. Likewise managerial employees prefer occasional supervision in fact this is conducted infrequently on purpose to stimulate self-sufficiency among subordinates.
- The chance to take tackle various demanding responsibilities is found to positively affect job satisfaction for all positions by leading to fulfilling potential and gaining new skills and experiences. As responsibilities increase more autonomy is desired and since there is a limit to responsibilities one can handle there also is a limit to how low hierarchy can get for parallel autonomy to be practically provided.

Table 13 illustrates the interpretations reached as for how low hierarchy should be. From the pink shade fields it can be seen that desires of employees for optimal job satisfaction do not represent a total lack of hierarchy based on these factors. They desire certain properties of hierarchical applications to prevail for the most part, the most prominent ones relate to advancement, recognition and supervision as discussed.
Discussion

Table 13: Summary of all factors divided by respondent groups

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Factor</th>
<th>Managers</th>
<th>Non-Managers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Authority</td>
<td>Relish authority over subordinates</td>
<td>Value authority over peers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Advancement</td>
<td>Satisfied, emphasize hard work</td>
<td>Desire sufficient number of layers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Independence</td>
<td>Consider no limits</td>
<td>Consider no limits</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recognition</td>
<td>Avoid overly indulging subordinates</td>
<td>Repel artificiality and frequency</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relationship with superordinates</td>
<td>Favour effectiveness, respect yet formality</td>
<td>Favour effectiveness, respect yet formality</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Responsibility</td>
<td>Desire proportional autonomy</td>
<td>Desire proportional autonomy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Supervision</td>
<td>Stimulate self-sufficiency while not losing the track</td>
<td>Relish self-reliance but repel ambiguity and confusion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Support from superordinates</td>
<td>Delegate middlers</td>
<td>Rely on middlers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Influence</td>
<td>Balance btw. using superordinates ideas and getting things done</td>
<td>Consider no limits yet aware of the balance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communication</td>
<td>Welcome convenience yet focuses on effectiveness</td>
<td>Welcome convenience, desire more communication yet favours effectiveness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Creativity</td>
<td>Expects from certain units</td>
<td>Prioritize primary tasks</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

To sum up the assessment of evidence indicates that low hierarchical structures are beneficial yet there are limiting aspects as summarized in table 13. As for the role of formal position on these, matters are regarded considerably differently by managerial and non-managerial employees however they are both in favour of prevalence of some hierarchy in particular contexts as discussed.

As explained in chapter 3.3, the company studied is believed to be a very good representative of its industry with its revenue and number of employees. Therefore although every organization is peculiar in plenty of ways, indications of this study is believed to shed light into the obscure lower limits of hierarchical applications in medium-sized manufacturing companies in Germany where job satisfaction and productivity have an absolutely crucial role.

5.2 Implications, Contributions & Future research

As discussed in the background it was confirmed that neither total lack of hierarchy nor high hierarchy bring the perfect outcome regarding job satisfaction and productivity. This study did not only confirm this consensus but additionally provided in-depth analysis to gain insight as to where the boundaries to a totally egalitarian structure lie in medium-sized manufacturing companies in Germany.
Discussion

Nevertheless there are further studies needed within this industry in Germany to gain more information about the topic and deliver a more comprehensive and well-rounded set of indications. Single case study did provide the authors with the target in-depth information thus this approach is suggested for further research. It should be noted that study is only the first part of a puzzle of many studies which at a later stage can potentially deliver highly important information to the German manufacturing industry and to researchers who explore the job satisfaction in context of hierarchy structures.

In terms of the content of future research, difference regarding how individuals perceive job satisfaction would potentially be helpful to consider. The grounds for this proposal is that employees assess job satisfaction based on different dimensions such as work environment, colleagues and work content. Once an individual’s particular standpoint is identified during data collection it would be beneficial to adapt questions to the utmost in that specific direction while also not losing the track of the main factors of investigation. This may not have a straightforward method but it is suggested to generate more accurate representation of job satisfaction.

Another issue worth remarking is inclusion of all factors with each interviewee. As illustrated in the tables during analysis some factors were not discussed with some interviewees. This is mainly due to interviewees’ preference rather than negligence of the authors. This occurred far too occasionally to disservce the completeness yet this issue could be tackled by even more careful development of interviews questions.

Finally despite having a fair variety of employee functions and formal hierarchical positions, more diversity would enhance comprehensiveness of studies in this pursuit.
6 References


References


Robert, C. et al., 2000. Empowerment and continuous improvement in the United States, Mexico, Poland and India predicting fit on the basis of the dimensions of power distance and individualism... *Journal of Applied Psychology,* pp. 643-658.

References


Appendix

Introduction letter to the companies, guaranteeing confidentiality

Dear Sir or Madame,

First of all we would like to thank you for taking the time to speak with us about hierarchy and job satisfaction. Your answers will contribute to our master thesis and they will be kept anonymous and confidential in the report. The structure of the interview is not strict and you are very welcome not to be bound with our wording, please feel free to add any ideas that cross your mind within this topic.
Here is a short introduction so that you are able to think a little about it before the interview. Our study aims to discover hierarchical structures, therefore the questions will mostly be about the situation in your company and things you would like to change in terms of hierarchy and job satisfaction. Please think about the situation in your company and how you would describe the hierarchical structure (steep, flat, whatsoever?) and things you desire to change about it. Also we would like to hear about your opinion on how high you value the job satisfaction of your employees.

Yours faithfully,

Tobias Bauer & Ali Can Cebi

Jönköping International Business School

Interview Guideline

**Introduction - ice breaker:**
- What is your name?
- Could you tell us more about your position?
- Can you tell us about how long you have been working for the company?

**Job satisfaction**
- What do you connect to this term?
- What are the most important values you would think of hear?
- How important is job satisfaction for you personally?

**Hierarchy**
- What do you perceive about the term “hierarchy”?
- How would you say the hierarchy situation in your company is defined: flat, steep or anywhere between and why?

**Advancement**
- Have you received any promotion in the company previously?
- How would you describe the promotion opportunities in the company?
- Would you suggest changing the promotion opportunities in the company, and if yes how?
- Do you see any obstacles this could bring with it?

**Authority**
- In your position do you generally direct people or are you getting directed?
- In which way is this usually happening?
- Would you like to have more “power” over other employees or would you like it to be more equal?

**Independence**
- How free are you to work on your own?
Appendix

- How free are you to tell your own opinions and suggestions?
- Would you like to have more?
- Do you see any obstacles arising in being fully independent?

**Recognition**
- Do you get/give praise for doing a good job?
- Do you think you get enough?
- Where do you see the problems in giving/getting too much and too less praise?

**Responsibility**
- How free are you to use your personal judgement?
- How high are your responsibilities in decision making?
- Would you prefer higher or lower responsibility for your tasks?

**Relationships with superordinates**
- First of all, do you have any personal connection to your superordinate out of the office?
- How would you describe the relationship with your superordinates?
- Would you like it to be closer, more distant or are you happy with the current situation?

**Supervision**
- In which intensity are you supervised / do you supervise?
- Does the current situation bother you?
- If yes why, and what would you like to be changed?

**Support through superordinates**
- Do your superordinates support you in anyway, if yes how?
- How good would you say regular support is from them?
- Would you like to get more support or is it already too much?

**Influence on others**
- In a meeting how much is your opinion taken into consideration to find a solution?
- Are you satisfied with this, if not what would you change?

**Communication**
- How easy is it for you to reach other people within the company?
- Are there anywhere problems which influence the communication with each other in a negative way? If yes what?
- Do you think the current situation is satisfying or would you change anything, if so what would you like to change?
- Is there in any way too much communication?

**Creativity**
- How creative do you have to be in your job?
- Does your manager encourage creativity, if yes in which ways?
- Would you like to do more creative things at workplace or are you satisfied with the current situation?