Who maintains wellbeing at work in multi-locational work? Analysis on managers' and employees' agency and roles

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Background

- Part of the research project "Capabilities and practices of multi-location work".
  - The aim is to study multilocational work in Finnish organizations and to develop multilocation work practices based on the research findings.

- Ten Finnish organizations participated the study.

- Implemented by Aalto University, Tampere University and Workspace Ltd.

- Funded by The Finnish Work Environment Fund and continues until 09/2024.

Positioning and contribution

- Impacts of multilocational work on employee wellbeing have been researched actively – particularly during and after the Covid-19 pandemic.

- The presentation discloses viewpoints of agency, activities and roles, that have been addressed less frequently.

- Qualitative orientation.

- Theoretically connects to research of work, wellbeing and organizations and more specifically to JD-R (job demands and resources, *Bakker & Demerouti 2007*)- and IGLOO (*Nielsen et al. 2018* –models) and theories of agency and practices (*Giddens 1984*).

- Produces new information on how to support a balanced way of working after the Covid-19 pandemic.

Data and methods

- Responses to open-ended questions from a (mainly quantitative) survey to employees of 10 Finnish organizations in 01/2023 – 04/2023.
  - Large organizations, involving mainly knowledge workers.

- The open-ended question included in the analysis was: "*What kind of practices have supported your wellbeing in multilocational work*?" / "*Millaiset toimintatavat ovat tukeneet työhyvinvointiasi monipaikkaisessa työssä?*"

- Qualitative thematic text analysis of the data: representational e.g. meaning imposing coding orientation (Popping 2015).

- Both actors / roles and activities were searched and coded. Codes were developed during the reading and coding process.

- Theoretical framework of IGLOO (individual, group, leadership, organization, overarching levels, e.g. Nielsen et al. 2018) was utilised in interpretation.

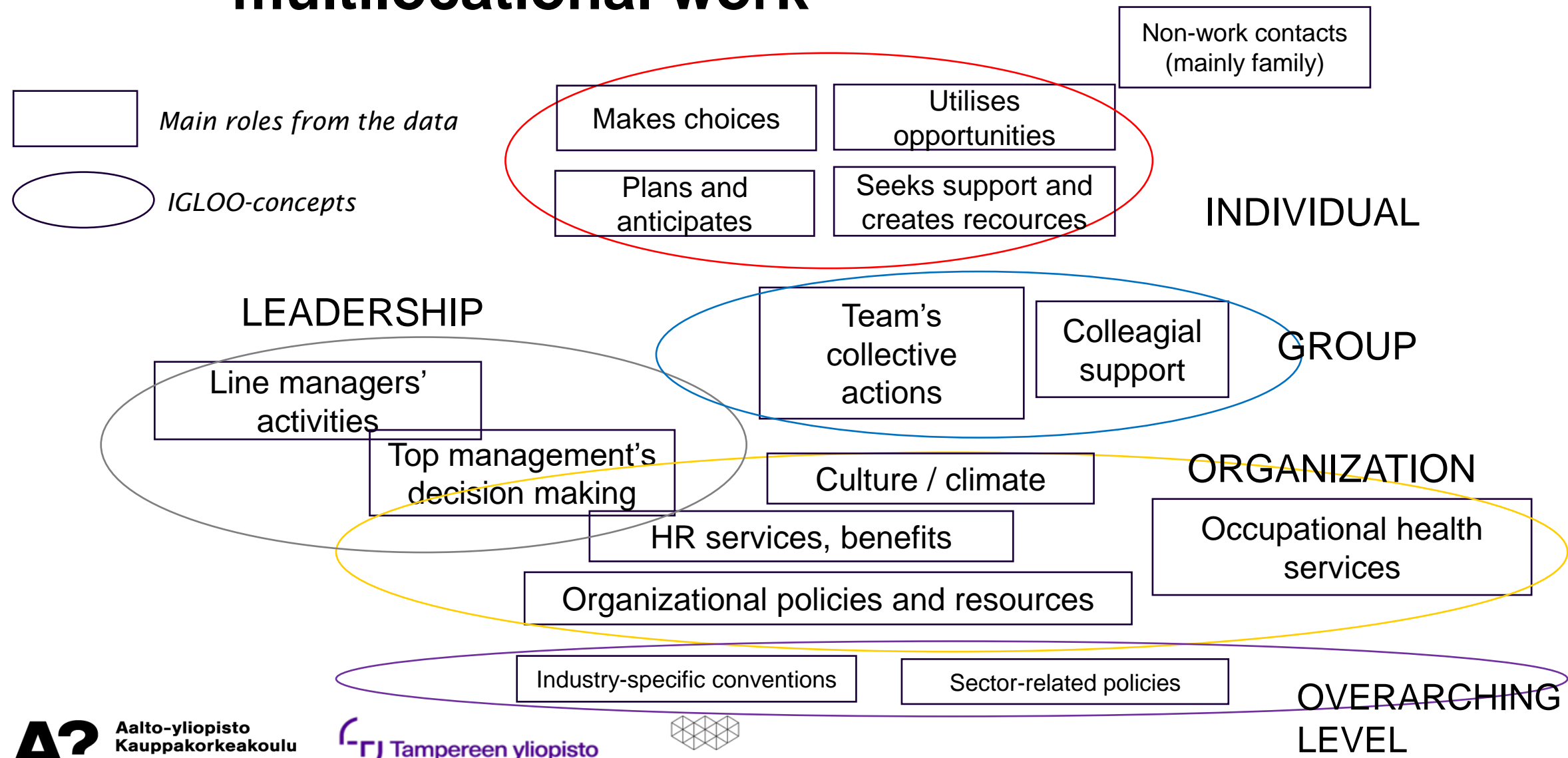⚠ Analysis is not complete so presented results are preliminary!

Description of the data

Organizations	No. of questionnaire respondents	No. of replies included in the analysis	Word count
A	949	526	7773
B	74	40	599
C	297	144	1815
D	409	186	2184
E	177	93	1448
F	318	150	1857
G	180	63	853
H	356	205	3441
I	298	154	1834
J	483	218	2826
In total	3541	1779	24630

50 % of the respondents replied to open-ended question

Average lenght of a reply was 14 words.

Actor network maintaining wellbeing at work in multilocational work

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Main roles from the data

IGLOO-concepts

Non-work contacts (mainly family)

Makes choices

Utilises opportunities

Plans and anticipates

Seeks support and creates recources

INDIVIDUAL

LEADERSHIP

Team's collective actions

Colleagial support

GROUP

Line managers' activities

Top management's decision making

Culture / climate

ORGANIZATION

HR services, benefits

Occupational health services

Organizational policies and resources

Industry-specific conventions

Sector-related policies

OVERARCHING LEVEL

Aalto-yliopisto Kauppakorkeakoulu

Tampereen yliopisto

Workspace

Individual employee

- Utilises the opportunity to choose where to work and how to combine different locations
  - Own needs and feelings & the requirements of the work activities.
  - Balances remote and onsite work ("*regular check-in face to face with the team*").

- Is active in communicating, asking for and offering help – also online.

- Plans ones own work and the structure of work days.

- Sets limits and boundaries by controlling working time, availability and the use of technology.

- Engages in wellbeing-enhancing activities (breaks, outdoors, excercise, socializing).

- Modifies one's own working environment.

Line manager

- Supports the opportunity to work flexibly and multilocationally.

- Trusts the employees – no micromanagement or too strict policies, support when needed.

- Maintains regular contact: also 1-to-1 conversations.

- Is easily and transparently available.

- Encourages and maintains good meeting and communication practices.

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Team / colleague

- Develops team-level practices and guidelines for multilocational work: e.g. onsite working, availability, communication channels, meetings.
  - Respects them and / or discusses openly if they need to be changed or updated.

- Builds a sense of community: e.g. informal communication, having coffee / lunch together onsite or having online coffee breaks.

- Communicates in an open and friendly manner.

- Trusts each other and respects different needs and ways of working.

- Is flexible in balancing team's and individuals' preferred and needs.

- Maintains transparent availability.

- Provides help and support to colleagues.

Aalto-yliopisto Kauppakorkeakoulu

Tampereen yliopisto

Workspace

Organization

- Develops organizational policies and guidelines for multilocational work.
    - E.g. offers flexibility in working times and places.
- Provides facilities: office design, workstations, working spaces for different purposes.
- Provides enabling communication technology and supports its use.
- Treats different employee groups and offers services and other resources equally.
- Offers services supporting health and wellbeing: equal access, remote services…

Overarching level – operational environment

- Only a few mentions in the data.

- Conventions and working culture of the industry related to multilocational work.

- Sector-related policies and regulation (e.g. travel policies of governmental agencies).

- "Bubbling under"? Infrastructure, housing, school and daycare, transportation…?

Concluding remarks

- The role of an **individual employee's** agency is emphasized in maintaining wellbeing in multilocational work.
  - One reason may be that the organizational practices and structures are still rather undeveloped.

- **Colleagues / team** and **line managers** are presented as the most important actors in addition to the employees themselves.

- **Organizational policies and strategies** and **top management** are indirectly involved: they create opportunities and offer resources, which individuals, teams and line managers utilise in creating local solutions.

- Analysis of open-ended survey questions entails **methodological challenges**, e.g. responses are often short and unspecified; the degree of interpretation; "correctly" identifying latent meanings.

- **Trust** is often brought up, but it is always not clear how and by whom trust is shown:
  - Activities that build and demonstrate trust could be a subject of further research.

Thank you for
Your interest!